



### **An “Overnight Success”**

One of the most popular movies of 2025 was *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. It is an animated movie about three young women who are in a Korean pop band called Huntri/x. The band Huntri/x doesn't exist in real life—it exists only in the movie. The three singers, however, are real people. This is the story of one of them.

The singer and songwriter E-JAE is the singing voice of Rumi, the main character in the movie. E-JAE showed talent as a singer when she was only three years old. When she was 11, she auditioned for a Korean company that is a K-pop music powerhouse. She was accepted in their training program to be a K-pop star. The training was rigorous. Before school and after school, she had lessons in singing, dancing, and foreign languages. Sometimes she got home from training at midnight.

Year after year, E-JAE watched as other trainees were chosen to debut as K-pop idols. She was never one of the lucky ones, but she wasn't dropped from the program, either. So she continued to work really hard toward her dream.

E-JAE took a break from training to go to a university in the United States. She got a degree in music and psychology, and then she went back to Seoul—back to training to be a K-pop star. But when she was 23, she was dropped from the program. She had talent, she was told, but her voice was too raspy, and she was too tall. And now, of course, she was too old.

Thinking back to that time, E-JAE says, “I was devastated. I felt like I had let down 11-year-old me. I had worked really, really hard—hours of singing, hours of dancing, trying to improve. I felt like all that hard work was for nothing. What do I do with my life now?”

At the university in New York, EJAE had studied music production. She decided to learn more about it. For years, she kept this routine: Every day, including weekends, she walked to a neighborhood café. From 3 PM to 12 AM, she sat at her laptop, improving her skills in music production. She wrote a lot of songs, too.

One song that EJAE wrote, "Psycho," was a big hit after a K-pop girl band recorded it. That got the attention of the director who was making the movie *K-Pop Demon Hunters*. She hired EJAE to write songs for the movie. EJAE recorded herself singing the songs so that the director could hear what they sounded like. The director liked EJAE's singing and asked her to be the singing voice of Rumi. She would sing "Golden," one of the songs that EJAE co-wrote.

"Golden" was a #1 worldwide hit, and EJAE became instantly famous—an "overnight success." But EJAE knew that she had worked 22 years to become an "overnight success." She thought about her younger self, the 11-year-old girl who dreamed of being a K-pop star, and she spoke to her. "You worked so hard. You did so well. *Jal Haess-eoyo*: Good job."

Story: Copyright © 2025 Sandra Heyer. All rights reserved. Permission granted to reproduce for classroom use.  
Photo: Copyright © Carla Van Wagoner | Dreamstime.com. Reprinted with permission.