

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

"In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on."

— Robert Frost

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LOGLINE/SHORT PITCH:

A couple who met at a dance competition, and live on to become champion ballroom dancers, come to grips with his cancer diagnosis in different ways. She runs from the truth, while he embraces it the only way he knows how: through saying goodbye the way they said hello.

DESCRIPTION (Spoilers):

THE LAST DANCE is a story about a future close to our own, full of technology and wonders just on the threshold of human understanding. It gives us opportunities, but much like today, it falls short of providing ultimate cures and solutions to problems that still haunt us, including the unwanted spectre of death, and learning to accept it when it comes.

The story revolves around a husband and wife competitive dancing duo who face a cancer diagnosis. Jae's husband, Kwang-Sun, is dying, with just a few months left to live. She tries to avoid it while he disappears into what she feels is a world of escapism and other women that can give him a vivacity of life she simply does not have the will to give as sorrow claims her.

In actuality, he is spending his last few precious moments when not at home recording a final dance using a technology that records his presence, and his movements. This is to be revealed at his memorial service as the final way of saying goodbye, and letting her know that he will always be there, in some form, with just enough light to dance to when the dark comes.

PAGE ONE - ESTABLISHMENT - SIX PANELS

One primary full page. Three smaller, incidental panels in the middle bridging the scene.

[ESTABLISHMENT BOX:]

A Ballroom in Jongno-gu, Seoul - Present Day

PANEL 1.1

STUDENT Kwang-Sun and STUDENT Jae are preparing for preliminary “blind” pairings as part of a professional dancing school function for intermediate dancers. Both are in informal attire, as are the rest of the group, to highlight the fact they are still all students. Everyone is talking as they are given tickets with numbers. Everyone has a small label with a number on their backs.

PANEL 1.2 (small)

Tight shot on them both looking in opposite directions, holding small ticket stubs with numbers on them, searching for their match, facing away from each other.

PANEL 1.3 (small)

STUDENT Jae slowly puts her hands down as she contemplates not finding her number, in confusion.

PANEL 1.4 (small)

STUDENT Kwang-Sun does the same, scratching his temple absent-mindedly with the opposing hand.

PANEL 1.5

They bump into each other as their backs touch. Upon this contact, both of their faces express a momentary shock as their eyes widen at having backed into another stranger.

PANEL 1.6

They are now facing each other, and smiling shyly.

PAGE TWO and THREE - EXAGGERATED SIZE TITLE CARD

A framed shot of them standing, looking at one another, holding raised hands, ready to dance, while a large, backlit and thinly draped window composed of sunlight sits behind them, making them silhouette-like.

TITLE across the bottom in whimsical font: MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE.

PAGE FOUR - SIX PANELS

[ESTABLISHMENT BOX:]

Seoul. A Future Not Far From Here

PANEL 4.1

We are in their home. The panel is a wall of international competitive dancing trophies for paired dancers. There are numerous commendations, photos, and other paraphernalia that adorn the wall. Voices off camera include MAN (Kwang-Sun), WOMAN (Jae), and a DOCTOR that continue during this sequential panning shot across the wall.

JAE:

How can you be sure so quickly?

DOCTOR:

We've come a long way in detecting these kinds of disorders.

JAE:

Test him again! We'll get a second opinion!

PANEL 4.2

An older Kwang-Sun and Jae sit facing a DOCTOR at their kitchen table. The wall with photos and trophies from PANEL 4.1 is viewable in the background. Jae is angry. Kwang-Sun looks at the DOCTOR while he rests his hand on Jae's arm.

KWANG-SUN:

How long?

DOCTOR:

Five months. Maybe six, but we can mitigate progression. Give you a good quality of life until...

KWANG-SUN:

I understand. Thank you.

PANEL 4.3 (small)

Kwang-Sun and DOCTOR shake hands. His wife has moved over to a window that overlooks the balcony of the apartment and view of the city, presumably staring outwards to avoid staring at anything else.

DOCTOR:

Call me if you have any questions. I'll be in touch.

PANEL 4.4

POV is now from the balcony looking inside the apartment. Jae now stands there, staring outward just past the viewer. He is behind her, wrapping his arms around her, resting his chin on her shoulder. She wears an incredulous expression.

KWANG-SUN:

It will be okay.

JAE:

How in the world is any of this okay?

KWANG-SUN:

Because right here, right now, we can still do this.

PANEL 4.5

He steps back and lifts one of her arms up over both their heads, gently turning her to face him. The POV catches this motion halfway through the process, just enough to capture her movement, and an expression of surprise on her face.

KWANG-SUN:

House: Play *Moon River*, main hallway.

[VOICE OF HOUSE A.I.]
Playing music in the main hallway.

JAE:
What?

PANEL 4.6

They're both in the center of the apartment, in an open space. The panel captures them in a classic ballroom dancing position. She smiles as he twirls her around.

[Music with Notes]
Moon river.... wider than a mile...

PAGE FIVE - SEVEN PANELS

PANEL 5.1

The pose is the same as PANEL 4.6, but they are YOUNG again, and the dance blends back into a dance competition as they are dressed and have an audience lining the periphery. This time, however, they're dressed in competition formal attire in front of an audience and judges.

PANEL 5.2 (very small, an interjection of action)

Her heel breaks. SFX of audience gasping.

SFX:

GASP!

PANEL 5.3

YOUNG JAE sits on her butt on the floor, staring at the YOUNG Kwang-Sun in shock. Some of the audience is up out of their chairs, peering at them to make sure she's okay.

YOUNG JAE:

I am so, **so** sorry. I can't believe it...I just can't...

PANEL 5.4 (very small again)

Just a shot of his outstretched hand.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

It will be okay.

PANEL 5.5 (very small again)

Their hands grasping each other.

PANEL 5.6

YOUNG KWANG-SUN and YOUNG Jae stand face to face as she dabs at the corners of her eye with his handkerchief to mop up errant tears forming.

YOUNG JAE:

We just missed our chance at a scholarship. You have a strange idea of what is okay.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

You just need to find the silver lining.

YOUNG JAE:

What's the silver lining in this situation?

PANEL 5.7

Bird's eye shot from above: Them both walking down an elaborate flight of gilded stairs with scarlet-colored carpet. Wherever this competition was being held was a beautiful location or hotel.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

For starters, there is an *excellent* restaurant upstairs.

YOUNG JAE:

You have my attention.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

And bar.

YOUNG JAE:

Sold.

PAGE SIX - FIVE PANELS

[ESTABLISHMENT BOX:]

Hongdae District, Seoul.

The Future - Several Months After Diagnosis

PANEL 6.1

The older adult Kwang-Sun, carrying a large duffel bag, departs from the side compartment of a taxi. He is looking up at the glowing digital signs of the various storefronts before him.

PANEL 6.2

POV of this panel is across the street from the Kwang-Sun as he knocks on the door he's looking for. There's an old worn sign that shows it to be a dance-related studio of some kind. The taxi begins to lift off from the ground.

VOICE FROM INSIDE:

One moment, please!

PANEL 6.3

A beautiful female DANCE INSTRUCTOR answers. She smiles and beckons him inside.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

You're late.

KWANG-SUN:

I had to think up a new excuse.

PANEL 6.3

Kwang-Sun looks around carefully, cautiously, before entering.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

You're being paranoid. Come in already.

PANEL 6.4

POV is from a cafe table a few dozen feet away, but still in view of the Kwang-Sun as he finally enters the open doorway. A PRIVATE DETECTIVE in nondescript attire sits at the cafe table taking clandestine photos of Kwang-Sun with an elongated camera lens and telescopic microphone.

PANEL 6.5

He pulls out a recording device from his pocket and speaks into it.

PRIVATE DETECTIVE:

Contact. Client suspicions have merit. Photos obtained.

PAGE SEVEN - SIX PANELS

PANEL 7.1

DANCE INSTRUCTOR and Kwang-Sun are alone in the studio, with light filtering in from several windows cascading across the polished wood floor. The duffel bag is sitting next to his feet. He is handing her a few sheets of loose paper.

PANEL 7.2

POV is a framed conversation shot of the two of them. The DANCE INSTRUCTOR is smiling as she reads the sheet music and papers he handed over to her.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

A classic. Literally.

KWANG-SUN:

Yes.

PANEL 7.3

She looks back up at him and raises an eyebrow quizzically. It's clear she has an incredulous take on whatever he's requesting, but is also touched or intrigued by what she saw.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

It's no secret who you are. I'm not sure why you need my help with this. It's clear to anyone who knows anything about this piece that you've danced to it countless times.

KWANG-SUN:

Not like this.

PANEL 7.4

Kwang-Sun is kneeling now. She is peering over his shoulder as he opens the duffel bag.

INSTRUCTOR:

What *is* all this?

PANEL 7.5

POV is from her perspective as she is peering over his shoulder into the open duffel bag. It's now unzipped, gaping top reveals long, fore-arm length black gloves attached to wires, a head mounted recording device, and several small circular camera devices.

PANEL 7.6

POV is now from a bit behind them both. He's still kneeling, but looking up at her now.

KWANG-SUN:

A promise.

PAGE EIGHT - SIX PANELS

Note: PANELS 8.2-8.4 are small and should be arranged together.

PANEL 8.1

Kwang-Sun and DANCE INSTRUCTOR are dancing. The shot is tight, capturing them from the waist-up, and we can only see some of the equipment briefly in the periphery as they dance: a few microphones on tripods pointed in their direction. Also, those circular cameras are floating in mid air with a light blue glow and red lights, recording their movement.

KWANG-SUN:

When the music stops, stand right there. I need to record the beginning now.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

What do you need me to do?

KWANG-SUN:

Listen, if you wish.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

To what?

KWANG-SUN:

A message in a bottle.

PANEL 8.2

Same scene, but Kwang-Sun is simply holding the instructor's hands, and they're standing close. She's looking at him as he speaks, but the dialogue is silent for this panel.

PANEL 8.3 (very small)

The scene zooms in slightly on the DANCE INSTRUCTOR's face. She's still looking at him, but her eyes and brow furrow slightly, in a slightly surprised, worried and moved expression.

PANEL 8.4 (very small)

Same scene, it has zoomed past him now, and focuses almost entirely on her, still looking at him. She raises a hand to her mouth, and tears fall from her eyes.

PANEL 8.5

POV is now from a few feet down the sidewalk, focused on them both. He is standing in the mist-filled twilight that only night in a city can yield to the eye. Her, slightly elevated at the top of the steps, still framed in the open door, a loose silk shaw wrapped around her dark tight-fitting dancing clothes. Tendrils of the silk belt that tethers the material to her waist billows lightly into the night air from where she stands.

DANCE INSTRUCTOR:

...why not simply talk to her?

KWANG-SUN:

I am. The only way I know how.

PANEL 8.6

POV is from behind her shoulder as she watches his lone figure walk down the street, illuminated under a street light as the dark of evening encroaches.

PAGE NINE - SIX PANELS

PANEL 9.1

POV is above the kitchen table from their home on PAGE FOUR. PRIVATE DETECTIVE is sitting with Jae. Between them, on the table, are assorted photos - some physical, others digital on a tablet - showing Kwang-Sun meeting with the DANCE INSTRUCTOR at the door on different occasions and shots of the dufflebag the MAN is carrying every single time.

DETECTIVE:

I'd normally say the bag is for staying the night, but the studio doesn't have living quarters, and she lives on the *other side* of the district. What does he tell you?

JAE:

Just that he has errands. Do you know what's going on inside?

DETECTIVE:

That would be extra. Studio's old, but the building is upscale. Landlord has security.

PANEL 9.2

Jae's face grows somber, but resolute as she stares down at the pictures. POV of this scene is positioned just next to the photos, angled up at her face.

JAE:

Nevermind. I'll transfer the funds tomorrow.

DETECTIVE (off-panel):

Are you sure? We have enough for family court.

PANEL 9.3

The POV is above again, focusing almost entirely on a large black and white photo of Kwang-Sun going inside the studio with the INSTRUCTOR closing the door.

JAE:

If this is what he needs, then that is what he needs.

DETECTIVE:

If you say so. Is there anything else I can do?

PANEL 9.4 (smaller)

Jae looks up with lifeless but resolute eyes.

JAE:

No.

PANEL 9.5

Kwang-Sun comes in and stores his duffle bag in the closet of their bedroom. All of the lights are off, with just the dim illumination of the windows giving context to the environment. He is looking over at Jae already asleep.

[ESTABLISHMENT BOX:]

Later.

PANEL 9.6

He lays down next to her, quietly. The POV is shifted to her side of the bed. Jae's eyes are actually open, and she is simply staring off into the distance.

PAGE TEN - SIX PANELS

PANEL 10.1

The narrative has shifted back to the past, later in the evening. A YOUNG Kwang-Sun pokes his head through a large ornate double-door that leads into the now entirely empty ballroom from where the competition once was earlier that day. He guides YOUNG Jae back in. She looks nervous.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

There we go, just enough light to dance to.
Come on. We'll get it perfect for next time.

YOUNG JAE:

Next time?

PANEL 10.2

Laughing, he spins her around in a circle, while she gives him a queer look.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

Absolutely. We're a team, remember?

YOUNG JAE:

There's no music.

PANEL 10.3

He pauses and looks up, around, and then back at her and smiles as she's cradled in his arms looking up at him.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

Of course there is, don't you hear it?

YOUNG JAE:

No.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

You need to listen for it. I'll whisper a hint on how to find it.

PANEL 10.4

He leans in slowly, as if to whisper in her ear, and instead kisses her cheek. Her eyes widened a bit.

PANEL 10.5

She looks back at him, her cheeks flushed and face slightly rose-tinted, and smiles.

YOUNG JAE:

I think I hear it now.

YOUNG KWANG-SUN:

I knew you could.

PANEL 10.6

Higher above shot of them dancing across the floor, laughing, twirling from one end of the room to the other.

PAGE ELEVEN - THREE PANELS

PANEL 11.1

A ballroom in the evening. Much akin to the kind they snuck back to that evening, all those years ago. Slivers of silver hueish light from a full glorious moon pours in from various curtained windows. The space is intimately lit from above, but not overtly so, as to give the place the look of a ballroom competition space.

Jae is greeting mourners coming to pay respects at reception service for Kwang-Sun, with his photo mounted on a flower-covered canvas adjacent to a golden urn sitting farther back. A very secular affair. Chairs are arranged in a crescent, with a table adorned with flowers and a portrait of Kwang-Sun resting upon it in the middle. Guests filter in.

PANEL 11.2

A singular female GUEST approaches Jae.

GUEST:

This is lovely, if unconventional.

JAE:

An unconventional funeral for an unconventional man. The one place he loved more than anywhere else.
The solicitor took care of everything. I approved whatever was stipulated.

PANEL 11.3

The line of guests slowly abates and finishes, and Jae finally sits next to her friends and family.

PAGE TWELVE - ONE PANEL - WHOLE PAGE MONTAGE - ARTIST DISCRETION

PANEL 12.1+

A montage of services and formal ceremony. Speeches. Words of consolation and remembrance. Shots of her face as individuals speak. Shadows bending slightly as time passes. There's a projection screen showing photos of them through the years.

PAGE THIRTEEN - FOUR PANELS

PANEL 13.1

Their family Solicitor makes a gesture to several men dressed in livery that spring to life, moving chairs back slightly so there's an open space in the floor. Guests move to surrender their chairs in the closest rows and stand aside to watch whatever is transpiring. Jae is in the foreground, not yet aware.

PANEL 13.2

Jae rises as the disturbance reaches behind her. She is shocked and surprised and stands up, but she is grabbed and consoled by those near her.

JAE:

What is this?

PANEL 13.3

Several of the men in livery bring out electrical and light projection equipment and set it up, and present her with long gloves hooked up to elaborate sensors in the palms and fingertips.

Solicitor:

A final request, madam. We could not disclose it until now.

Please put these on, if you would be so kind.

PANEL 13.4

Jae puts on the gear with assistance while looking on at everyone else, who apparently was already informed of the proceedings in advance. As she completes putting on the attire, a sound file plays with the earphones attached.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

My love.

PAGE FOURTEEN - FOUR PANEL

PANEL 14.1

Jae gasps, putting her gloved hand to her mouth as an illuminated apparition of light and particles, begins to resolve before her. Her eyes wet gently at the edges.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

I know it's not my fault, but I am sorry. Sorry for getting sick.
Sorry for leaving you alone. For all you will see, and do, without me there.

PANEL 14.2

The ceiling lights around the periphery dim. Jae begins to cry as his form materializes fully in the space. He is just imperceptibly opaque, with a trim of light along every edge and contour of his form. The funeral goers, reduced figures in the recesses of the frame, almost like ghosts themselves, look on silently. Everyone was in on it but her.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

I left my partner before the contest finished.

PANEL 14.3

Side-profile view of the two of them framed in a window again, just like the beginning, except this time, the moonlight partially cuts through his tenuous, ephemeral figure. And instead of a sun, we see an overly large and impossibly glorious Luna behind the thin, sheer drapery.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

Those times I snuck away? I know you noticed. It was to make this. For you.
So you would know I love you. That I will always love you. I wanted you to know you're *strong*,
and you will be okay...but this is the only way I knew how.

PANEL 14.4

The digital apparition reaches for her with a single hand, the other tucked behind his back, bent forward in mid-bow, his eyes fixed upon her. The view is from her perspective, looking at him gesturing towards her. His portrait is in the background, blurry, along with the sea of flowers that frame it.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

Take my hand. One more time.

PAGE FIFTEEN - SIX PANELS

PANEL 15.1

Tight panel of her hand as it is encircled by his projection's hand. The gloves tighten in coordination with his grip.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

Ballroom: Play *Moon River*, please.

SFX (gloves):

Sssssttt...

PANEL 15.2

The curtains in the room open as two attendants pull upon a knotted, gilded silver cord in the background. The moon is revealed in full, bright enough to shine over them both, but not so powerful as to overwhelm the senses or interfere with his project. The moon hovers over a futuristic Korean cityscape at dusk. His digital apparition flickers as it's projected form adjusts to give its contours more definition in the altered environment. As it does so, he smiles.

SFX:

Music Notes/bars begin to play

Moon river, wider than a mile,

I'm crossing you in style some day.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

Just enough light to dance to. Come on.

PANEL 15.3

They spin and twirl in time to the song, gliding from one end of the room to the next. She laughs, even with tears running down her face, and his recording seems to have known she would, for it responds in turn.

SFX:

Music Notes

Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker,

Wherever you're goin'...I'm goin' your way.

KWANG-SUN (recording):

Ah, **there's** the music. Can you hear it?

JAE:

Yes.

PANEL 15.4 + PANEL 15.5 + PANEL 15.6 (small sequential - can be grid or open/fluid/organic)

A whimsical series of shots in an abreast grid. Jae weeps and smiles at the same time as she dances, each sob broken by a surprising and sudden shriek of surprise, if not shameful joy, and she sweeps across the old wooden floor. Each panel is of the two of them, spinning back and forth. Across each panel they are old and young again, old and young, alternating.

SFX:

Music Notes

Two drifters, off to see the world.

There's such a lot of world to see...

PAGE SIXTEEN - FIVE PANELS

PANEL 16.1

The dance is over. Jae is sitting in a chair among many still facing his photo. Time passes and guests filter and leave as they give their farewells.

PANEL 16.2

She sits in silence for a moment longer. Finally, the Solicitor comes up and stands next to her, both staring ahead.

Solicitor:

You have the ballroom for as long as you want.

JAE:

Thank you.

Solicitor:

Is there anything else I can do?

PANEL 16.3

Pulled back shot. We are seeing a blending of this moment: the real world, and the memory. Jae is facing his photo still with a thoughtful expression, enshrined in flowers with innumerable candles and wisps of burning incense framing it. Before it, a floating memory of them as younger dances still continues to dance to the ending of *Moon River*.

SFX:

Music Notes

We're after the same rainbow's end...

JAE:

No.

PANEL 16.4

A tight, lingering close-up of her face as she smiles, tears drying across a face that is looking across shores yet unexplored.

SFX:

Music Notes

My huckleberry friend...

JAE:

I'll be okay.

PANEL 16.5

A POV shot from above and in front. The ballroom is empty. She is sitting alone. No projections. No specters of the past. A single shaft of moonlight beams from an exposed window, cutting across the floor, like an open doorway. A memory. An invitation. A promise. A single thread of eternity.

SFX:

Music Notes

Moon river...

...and me.

END