

Aari's Arirang Adventure

E.J. Bahng



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Arirang, 아리랑 in Korean, carries many meanings...and never ceases to be defined ... and its meaning becomes deeper and changes as you mature through life. Many who speak Korean would carry their own definitions of its sound and enjoy its cathartic impact on the body and emotions. My grandma would move her shoulders up and down as if they were ocean waves, and smile in spite of trials and tribulations. One could say, "Accepting regardless," "Rolling with the punches," "Being porous," or "Dancing it out." However, these limit the unlimited nature of the word, or the sound, or the impact of the sound of the word.

For our next adventure together, please share your *arirang* adventures based on what puzzle pieces you have collected from the story and from your lived experiences, and what definitions of *arirang* you are able to make. Also, what word or sound in your language do you have like *arirang* or, perhaps, a word or sound of your own creation? Contact: ejbahng@iastate.edu

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Dedication

For living humans whose actions have evolved to the level of angels, and who have made the world a better place through their faith, courage, and friendships.

For those humans who came before and lived unknown but left behind their stories to only a few.

For my late grandparents. Love you.



Aari has been standing in a corner of Ms. Barbariv's house.

This is the corner with the Picasso animal drawings.

There is a dove, an owl, a horse, a bull, and a penguin. An elephant made out of dried tree leaves is standing with its trunk aimed up high.



For some time, Aari stands anxiously in the corner.

This is her first night at Ms. Barbariv's beautiful Blue House.

Carefully, Ms. Barbariv makes Ukrainian kasha for Aari with spoonfuls of honey collected last year.





One day, at a farmer's market among the vast corn fields, Ms. Barbariv, who lost her son, found Aari in a dark street corner in the early morning's bright sun amid the vibrant din of the market.

“You will be my daughter and you will be loved,” said Ms. Barbariv.





In the Blue House on Seattle Street, Ms. Barbariv greets Aari every evening before bed and always says,

"Good night, Aari!" at the side of her bed.

"It will take some time, of course, maybe three years," she murmurs.



When Ms. Barbariv cooks in her kitchen, the radio is always on. From time to time, when soft violin music plays, she would stop cooking and close her eyes,

“My little boy played violin just like that...”

Then, she would slowly open her deep wrinkled eyes while swaying her body to the music. She would hold her hands together to her heart and quietly cry.

‘I don’t want her to cry. I want to make her smile,’ intuits Aari, who is slowly turning her head up from the corner.

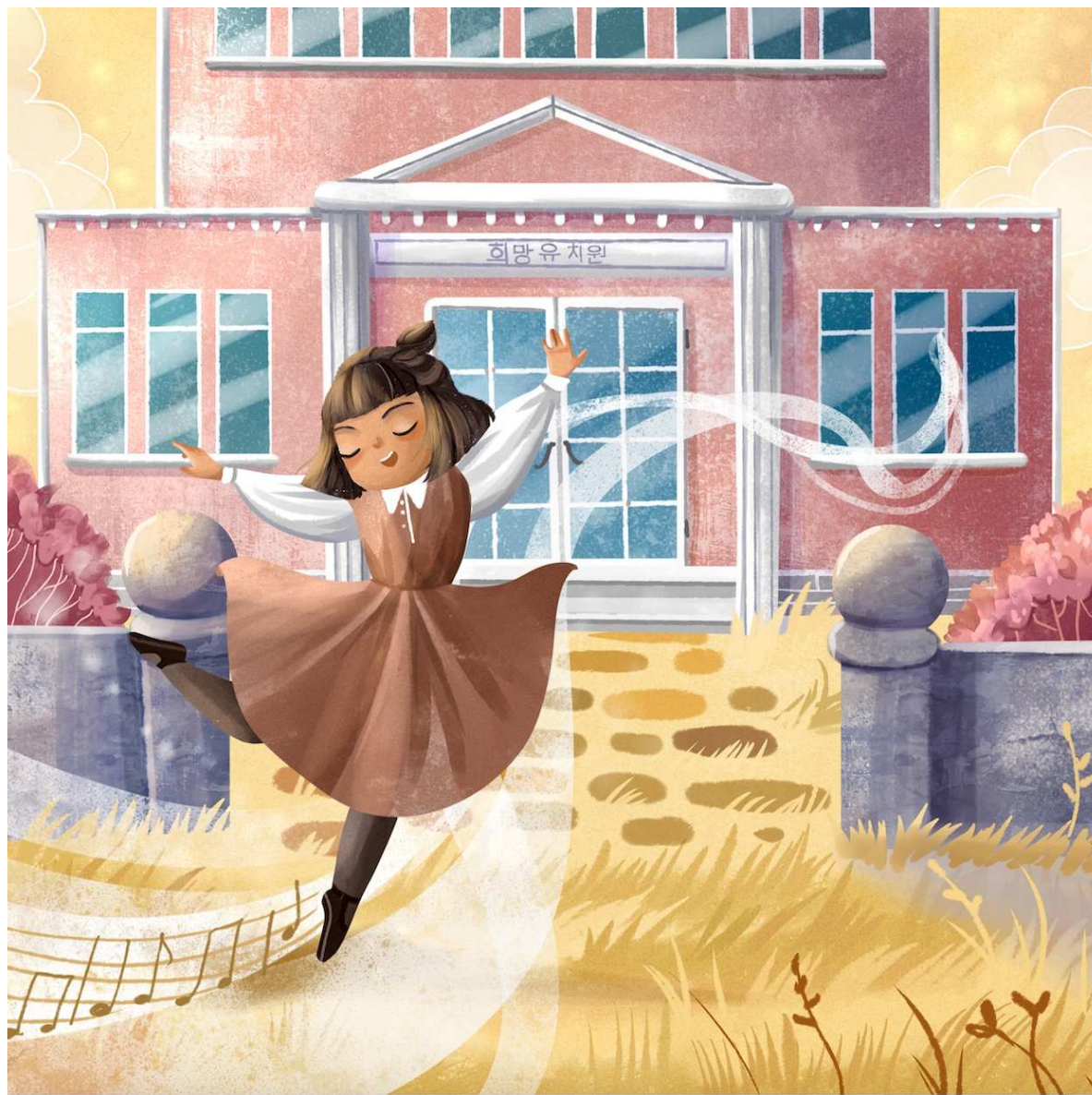




Aari loved singing in the village festivals when she was young. She loved playing a bus driver using the door of a house, assuring every passenger that her door-bus would take them to the farthest corners of the world.

She became a school dog, when she wasn't sent to the village kindergarten, following along with her friends where she learned songs and dances and the alphabet delivered by the wind through the window.

She loved playing school with neighborhood kids quizzing each of them on what they had learned at school.





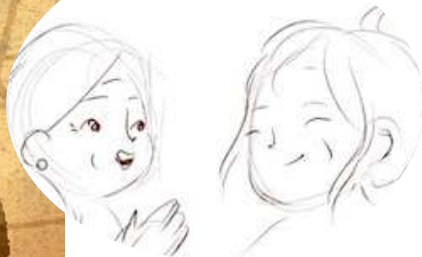


One day Ms. Barbariv's old friend Miss Monic came over.

"She must've been born somewhere in Eastern Asia. You were born somewhere in Eastern Europe, weren't you? Coincidence.

"Where did all of your young dances go? You were a famous dancer. Then, the war broke, do you remember that? Absurdity.

"How about the times in New York as a cleaning lady? You never stopped going to that night school. Perseverance."







Somewhere among the early adventures of Aari, little by little, she naturally found a corner off center stage and, anxiously standing there, heard the words,

“Only if you were a boy,” “Only if you didn’t speak awkwardly,” “Only if your hair weren’t black,” “Only if you had double eyelids,” and then one day, she mimics these words while spying her own reflection in a rain puddle,

“Only if I were a boy,” “Only if I didn’t speak awkwardly,” “Only if my hair were not black,” “Only if I had double eyelids.”

Aari tried to be loved and to belong.

Somehow Aari hears the same march of chants,

“Only-if-you-were” “Only-if-I-were, ”
“Only-if-you-were” “Only-if-I-were, ”
“Only-if-you-were” “Only-if-I-were. ”





Mr. Tomatover loves training his brain by memorizing poems while walking his dog near the Blue House.

"Would you like me to recite some passages? How about this one for you?"

"All the world's a stage!" Aari hears Mr. Tomatover's words every day and mimics his lines,

"All the world's a stage!"
"All the world's a stage!"
"All the world's a stage!"



Ms. Barbariv, who used to be a theater dancer, teaches Aari how to be on a stage,

"You must focus on the lines, not the audience.
O.K., let's do it again, Kate's obedience speech."



Miss Monica has a magical sewing machine and makes a school bag with a carp fish stitch for Aari,

"Everybody needs a good satchel."

Aari watched Miss Monica's fast hand movements and various colors of fabric moving in and out of the string-holding needle's eye.



Mrs. Minnkler wakes up in the morning to take care of her flower garden.

In her garden, early in the Spring, surprising ‘hellos’ are heard from crocuses. This cascades into the blooming of yellow daffodils and strongly-colored tulips.

“Aari, my secret is perennials!”



From summer to autumn, Ms. Barbariv, Miss Monic, and Mrs. Minnkler would tend the flowers together.

Purple irises would come and bloom while big wild-colored flowers of peonies are taking over the garden, as if someone had planned them omnisciently.

When the Sun sets, Miss Monic would make beautiful flower arrangements with summer flowers and bring them to the dinner table.

When that happens, Aari knows that the dinner will be full of wonderful stories and we would play Hwa-Too card games, or watch Anna Karenina movies all night long.







Aari remembers this feeling of being loved. It was a Catholic church where she met for the first time a softly-speaking and gently-smiling adult covered with long white and black cloth. People called her Sister Stella.



There, Aari had an urge wanting to call her “mom.”

"Now, promise me that you are going to be a good person," said Sister Stella to a small group of children surrounding her.

She would hold her pinky finger towards Aari, and Aari promised.



By and by, over 12 years of living in the Blue House with Ms. Barbariv and her neighbors, Aari now learns to raise her head up and now basks in the friendship of

the dove,
the owl,
the horse,
the hen,
the bull,
the penguin and
the confident elephant.



It was the right time for Aari to leave Ms. Barbariv's house.

Mr. Captain, who taught English to Aari, gifted an old bicycle that his daughter used to ride.

“Don't forget to wear a helmet and oil it from time to time and check the tire pressure.”




Rain or shine, breezy or stormy, Aari rides her bike.
She peddles and peddles, and she is on her way.

“Thank you!” she calls skywards.

“You’re welcome,” Ms. Barbariv whispers earthwards.





Aari recites poems while peddling over the roads,
sometimes smooth or rough,
sometimes alone or accompanied,



sometimes over exciting big dips and fearful curves,
sometimes against or with the wind.







Aari greets

horses near a barn,

morning glories on the roadside,

black birds on tree branches in
the arboretum,

cardinals in their nests, and

thirteen sun-facing trees near a
dormitory.

Aari has just begun her bicycle
adventures into the wonderful
ways of the world!

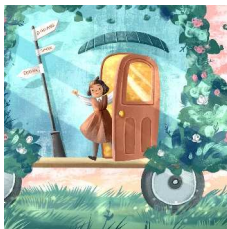
Hurray!

That's what I call "*Arirang*."

This space is for the title of your *arirang* story and a possible *arirang* word of your own:

Title:

Your own word:





A 50-word summary

A young girl, Aari, is adopted by a lady who lost her only child. They together care for each other day by day. Aari stumbles forward from a corner and encounters the magical ways of the world through human love and through her inquisitive adventures with nature.

Keywords

Reciprocal sustainable relationship (*Arirang*-like), Coming-of-age adventure, Love and humankind-ness, Artful stewardship of personhood and nature, Honesty and responsibility.

An Acknowledgment and a Disclaimer

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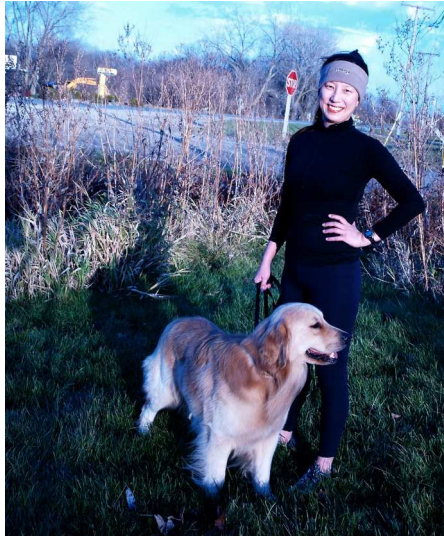
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