

With friends like this, who needs enemies?

Love survives sociopathic jealousy in *My Love Patzzi* | BY KATE MEE-HEE SANDS

My Love Patzzi

MBC drama, 2002

10 episodes, (Available from YA Entertainment, www.yaentertainment.com)

Along time ago in Korea, there lived two sisters named Patzzi and Kongzzi. Patzzi was selfish and ugly while Kongzzi was pure-hearted and beautiful. Because of her beauty and kindness, Kongzzi was resented by her sister and her mother, and was forced to do all the household chores. Despite this mistreatment, Kongzzi was always able to keep her beautiful nature because she knew someday she would be rewarded for her selflessness...

Once upon a time in modern-day Seoul, there lived two girls named Song-yi and Hee-won. Song-yi was an average girl with a feisty temper while her friend Hee-won was beautiful with perfect manners. The two girls always fought with one another because of their differences and most often, at the expense of Song-yi's well being. Fed up with being second best, Song-yi vows to one day settle the score between herself and Hee-won...

Sounds like history repeating, right? The joy of the Korean drama *My Love Patzzi* is how the conventional "self sacrificing girl gets ahead" plot from the Korean folktale Patzzi and Kongzzi is turned on its head. In this story, the Kongzzi character (Hee-won), who is supposed to be kind, isn't actually very nice and the evil Patzzi character (Song-yi) has a pure heart and good intentions, but a fiery temper. In a swift ten-episode series, we come to understand that there is really more to appearances than what meets the eye, and the path to finding out that reality can be pretty darn funny.

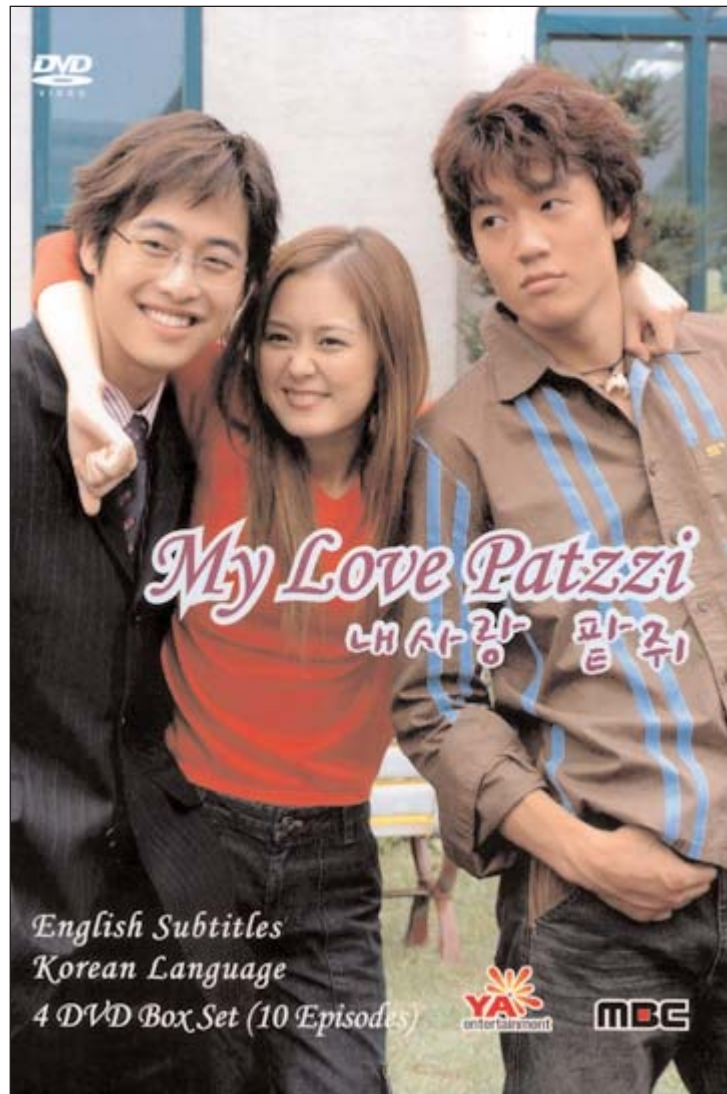
Korean pop singer Na-ra Jang stars as Song-yi, the well-intentioned but ill-tempered heroine. Throughout her life, Song-yi has been tortured by her "best friend" Hee-won (played by actress Eun-Hee Hong, *Shoot for the Stars*) who has become successful and adored by others only through the secret manipulation of and

schemes against Song-yi. In fact, Hee-won's betrayals date back to elementary school, when Hee-won promises to never pursue a boy that Song-yi likes and then subsequently steals away Song-yi's grade school crush, Hyun-sung. This childhood event sets the tone for the peculiar type of friendship that Hee-won offers Song-yi; bogus kindness fueled by jealousy and eventually, the motivation to sabotage and humiliate Song-yi.

Na-ra Jang is quite believable as the passionate Song-yi, whose "bark" is definitely much fiercer than her "bite," and whose life circumstances are deftly controlled by Hee-won. Thanks to her temper, Song-yi finds herself unemployed yet again. Luckily, (or not so luckily, if naïve Song-yi would learn from her past experiences!) Song-yi is benevolently offered a job by Hee-won at the amusement park where she works as an event planner. Feeling as though she has no other options, Song-yi begrudgingly accepts a position as an amusement park mascot complete with big floppy shoes and a giant, cartoon-inspired head while Hee-won's work attire consists of sleek business suits and perfectly-coiffed hair — another odd visual variation of Patzzi vs. Kongzzi folktale.

For the most devout of K drama fans, it is no surprise coincidence that childhood sweetheart Hyun-sung (played by actor Rae-Won Kim, *What Planet Are You From?* reviewed last issue) also happens to work at the same amusement park as a seal trainer — though the way they discover one another is anything but expected. Two boys, wanting to know if mascot Song-yi is of the male or female persuasion, are advised by mischievous park employee Sam-Yal (played by actor Kyung Shik Kim) to run a surefire "test" in order to figure out the mascot's gender. After a swift smack to Song-yi's chest, the boys decide "It really is a man!"

After Song-yi gains her composure, she commences what can only be referred to as "operation beat down" on the two pre-teen boys while Sam-Yal and Hyun-Sung look on in disbelief. The two guys decide to chase down



this disrespectful mascot and give "him" a harsh lecture on proper park etiquette, but they both discover "he" is really a "she," which causes awkward discomfort on both sides.

Hyun-sung and Sam-Yal are then forced to endure a lecture from Song-yi delivered in *ban-mal* (what Koreans refer to as "informal speech" that is used by an elder when addressing a child, between people who are very familiar with one another, or as a sign of disrespect) about their "ugly horse faces." Hyun-sung counters that it's no wonder the boys were confused about her gender because she is "flat in the front and the back" (Nara Jang is unusually petite and thin, and somewhat less endowed than some of her other 20-something counterparts).

Entering the picture at the perfect moment is none other than Hee-won, who ever-so graciously apologizes for her friend's behavior. And again, Hee-won

receives the attention, this time from Hyun-sung who quickly remembers her as the beautiful girl from elementary school.

And Song-yi? Who's Song-yi? Yet again, Song-yi is lost in Hee-won's shadow. However, Hee-won is disenchanted when she discovers Hyun-sung's financial situation — he is working at the park as an animal trainer while sending all his money back home to his family — and future vocational goals (veterinarian). Obviously not up to her standards, Hee-won immediately loses interest (anyone hear Kanye West playing in the background? "I'm not saying she's a gold digger...")

The interesting part is that Hee-won always revels in the jealousy of Song-yi, rather than the attention or compliments she receives. The deeper implication is Hee-won's true intention; she wants to reduce Song-yi into a mirror image of herself so she can feel justified in the continual betrayal of her friend.

Also, Hee-won's gut-check (and overly-vicious) reactions to put Song-yi in her place as an inadequate Patzzi truly display Hee-won's never-ending insecurity and her perceived tenuousness of her title as Kongzzi. The ability of this drama to look beyond the ordinary rivalry between two women friends adds a level of depth and dimension to the typical K drama romantic comedy plot.

In another series of misunderstandings, (What? Misunderstandings in a Korean drama? NO WAY!) Song-yi is deceived, but this time by Hyun-sung's friend Sam-Yal. He pretends to like Song-yi just to get closer to Hee-won. Song-yi is flattered by the male attention and the jealousy drives Hee-won mad. When the truth inadvertently reveals itself to Hee-won, she sets up an elaborate scene that completely humiliates Song-yi while she reasserts herself as the "perfect Kongzzi".

In order to seek revenge, Song-yi decides to sabotage one of the amusement park parade cars that is managed by Hee-won. During the half-hearted sabotage attempt, something goes wrong and Song-yi unknowingly starts a fire in the parade car — with the newly-arrived park owner's son, SJ (played by Jae-Won Kim, *Wonderful Life*) trapped in the front seat. Feeling panicked and quite guilty, Song-yi saves SJ from the fire and SJ feels indebted to this "savior" and quickly falls for her honest, down to earth character.

At almost the exact same time, Hyun-sung begins to realize that his initial feelings of pity towards Song-yi might actually be something more. All the while, Hee-won's jealousy makes her question Song-yi — Why was Song-yi near the parade car that night?

Will people discover the truth about who started the parade car fire? What will Hee-won do to settle the score between her and Song-yi once and for all? And most importantly, who will win Song-yi's heart? See for yourself with the Korean drama that really puts the meaning back into short and sweet. ●