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Mr. Baum

English 7, Period 4

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Predicting the Predicament

My name is Lee Chung-Su. I am a 35-year-old Japanese of Korean ancestry who speaks English, Mandarin, Japanese, and Korean, my hereditary tongue, and have been working as a captain for Japan Air Lines for 4 years now, having a prolific total of 10,000 flight hours in total under my name just by ferrying passengers around the globe.

After arriving in the Korean capital of Seoul 2 days ago on June 27, I'd already planned to jet-ski through the metropolis after I checked in at the Mugunghwa Hotel near Gimpo Airport. The primal reason is I will be leaving Seoul next week and the city, with plenty of fish in the sea, is the library of Babel relative to Osaka. At least Seoul is a boozy dance floor at night.

Because I could not be bothered renting a car, I decided to take the city bus. I wish I'd remembered the bus fare seems to cost a millionaire, but converting Wons to Yens results in the price of about half of the fare back in Osaka. Despite the high fares in Wons I decided to board the purple city bus with a giant white cheatline running across the side between the fenders and the windows and a bold "Hansung Transport" and the number 16 painted on the side and sat on the seat in the first row toward the right-hand side.

This is a winter's wonderland without wonder, disguised as a metal box branded Daewoo with a dozen cheap armchairs with equally cheap leather with only the bus driver and myself. I swear this bus transformed into a refrigerator as soon as we drove off. Even when I wrapped my thick navy blue jacket around my pilot's uniform, it wasn't enough. It instead worsened the cold.

Anyway, I am quite an impatient man and thus I pulled out my wristwatch and its hands read 5:40 PM. "Wow, only around 10 more hollow minutes to go!", I thought to myself.

This bus ride is not just cold, it is getting tepid fast and I cannot wait to get to my destination, the Sampoong Mall, the 5-star-hotel of a mall in Korea. Hence, I pulled out my Walkman, shoved a cassette tape for The Beatles inside, and plugged my earbuds in to not bore a hole in my brain and thereby bore myself to death in the next second.

While sitting on the bus on my way to the Sampoong Mall, I heard a deep metallic groaning noise, so I instantly took the earbuds off to confirm The Beatles did not have any problem isolating background audio. However, the problem is we weren't crossing any bridges. Not only that, the bus is not so old to the point where if you touch the body it falls apart.

I had read about the collapse of the Seongsu Bridge 8 months ago in October of 1994 and heard about the survivors' and witnesses' testimonies. Before the bridge, built hurriedly and cheaply and left unmaintained for some time, collapsed, it sounded like it was groaning in pain just before all the metal joints, by now are attached to the frame and the road comparable to a child's tooth on the verge of falling off, fell onto the Han River, so does city bus 16 with 29 passengers, all of which died as the bus pancaked on its roof.

Bus number 16! That crushed bus is the exact one I am riding on right now! Now, my expectations for the haunted experiences have drastically climbed like a plane waiting to stall, though I am sort of a deer when it comes to handling anything evoking fear unless it is to land a plane in vile situations. But what I am not expecting is the bus suddenly jolting to a stop, as if the driver is avoiding hitting a deer in the headlights 100 feet away, and the doors fly open.

A slightly paunchy middle-aged businessman in a full three-piece suit wades in and sits in a row of seats across from and parallel to mine and gazes out the window **at the views flashing like a Kodachrome film** outside.

“Hey! Why are you staring outside as if you’re paranoid about something? Also, where are you going?” I reluctantly ask.

The man turned around with an angsty expression and a strangely familiar face. **“Waiting to see when we will arrive at the bridge. Gosh, I am nearly running late to attend a meeting!”**

The first sentence of the response baffled me, **causing me to drop any recollection of scanning the newspaper 8 months ago into a black hole.** **“How could a man running late for a meeting be specifically focused on a bridge? Also, what bridge is it?”** I pondered.

But it matters not, so I introduced myself and then clarified to him. **“In case you didn’t know, my name is Lee Chung-Su from Osaka, Japan. I want to tell you that we are south of the Han, and my destination is the Sampoong Mall from the Mugunghwa Hotel, a bridgeless route.”**

“Are you sure you are truly concerned about your own safety?”

“Why, yes I am. The mall is the pride and joy of Seoul!” **But then** I paused for a moment.

What did the businessman even mean by my own safety? Am I going to die?

Thereby, I inquired to him, **“Do you mean many will die?”**

“Yes. The structure is so weak that if you touch it it falls apart, such as the Seongsu Bridge. There is no stopping the collapse. I was on this very bus at that place during rush hour.”

And then that last sentence **hit me harder than a Shinkansen.** I’d seen the man’s face in the papers on October 22, 1994, in a list of victims. His name was Park Il-Yeong and he is a ghost who’ll never attend his meeting warning me of shoddy construction. I had nothing to say. **Hence,** I let Park Il-Yeong bluntly warn me **as if every character he was saying were my lifeline.**

“Look, pal. The Sampoong Mall is going to collapse. If you are not concerned about your own safety, then you should, and you also should definitely make a beeline out of here!”

Afterward, I stared at Il-Yeong in disbelief, processing everything he said. It felt like a decade had passed between then and when the bus abruptly braked again. The doors opened and a teenage girl in a standard Korean high school girls’ uniform; white collared shirt, red necktie, navy blue jacket, and pleated skirt, rushed in and the doors shut behind her like a guillotine.

“Ma’am, please slow down!” I exclaimed. I grabbed her as she stumbled on the bus, but I suddenly noticed a part of her chest was visibly crushed and part of her uniform was soaked in blood. That’s when I realized she was another specter. Without so much as a “thank you”, she rushed and plopped down on the seat right behind mine so fast it looked as if a strong magnet was pulling her, pulled out her sketchbook from her backpack, and began sketching.

I got curious as to what the high schooler was convulsing her panned hand on, so I got up and walked beside her. “Good afternoon. What are you sketching?”

She abruptly jerked her head toward me, revealing a horrified but relatively pretty and bloodless face, as pretty as a primrose, which is ‘Aengcho’ in Korean, and hurriedly exclaimed, “You cannot see what I am sketching! It does not even matter to you!”

However, I knew that she was not real so I snatched her sketchbook as if it were my talisman from the wide-eyed girl. I flipped through the pages like a barcode scanner and they’re all graphic. Moreover, each page has the name Kim Aeng-Cho signed on it. One page depicted a caricature of Kim Il-Sung as the devil throwing missiles over Seoul. Another page showed what I guess is inside a crushed bus from her perspective, seemingly painted with her own blood. Below is the caption “Seongsu Bridge”. The third page isn’t better. Rather, the detailed sketch depicted a North Korean missile hitting the Sampoong Mall. Finally, the last page I saw had text reading:

“It is North Korea’s fault and we shall retaliate,” repeated over and over again.

I was so stunned **I might as well have been cryogenically stored**. Kim Aeng-Cho angrily swipes her sketchbook away. “Why in the world are you looking at my art without permission?”

Rather than honestly reviewing her art, I sarcastically lied to her, commenting “Why, you! Your art is so beautiful I couldn’t stand mesmerizing it up close! You might as well donate your art to the Louvre!” **When in reality**, I was so disgusted at her gruesome depictions that if I vomited, **my vomit would be a massive tsunami swallowing the city whole**.

But then I got curious. “Does this girl really think that North Koreans are at fault for all those catastrophic events in South Korea?” I pondered for a moment.

I calmly inquired her, trying to keep my voice from teetering. “Hey! I have a question: Do you blame the North Koreans for your death on this bus? Did they bomb the bridge?”

“Of course yes! Those vile North Koreans are now planning to bomb the Sampoong Mall today! And do not ask me where I got the info from! That dictatorship! We shall retaliate! And absolutely do not go into the Sampoong Mall because then you will surely be considered a victim of Kim Il-Sung’s massacre!” Aeng-Cho **screamed far louder than the Concorde during takeoff**.

That’s when I knew that she became paranoid **thanks to** all those fears of the North Korean government she developed after her death. She never heard what the actual cause is. **And** I cannot try to talk her out of her present opinion about the North Korean bombings. **I think she has dog rabies** even by thinking about it.

I glanced at my wristwatch again. **5:47 PM**. **Concurrent to when I did that**, the bus slowly halted at the last stop before the nearest stop to the Sampoong Mall, the doors opened once again, and an engineer in his late twenties with a light blue collared button-down t-shirt, tawny pants, and a reflective vest stepped inside the bus, sitting diagonally across from me.

In order to make sure he wasn't yet another ghost, I inquired him. "Good afternoon. What is your name, how old are you, and what is your job? My name is Lee Chung-Su, 35 years old, currently a captain for Japan Airlines," I introduced myself.

He replied "Who, me? The name is Han Ssang-Jung. I am a 28-year-old engineer working for Hyundai Engineering!"

"Well, let me ask you: Where have you been when the Seongsu Bridge collapsed?"

As a result, Ssang-Jung's heart sank to the same depth as the Titanic for a moment in disbelief at what I just asked and his face turned angsty.

When he came to, he said in a near-whisper. "Chung-Su, I was watching TV at home when all of a sudden there's this news report interrupting the opera performance saying the Seongsu Bridge collapsed. I can only watch as I saw those police officers helplessly rescue passengers off the bus only to find said passengers dead the next moment."

I was initially relieved at his survival but wanted to clarify. "Whew! Thank goodness you survived. But to make sure you truly survived, have you personally been involved in any construction accident? You know there were around 1,000 construction-related deaths last year."

He stated far better than a standard high school speech. "Oh! I have never, ever, been in a construction accident! Hyundai Engineering is known for its construction quality and the safety of its workers! I've never even bore a scar at all in my construction life!"

Suddenly, I recalled what Park Il-Yeong told me, but Il-Yeong exclaimed his prediction of the tragic collapse for me as if it was indignant for him to be excluded from the conversation. "This young lad wants to go to the Sampoong Mall, but I wanted him to make a beeline out of there. It might collapse because the structure's too brittle! Ssang-Jung, I know you are very familiar with construction around here. Tell the pilot what he needs to know, ASAP!"

It turns out that Han Ssang-Jung also sees and hears ghosts, and he also happens to be an encyclopedia, because the engineer thoroughly explained to me the structural issues of the mall.

“Listen, Chung-Su. I have something urgent to tell you about your fate. Inside the walls of all the grandeur hides a dark truth. The chairman of the Sampoong Construction Group, Lee Joon, wanted all amenities to display clear as day without any obstructions, sacrificing the weight support of the originally planned thicker pillars for far thinner ones, causing cracking to develop over time. A couple were also sacrificed for escalators. To exacerbate things, the mall was originally designed to be 4 stories tall, but that was later changed to 5 stories due to the fact that 4 is deemed bad luck, leading to even more unbearable weight. Another construction company that originally planned to build the Sampoong Mall, Woosung, disagreed with Lee Joon because of all those compensations. So, Lee Joon fired the company and let his company, the Sampoong Construction Group, take over construction as Lee Joon wished. The building does not have any supporting crossbeams at all, resulting in the structure becoming brittle and developing visible cracking, exacerbated by air conditioning units weighing 15 tons each on the roof. Furthermore, the brittle support beams on the fifth floor do not align with the support beams below, worsening the cracks to an unbearable degree. Today is the day when the pillars finally give way to Lee Joon’s demon. Today is the day when hundreds will die. Today is the day you absolutely have to stay on this bus. This bus is the veil between life and certain death, because if you even dare step off this bus, then the consequences will be unfathomably dire. Understand?”

After listening to Han Ssang-Jung explain all the issues and warn me, which means he is truthful in this context as liars tend to not dive into the Lake Specifics, I’m now convinced about my certain death if I get off this bus. I nodded and wholeheartedly thanked him for his advice.

“Thank you! I was pretty skeptical at first about the structural failure of the Sampoong Mall,

supposedly reflecting grandeur, when I boarded the haunted bus but now, your encyclopedia-esque heads-up has had me on the edge of surviving against the others! Again, thank you for explaining to me why the mall has structural defects!”

The bus slowed to a stop across from the Sampoong Mall with its distinct pink facade. I glanced at the watch for the third time, **it read 5:51 PM**. The doors opened, and the two specters walked off the bus. Park Il-Yeong turned toward me before he left, smiled, and ominously said,

“Are you coming with us?”

Obviously, I shook my head in decline because I thought the mall’s collapse was going to engulf me in debris which might kill me in an instant since I am parallel from the Sampoong Mall, on the verge of collapsing, on the other side of Seochojungang Road in Gangnam, Seoul.

However, all of a sudden, **I can somehow feel the tug of the two specters** dragging me to doom. I can physically feel myself leaving my seat without my consent with Han Ssang-Jung dragging me back as strong as he could **in the invisible tug-of-war between life and death**. The timing was just right, too, because the exit door shut in my face **like a guillotine**. **Well**, not completely on my face, **but rather**, the door slammed shut **just as when** I was maybe a foot away from the door, **from exiting into Dante’s Inferno**, the mysterious force vanishes, and the bus drives away with me, the engineer, and the bus driver inside.

“Thank god you survived!” Ssang-Jung breathed a sigh of relief. **“I can feel the building about to surrender to Lee Joon! You may not feel it now, but you will in the next minute!”**

The next minute, when we were stopped at a stoplight for the intersection between Seochojungang Road and Seocho Road, maybe 1,000 feet away from the last bus stop, I heard **this horrendous wave of a hundred thunderstorms, a Concorde taking off, missiles hitting, and the awakening and the revelation of the devil washing over me** all at once, even inside the bus.

I knew that was the culminating moment, highly anticipated yet overlooked. I knew that was the sound of the Sampoong Mall **surrendering to Lee Joon**. **Concurrently**, I decided to see the severity of Lee Joon's creation. **Therefore**, I rushed to the rear window of the bus.

When I got to the rear window, all I saw was a giant tawny cloud of dust and debris between 2 rows of mid-rise buildings on either side and behind a row of cars, each housing a traumatized driver and the occasional passenger **experiencing every war imaginable again**.

Through **the massive philharmonic orchestra of the cloud** inching closer by the second, I can just about make out 5 louder and more distinct booms. **And then a thought hit me harder than a Shinkansen**. The upper floors have collapsed onto the lower ones, and so on. I believe there is a basement level as well as I counted 5 booms of the aforementioned kind.

Another speechless minute later, the giant cloud started dissipating and most of the occupants rushed out, leaving their cars running, **presumably** to either contact people they knew were in the mall or contact emergency services. **So does** my brain, **at this time** **screaming at me like a banshee** for me to run and call an ambulance.

So I did exactly that. I pressed the stop request button, letting the driver know I had to get off now. I told the slightly older engineer that **"Ssang-Jung. I have to get off now. I have to call the ambulance at the nearest payphone immediately!"**

After asking Ssang-Jung, he wholeheartedly obliged. **"Why, yes you may! The dust has mostly settled by now!"** And I ran, I ran so far away. And I ran. **I ran faster than Leroy Burrell, the fastest runner**, to the nearest payphone and punched 119 for the fire brigade and the ambulance. I managed to get on the line with the operator despite **an entire stadium's capacity** frantically dialing 119 concurrently. I spoke to the operator to send both the fire brigade and the ambulance to the Sampoong Mall ASAP because of the disaster a couple of minutes ago.

Just after the operator passively assured me that help was on the way, I forced the phone back in its holder like the Hulk and ran to the Seoul National University of Education station, also known as Gyodae and only a few hundred yards away, while shoving screaming faces out of my way in order to return to the Mugunghwa Hotel and watch the live coverage on TV due to the fact that I couldn't stand getting into a stampede arduously trying to return to the hotel by bus in roads congested with potentially rabid wild animals, or even stay there for that matter.

I safely got on the Line 2 subway in the Gyodae station which is a living depiction of every circle of Dante's Inferno compressed into one station by now. I arduously force myself into one of the green cheatline subway cars that are packed like sardines in the chaotic station.

On the train, I heard rounds of discussion going on about the disaster, whether it was a bombing or a structural failure. I squeezed into another compartment and ran into what looked like a crowd at Kim Il-Sung's funeral I'd seen on TV back in Osaka, except with passengers who had tragically lost their loved ones in the mall. They were huddled together, bawling their eyes out in the subway asylum as if it were the apocalypse. At one point, I heard an old man cursing something about the North Koreans bombing the mall at the top of his lungs.

I ran out of the subway at the Yeongdeungpo-gu Office station. I've heard the Line 5 subway connecting from here to Gimpo Airport will open by 1996 but it's not in use yet. Thanks to the unopened line, I had to take the city bus, a slower method. Fortunately, the station was slightly more peaceful than the makeshift Inferno station right in the heart of things.

A bus stopped for me, also a sardine can. This time it had lime green paint. Despite the crowd, I got on it. Inside, there was another round of discussion about the disaster among travelers getting to Gimpo Airport. Some shed a tear or two. Thanks to that, I get the general idea that the entire city of Seoul is petrified at the collapse and shed a few dozen tears myself.

As soon as the exit doors opened, I jumped out like a rabid dog and sprinted all the way to the Mugunghwa Hotel, where my colleagues awaited me at the front entrance. There, I was met with open arms and cries of joy that I was still alive. When they ecstatically wanted me to tell the entire time I was unaccounted for, I told them all the details of the tragedy I could muster at the time. And the crowd goes wild! A fellow Japan Air Lines stewardess suggested that I spread the word and that the world has to know my story.

Thus, here I am. Writing this story on the night of June 29, 1995. I already wrote on 10 sheets of paper and spent 2 hours and am currently on the eleventh. I write this as I occasionally glance at the CRT TV in the hotel room on the live coverage after the Sampoong Mall's collapse.

Well, if there is one crucial thing I learned in life unrelated to aviation, it's that you should never trust shoddy Korean construction companies as they mainly prioritize punctuality, price, and the visitors' experience over safety. Another crucial thing I learned is to absolutely follow the warnings and the predictions of the ghosts you are seeing when you are about to get into a fatal predicament. Seriously, they've already been through fate and are trying to prevent you from going down the same unfortunate path as them. And I hope you adhere to the above!

Narrative Writing Rubric/Checklist

Color-Coding	Self-Assessment YOU DO THIS
The setting (story's time and place) is HIGHLIGHTED IN RED	Yes
5-10+ examples of <u>figurative language</u> are HIGHLIGHTED IN GREEN	Yes
10-15+ <u>transitions</u> are HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW	Yes
10-15+ lines of dialogue are HIGHLIGHTED IN ORANGE	Yes
Conclusion with a clear theme/message is HIGHLIGHTED IN CYAN	Yes

Checklist	Self-Assessment YOU DO THIS
The intro establishes the main character and setting (time and place)	Exceptional
All characters are developed with <u>strong adjectives</u> and <u>figurative language</u> to describe them	Exceptional
Dialogue develops the plot and characters, a new paragraph should be started for each new speaker too	Exceptional
Clear point of view throughout (stay in 1st person POV)	Exceptional
The plot makes sense-events are logically connected in the story	Exceptional
Connect ideas together with 10-15 different <u>transitions</u>	Exceptional
The conclusion ends the story with a clear theme/message to be learned	Exceptional
Proofread for grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation	Exceptional
<u>Is the whole narrative in Times New Roman 12-point font and double-spaced like this linked example?</u>	Exceptional

Send an email after I grade for more feedback to revise and resubmit! 😊