

Eun Ha's POV:

Eun Ha stayed quiet.

The therapist smiled, then tilted her head. "Well, take your time, there's no pressure. Is there anything I can bring you, Eun Ha? A coffee? Water?"

"It's fine, thank you." Eun Ha licked her bottom lip, seemingly going through an inner debate about something, until finally. "I have..." The word cracked. She tried again. "I have thoughts. Bad ones. About someone I shouldn't."

Dr. Han listened attentively, nodding, an open look on her face. Eun Ha noted, then averted her gaze. "I guess... I don't know. It's so confusing."

"So your bad thoughts... they're about a man."

"Mm..." Eun Ha began, nervously scratching the fabric of the sofa.

Dr. Han didn't move, didn't lean forward, didn't do anything that felt like pressure. She just waited, hands folded loosely in her lap. She merely tilted her head, softly urging her to go on.

Eun Ha's fingers dug into the strap of her purse until the leather creaked.

"About someone I shouldn't..."

Dr. Han regarded her with a serene but focused eye, neither pitying, nor impatient, nor any other thing that might have caused Eun Ha to latch shut. "Someone... that isn't your husband? Is that what I am gathering, or am I wrong?"

"....."

"Yes. It is about a young man that isn't my husband." Eun Ha admitted with a certain kind of tired defeat.

She buried her head in her hands again, willing her words not to turn into an incoherent, desperate mess.

Dr. Han's voice stayed quiet, almost airy.

"How old is he, Eun Ha?"

Eun Ha's shoulders folded in on themselves.

"Fifteen." She whispered, the word itself a curse on her tongue. It dropped like a stone into still water.

Dr. Han didn't gasp. Didn't blink too hard. She simply let the silence sit for three heartbeats, then asked, calm as ever.

"And have you ever touched him in a way that crossed a line? Or tried to?"

"No." It came out sharp, almost angry. "Never. I swear. I lock my door. I stay away. I—" Her throat closed. "I would rather die."

Another soft nod from the doctor.

"Thank you for telling me that. It matters."

Eun Ha's hands were shaking so badly the purse slid off her lap and hit the carpet with a dull thud. She didn't pick it up. "Besides... he's... he's rarely home these days. So it's easier to fight the impulses and keep some control on my behavior and actions. It's been really taxing, but I try."

"Hm." Dr Han considered, leaning slightly forward. "You said he's rarely home... does he live with you?"

"Yes... he lives with me." Eun Ha closed her eyes. "He's... my son."

There it was.

It hung in the air, awful and terrifying and true.

It was finally out there, on the other side of a line Eun Ha had drawn inside her own mind months ago. The truth. Out in the open, with no taking it back or swallowing the words down or washing them away. She wasn't going to stick her fingers down her throat, wasn't going to say nevermind, pretend nothing had come out of her mouth. No. This was her truth. Her sin. Her burden. And if there was any hope she could absolve, any forgiveness or penance to offer for the monster inside her head and body—

—well, this was it.

Tell a therapist.

Admit there was a problem.

Pray to god, or the Buddha, or whoever was out there to fix her, or end her.

Eun Ha waited for sirens, for lightning, for the floor to open and swallow her whole.

Instead Dr. Han only breathed in once, slow, and steady, and said.

"Thank you. I know how much that cost you to say."

Eun Ha stared at her, eyes wide, chest heaving.

"You're... you're not calling the police?"

"No." Dr. Han answered, firm but kind. "You have done nothing illegal. You have intrusive, unwanted sexual thoughts about your minor child. You aren't hurting him. Right now you have not acted on these thoughts and you are actively protecting him by avoiding contact. That means I have no legal duty to report. My only duty to break confidentiality would be if I ever believed there was a real plan or immediate danger to your son. Everything else stays strictly between us."

Dr. Han paused, waiting for the small nod.

"Yes, thank you."

It took Eun Ha a second, and then another, but eventually, the therapist watched her breathe out, saw the tension lift off her face like a veil that wasn't her own. Dr. Han let the silence sit for another few seconds, then spoke softly.

"What you just told me is one of the hardest things a mother can ever say out loud. The fact that you carried this alone and still walked in here today... that tells me how much you love him and how seriously you're taking this. That matters more than you know."

Eun Ha gave another nod, less tentative than the ones before. Her features hardened as she resolved to make the most out of the situation.

Dr. Han looked up. "And how long has this been happening?"

Eun Ha watched the faint flicker of sunlight from the window play across the carpet.

"I'm not really sure..."

A faint shrug, then.

"A while, I think. Probably after his last birthday. But, I didn't truly realize... the severity of things until more recently."

"And... does anyone know about this?"

Eun Ha winced, embarrassed, shook her head.

Dr. Han didn't even look mildly surprised, just nodded, eyebrows lifting. "What you're describing sounds like ego-dystonic sexual obsessions. Sometimes linked to OCD, it often stems from a sense of moral conflict and involves unwanted intrusive thoughts about a forbidden target. It's one of the classic taboo themes we see in specialised

clinics, even though almost nobody talks about it outside these walls. It's usually triggered by emotional distress, significant life changes, traumatic experiences or lack of intimacy and support systems in general."

Eun Ha's stomach turned over.

Classic.

Classic taboo theme.

Like she was just another sick mother on a list.

Like there was a whole drawer full of women who sat here and cried about wanting to fuck their own sons.

Her mouth tasted like metal.

She stared at her knees.

"So... lots of mothers feel this?"

Dr. Han's voice stayed flat, kind, careful.

"Not lots. But enough that I've treated more than a dozen. Enough that there are whole chapters in OCD textbooks about this exact fear. The difference is: real desire feels exciting or comforting. This feels like torture. That's how we know it's an illness."

Torture.

Yes. That was the word.

Every day a new knife. Eun Ha swallowed.

"Do they... do they ever act on it?"

"Almost never." Dr. Han said. "The ones who are terrified of acting are the ones who never do. The terror is the brake pedal."

Eun Ha's fingers twisted in her lap.

"But my body still... reacts. I still get, well—" She bit her lip, blushing in shame.
"That's not a brake pedal."

Dr. Han didn't blink.

"That's anxiety hijacking your blood flow. Same thing that makes people get erections during panic attacks or when they're scared of heights. The body is stupid sometimes. It doesn't mean consent. It means panic."

Eun Ha's face burned.

She wanted to peel her skin off right there on the sofa.

"But I'm still disgusting." She whispered.

"You're suffering." Dr. Han corrected. "There's a difference."

Silence again.

Eun Ha's voice came out smaller than ever.

"Will I always be this way?"

"No. Dr. Han said, simple, sure. "I've watched mothers go from locking their bedroom door every night to hugging their sons goodbye at university without a single spike of fear. It takes work. Ugly work. But it happens."

For one half-second, Eun Ha pictured it—no more dreading her own desires, no more door latches, no more slamming fists against her own temples every time the shadow caught up with her—no, her shadow vanquished. Finally, gone.

'Do you really want to get rid of me this bad, mom?' Jae-il's voice rang from one ear to the other. 'What if you start missing me when you do this...?'

Eun Ha's breath stopped.

The voice slid down her spine like ice water.

What if you start missing me when I'm gone?

She squeezed her eyes shut so hard red spots bloomed behind her lids.

It laughed.

Soft, fond, terrible.

'You will miss me. You already do. Every time you lock the door you're locking me out, and it still hurts, doesn't it? And even then, you seek me out in your dreams. Because this is all you, mom. I'm not doing anything. You're doing everything yourself.'

"Eun Ha?"

"Ah—y-yes." Eun Ha snapped her eyes open.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine..." She lied, her throat tight. "Just... just dizzy."

"Understandable. It's been a heavy conversation."

Dr. Han glanced at her watch, then at the door, then back at Eun Ha, her face gentle.

"Does it make sense to you, why you're here now, and why this is something that can be treated?"

Eun Ha thought about the sleeping pills, about the hollowed-out feeling that came whenever she watched her son on TV, about the way her body would simply react without her permission.

The thought that she could have a life where the fear of herself didn't rule her days.

That she could finally see her son, her beautiful, sweet boy, without the shadow of sickness rising up to choke her.

She really wanted that. Not only for herself, but for her boy, and for her family.

She thought about the door in her mind one last time and the beautiful boy with her purple eyes, and she made herself look at Dr. Han and nod.

"It makes sense."

'It doesn't, mom. Can it really be treated? Do you really want it to be treated? I told you, we can just stay like this. Here. With me. Won't it be much nicer to stay with me forever than going through with this useless process, hoping for a miracle? It is just you and me.'

She could feel his presence behind her, his arms around shoulders, ghosting over her skin. Goosebumps reared all over her skin. She gritted her teeth.

'Doesn't it feel amazing? Only us two? Remember? How you held my head between your hands, how you loved me? How happy and giddy it made you when you played with me when I was smaller, much smaller, how warm it all felt? Isn't it nice? Why can't we keep living like this, and why do you keep ruining our perfect days by trying to find an escape? I'm almost all grown now, mom. Don't you want to play with me?'

"Please..." Eun Ha's eyes stung, and her head and eyes hurt terribly as she stared at Dr. Han. "I really need your help..."