

碩士學位論文

Mother of Mine

(친정 엄마.論文翻譯)



濟州大學校 通譯大學院

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Mother of Mine

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Abstract

This true story is about a mother; especially her boundless love toward her daughter. She sacrificed as much as she could, but the only thing she wished for until her death was the happiness of her daughter. The daughter marries and has children, but then, she gives all her love and contributions to her children, not her mother who gives all she has to her daughter. A mother's love is like a "mountain echo that never comes back again," as the author said in this book.

The mother in this book is a poor, country woman who is battered by her husband all the time. She endures all the hardships only for her children, as she later confesses to her daughter who thought her mother was powerless and not smart enough to come up with a way out of the situation. With little education, she knows fewer things than other mothers, but when it comes to things related to her daughter she comes up with a lot of ingenious ideas and solutions.

This story allows all daughters to have an opportunity to think about what we have received from our mothers and what we have to do for our mothers and, if married, our children, reflecting ourselves living very busy lives.

Author, Ko Hae-Jung, writes this essay with an emotional touch and extraordinary sense of humor. When a story in this book is a sad one, the writer describes it not only with tearful moments but also very funny scenes, which makes us cry as well as laugh aloud without knowing it. In its afterglow, we feel warmed forever. This book was so popular that it was edited and presented as a play about two years ago and is still being presented now.

감사의 글

아낌 없는 격려와, 때론 혹독한 채찍으로 열성적으로 지도해 주신 김원보 교수님, 김재원 교수님 그리고 박경란 교수님께 진심으로 감사를 드립니다.

그리고 언제나 변함없이 저를 믿어주고 지원해준 남편에게, 당신의 도움과 사랑이 없었다면 결코 할 수 없었던 과정이었음을 전하며 깊은 감사를 드립니다. 마지막으로 나의 에너지와 기쁨의 원천인 사랑하는 아들 태훈, 영훈에게 특별한 감사를 전합니다.

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Contents

Introduction	1
The Reason Why Mother Lives	2
A Daughter Leaving Home	6
Mother's Bag	11
Mom Drives Me Crazy	16
Love of Hedgehog	30
Mom's Name Is... ..	36
Mom's Sentiment	40
Why Do You Raise Dogs?	47
Mom Made Her Son-in-law Cry!	56
Memorial Service Day or Birthday?	61
My Birthday and Mom's Birthday	65
Priest Has No Children	68
Residents, If You Are in 63-Story Building,	71
The Affection of My Mom toward Her Sister	73
To Dad in Heaven	81
Author's Note	83

Introduction

There is an old saying, “When mother goes to her son’s house, she is well served, but she has to set the table at her daughter’s house.”

Although she visits her daughter for quite a while, she is busy washing bedclothes, cleaning up the whole house and other such chores. As if she were too busy, she pours water into a rice bowl and just quickly eats it up over the sink. Then right after the meal, she sets to cleaning up the house and mopping the floor.

She always feels pity as she leaves her daughter’s house, knowing that her daughter will be doing house chores and raising children. She always feels sorry for not doing more things for her while living together.

When I gave birth to my first child, I thought, ‘Ah, mom must have felt such pain when she had me!’

Raising my own children, I got to know bit by bit what she felt and suffered. I wept many days alone thinking about her.

Is there anyone who thinks more of her daughter than a mother? Is there a daughter who talks to her mom about what she has deep inside her mind without reservation? Moms and daughters, however, know what the other is thinking and feeling without saying a word.

But then again, they turn around and cry, feeling sorry for each other.

That’s what moms and daughters are.

Under the sizzling heat,
Ko Hyejung

The Reason Why My Mother Lives

Recently, I saw an article that a famous female comedian had filed a divorce suit after many years of experiencing her husband's violence. People often mention "battered woman, battered woman" but no one can feel the terror of those who are battered.

My mother also used to be a battered woman. Although my father devoted himself to us, he thrashed my mother whenever he got angry. It doesn't mean that they always had a bad relationship, but it was strange that he vented his wrath by beating her.

However, what was weirder was my mother. She didn't say anything while she was being beaten.

She should have tried to confront him about why he was hitting her, or should have run away. But she stayed still and silently shed bitter tears while being beaten. If she had resisted or shouted, someone might have come and put a stop to the beating...

When I was a mere child, I had to just watch his violent rages with terror or run away to our neighbors. But as I grew older, I couldn't stand the situation.

I remember it was when I was in middle school. It was somewhat funny, almost a comedy, remembering back to one particularly outrageous incident.

That day, he gave her blows like any other day and we were crying in a corner, watching that scene. But as she was beaten silently, she said to him all of a sudden.

"The kids must be hungry. Let's continue after feeding them."

Then, he agreed with no objection this time.

She almost crawled to the kitchen and after a while she appeared with the dining table. She told us to eat and she went back to the same place where she had been beaten.

It really happened. Even I myself couldn't understand what happened then, and now as I am thinking back it doesn't make any more sense.

Would it have made perfect comedy material if we had eaten dinner around the table, crying? However, we couldn't eat. How could we have dinner at such a scene no matter how indiscreet we were...

At that moment, suddenly, I was so mad that I overturned the dining table toward them. And I shouted at them sharply.

"Kill her, Kill her. Kill her at once! Don't make her suffer and feel sick continuously. Kill her with one stroke, please... Mother, you had better die. Please, die. Don't live such a miserable life. Die!"

All others looked at me with their eyes wide open. What might happen next? Might he hit me and I would faint with his harsh blows? No. His intentions were impossible to understand.

While he violated her so harshly, he has never even thought about slapping his children. Not once. Except for the cases when he would strike her, he was a very good head of the family, as well as a wonderful father.

My neighborhood also liked him very much, calling him a good-natured man... But I don't understand why he was so violent only to her.

One day when I came home from school, he was beating her as usual. There was no special reason why he hit her. He just beat her.

Only I could hear him beating her in the room without any sound from. My younger brothers seemed to be wearing sooty clothes. They must have hung around outside all day. Sitting in a row at the edge of the wooden floor, they burst into tears when they saw me come. I approached them and started crying.

I hated living like this. I was sad about this grievous situation. I hated the fact that I'm a woman. Why should a woman endure being beat by a man? Why was my family always in such a miserable situation? I just sat still and cried mournfully out loud for a long time. After a while, it became suddenly silent in the room, and we heard the back door open.

We stopped crying and tried to hear what was going on in the room. There was no sound for quite a while. It seemed that he had lied down to sleep as it was quiet. Routinely, after he vented his anger on her, he would lie down. He

didn't actually sleep, he just pretended to sleep.

We, four siblings, walked to the backyard stealthily. There, my mother, with her lips chapped and bruised and her face swollen, was rinsing rice, still weeping silently.

We couldn't even think of approaching her and shed tears with our heads down. She stopped rinsing it and signaled us to come. While the youngest quickly jumped into her arms and the others slowly approached her, I stared at her without moving a step. I just hated such a foolish mom. But she repeated, "I'm OK", holding my brothers with tears in her eyes.

While doing so, she waved me to come once again. I stopped staring at her and came to her reluctantly. Then she promptly said to me.

"You must be hungry. I'll prepare food quickly."

"Mom, separate from Dad. He always beats you though you are innocent."

"Do you want me not to live with your Dad?"

"Get divorced. Or run away, go to the capital and make a living as a house maid. Why do you live this way, always being beaten?"

Then as she wiped off my tears, she said, "Do you think that I haven't thought of that? Sometimes I wish that I had died rather than live like an animal and other times I wish that I could run away because then I could make my living anyway."

"But why didn't you?"

She made a little smile while looking at me.

"Because of you... It's because of you."

"Why? Why do you stay here because of me?"

"You would suffer a lot without me. You would have to do every house chore that I used to do. You would have to cook, wash clothes and take care of your younger brothers... I am also afraid you would have some problems going to school. I can't do that. How could I live an easy and comfortable life while your life would be bogged down?"

I had thought her very foolish because she had just endured the situation, being beaten. So I hated her. But she said it was all because of me and she stayed here to protect me. I had never thought about her deep love and only complained about her. I hated and resented her bearing her misfortune with stoical fortitude. But she deliberated often on her life and future.

Being young, though, I was shocked at her confession; she gave up her own life and withstood very stressful circumstances, just because of me. Maybe that's when I started thinking of her earnestly. I was determined not to give her any trouble at all and to become a successful woman so that her sacrifice would not end up being in vain. Yes, I remember that's when I decided to work hard.

I have since worked hard, thinking that I wouldn't do anything that could cause pain to her.

My mother told me that her neighbors would say, "You are lucky because you have a good daughter. There is no daughter like yours."

I don't know whether I'm a good daughter to her, but if I am such a good daughter that others envy, I owe it all to her.

I still proudly tell others that my life would have gone wrong without my mom.

Without knowing my story, some people may think that my mother used to meet my teacher to get special treatment for me, but, in fact, I have lived this far thanks to her extraordinary sacrifice and affection.

All parents make sacrifices for their children in one way or another. Children think it natural but gradually realize their parents' devotion with age. I, however, realized it just a little bit earlier than others.

I have always boasted about being what I am, as if it is all because of me. But mother, I know I would have been nothing without your help. You don't know how much I appreciate you.

Do you remember that I told you I would never do anything foolish and would become a wonderful daughter that you could be proud of? You might have forgotten because I said it very young, but, you know, mother, I've never forgotten it for even a moment. I used to say to you, "Mom, you drive me crazy." But, with all my heart, I know that you are the most important source of support in my life... Mom, you give me so much energy!

A Daughter Leaving Home

I entered Seoul Art University in 1988. I was born in JeongEup, Jeonla province. Few people know of JeongEup, but when people say it is the city of Mr.NeaJang which is noted for its autumn colors, everyone knows it. Back then, it was really surprising for a girl in a small town to go to this university. The University was not well known in my town. Even those who knew it said it was for entertainers. Anyway, I went to the university.

My parents, however, probably didn't sleep well, watching their girl, who they had raised for about 20 years, go to such a frightful capital; people say it is a city where others cut your nose if you close your eyes. (They will steal your wallet if you look the other way!)

"I have no idea why the girl is trying to go to university whose name is not familiar. She'd be better off going to a school around here and thinking well of getting married.."

My father kept on grumbling, sitting at the edge of the wooden floor, while not able to dissuade my mother. She supported me whenever he tried, saying, "Leave her alone. These days no one sends their children to university to find a good husband. If they get a good education, they will make their own living. And the university she is going to is a special one."

But when I packed things up to live in Seoul, the capital, she silently cried a lot. I was so distressed that I had second thoughts about going to university.

"I may not go to Seoul because of you. Why are you crying? Why are you crying? Will you take all the responsibility if I miss the train? Why...?" "If you leave today, you might not come back home. You may leave forever."

"No way, I'll visit home all the time." My mother and I cried a lot. Because there was not an appropriate bag, I packed things into a box of instant noodles and took the train bound for Seoul.

When I was in university, I had to go home once every month. My father's brilliant idea to make sure he would see me was to make me come home to get my allowance and rent fees for the month. If he had wired the money, I would

have stayed in Seoul and had fun without visiting his house in the country, he thought. Yes, his idea worked so well that I couldn't avoid going home every month.

My parents practically made a feast every time I came home. My mother would always have a big smile while she cooked lots of delicious food, thinking that I must not have been well-fed away from home. My younger brothers were very fascinated by my experiences in Seoul, but I was really still just a country girl and only went back and forth from school...

When I visited my home every month I felt great happiness. I was becoming accustomed to the situation, but one day my mother came with me to the train station, because of her concern for me.

As usual, I went home for money. When I was about to leave, she said she would accompany me. At first, I tried to dissuade her but she kept insisting, so I let her join me. While walking to the station for about 30 minutes, we talked about this and that. When we arrived, she pulled me into a corner. Looking around, she pulled something from her bag carefully: a lump wrapped tight with a cloth. She started to unwrap it, still looking around carefully.

I watched her doing so and asked her dubiously, "Mom, what's that?" "Nothing" She unwrapped the carefully wrapped lump earnestly. A wrinkled handkerchief appeared from the multi-layered cloth, and then an instant noodle wrapper. When she opened it cautiously... Inside... There were piles of coins— five won, ten, fifty and sometimes one hundred won coins...

"My child, take this and spend it in Seoul. I heard that there is nothing you can get in Seoul without money. What can you do with the little amount of money that your father offers you? Take this and spend it hanging out and eating with your friends."

"How did you get all this money?"

"I can't sleep easy thinking of you. I have left you in Seoul alone and can't do anything for you. As I also rely on your dad for money, I am helpless when it comes to money right now. He has no idea about this money. I saved it by being as thrifty as possible when spending money.

When I bought 200 won worth of bean sprouts, I would only spend 150 won. I even bought half the regular amount of tofu. I just tried to save as much as possible for you."

"Who asked you to do so? Why are you acting so poor? The money from dad is enough! Why are you doing this?"

"You can't be full eating outside no matter how much you eat. I haven't eaten much since you left, wondering what you were eating. Hurry, put the money in the bag. There must be tens of thousands."

"I won't take it. I don't need it; spend it on something delicious to eat for yourself."

"What are you saying? I have saved hard just for you."

"I won't. It is too heavy."

"No, it's not. Take it."

"I said no. How long have you saved? It's very heavy."

"Don't talk idly. Quit complaining and put the money in your bag."

"You take it. Where can I spend this money?"

"No. I don't have anything to buy with it."

"Give me a break, mom. Don't behave like a poor person. When did I ask you for more money?"

"You would understand if you had a child. This is nothing. On the contrary, you might regret that you couldn't do more things for your child. Do you know how excited I was when I saved the money? I really had fun and enjoyed it, you know?"

"You are going too far for me to bear."

"There is nothing for you to worry about. I almost cry whenever I feel I can't fully support you. I always feel vexed because daughters are destined to leave home someday. On top of that, I am unable to help you a lot..."

"I really don't understand you. You are helpless."

"Yes, I am. I know. I am sorry that I'm such a fool."

"That's not what I'm talking about. Not that thing."

We cried and cried, avoiding looking over at each other. At last, with the announcement that the train for Seoul was coming, we couldn't contain our emotion; we kept weeping.

I left her behind and took the train with the piles of coins that she had wrapped tight. Where did I spend all the coins? I don't remember so well.

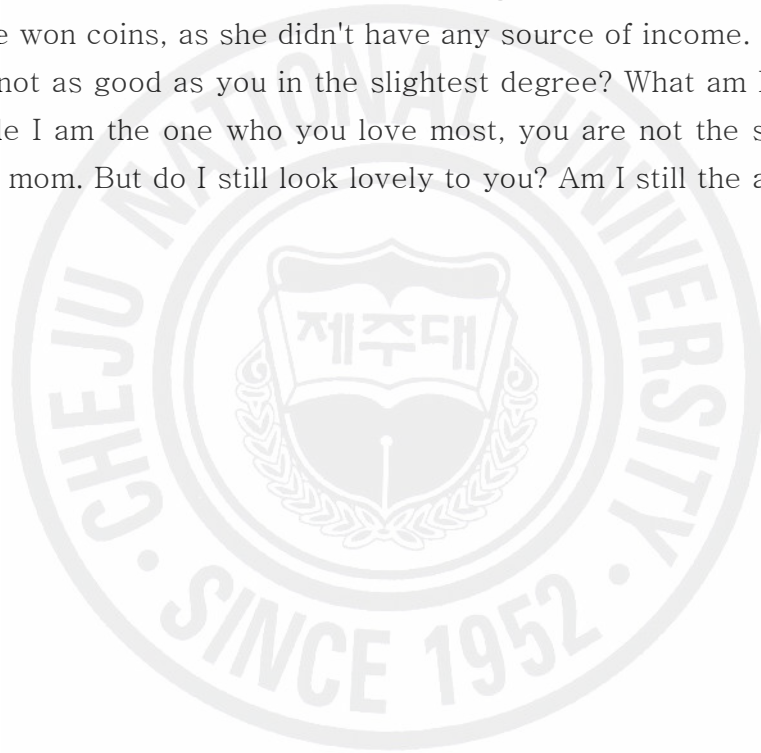
Later, I ended up staying in Seoul permanently, as she had envisioned. I mean, I visited home sometimes but didn't go home to live; after graduation, I

had to stay here to work. Eventually, I tied the knot with a guy who was born in Seoul. We settled down here in Seoul. I was never to go back home.

Now, as I live in a new nest, I miss her more and more. I have shed many tears as I have experienced many new things, such as living with my husband, having a baby and getting to understand my mother. When I return home, I put some coins into a piggy bank, which always reminds me of her.

I collect coins in the piggy bank because they are annoying sometimes. And when I've collected a lot, I change them into bills and use them again. Sixteen years ago, my mother collected coins for her daughter, who was living away from home. She was worried about her daughter so much that she even collected five won coins, as she didn't have any source of income.

How am I not as good as you in the slightest degree? What am I going to do because while I am the one who you love most, you are not the same for me. I'm so sorry, mom. But do I still look lovely to you? Am I still the apple of your eye?



*******Sorry, Mom*******

Sorry that I have never said, "I love you."

Sorry that when I was suffering, I said to you, "Why did you bring me into this wild world?"

Sorry that I said, "My child is more attractive than yours."

Sorry that I always leave you alone.

Sorry that your prettiest girl did not visit you more often.

Sorry that it was always I that hung up the phone first.

Sorry that when I go to your home, I do not sleep with you, but with my husband.

Sorry that I always just sit back and watch you suffering from a slipped disk.

Sorry that I always believe you when you say, "I'm O.K."

Sorry that I often fail to speak to you kindly.

Sorry that I think I am happy only because of my own luck.

There are tons of other things that I am sorry about, but the thing that I feel the guiltiest about is that while I am the one who you love the most in the whole world, you are not the one who I love the most. I am really, really sorry.

My Mother's Bag

When I entered university and left home, I stayed at an old house, in the upper area of a hill in ManriDong, near my aunt's house.

I went home every month for money but sometimes my mother came to see me with food she had prepared. She always called me to meet her at the Seoul Station when she bought a train ticket, because she is almost illiterate and was not familiar with the Seoul area. She told me she was afraid of Seoul.

Now, it's different. There are more methods of communication and it's easier to go back and forth from Seoul. Back then, seniors from small towns hardly went to Seoul and thought it was so horrible that it was not even a habitable place. My mother thought this as well.

When I first came here, I had the same impression. Everything was strange and people here spoke in a different tone...

Although she was afraid of Seoul, she missed me so much that she couldn't help but come here with lots of things to eat. Then I was so delighted that I went to see her. We chatted about everything while going up the road from the Station.

That day also I went to the Station at the time when she would arrive. There was an announcement about the arrival of the train from JeonRa province and many people flowed out of it. Out there, my little mother, so small like a dwarf, looking smaller because of her slipped disk which caused her back to bend, appeared with a heavy load on her head and a bundle in her hand.

The load must have been so heavy because her neck was tilted like a turtle's and she wore a serious frown. I was almost choked, seeing her looking around for me ...

As I approached her, she suddenly smiled, saying, "Oh, my little daughter!"

We came out of the crowded Station and headed toward a taxi stop. My mother, however, took the lead abruptly, asking why we would take a taxi when we could walk.

The heavy load on her head stopped her from walking several times because she had to wipe off her sweat and take breath. The bundle that she handed me was also really heavy on that particular day, but I pretended not notice. A feeling of anger surged up in me from time to time.

"What on earth did you bring with you. It looks too heavy. I just asked for some Kimchi (spicy pickled vegetables). Not all this food."

"Well, I tried. But as I prepared what you liked with just a small amount for each, they got bigger and bigger like this. Anyway, let's hurry. Let's go and eat."

Finally I lost my temper and spoke bluntly to her. For her, she was too upset and sorry to bring out how painstaking it had been to prepare all the food. While we walked to ManriDong from the Station, she had to adjust the load on her head several times.

But as we almost arrived home, the wrapping cloth suddenly came undone and all the things in it fell out and started to roll down the hill.

Surprised, she dropped her package and started chasing after the rolling things in a flurry. Some people walking behind us helped us collect them and she hurriedly picked them in her skirt.

It turned out the rolling things were canned pineapples and apples. Since I was young, I have liked fruits and canned fruit was what she always bought me on a special occasions or whenever I felt sick.

A feeling of anger welled up within me.

"What are these all about? Why did you buy them? Why?"

"For you..."

"They are spread all over here. Furthermore, there are better ones here."

Why are you taking such pains in vain?"

"I wanted you to eat some as soon as I saw you... I know Seoul has all these things. But I just wanted you to eat them as soon as possible"

"God, I can't stand you any more! Don't bring me any more, ever. Never!"

"All right, all right. I won't. But what can I do with all the broken apples? You won't eat the ugly ones. What if I peel them nice and neat?"

After such complications, we arrived home and unwrapped the food; side dishes like Kimchi, soy sauce-seasoned meat, seasoned raw skate, panbroiled anchovy, boiled beans and most common vegetables like potatoes, leeks, red peppers and so on. Once again, I got angry at her, saying they abounded in Seoul. She didn't react to me and started to put them in refrigerator one by one turning her back on me.

I talked to her roughly, but I didn't mean it. I was just distressed, but she must have been hurt by my reaction and told me her deeper emotions, shedding tears.

"You couldn't know what mothers think. You will know later when you have children and raise them. Then you will think of me. I've never eaten any dish that you used to eat. I couldn't have anything my kid had liked, ever. I've never had fruit by myself since you left for Seoul. Just to eat with you. That's what all mothers think when their kids go away."

I know. I know what she thinks. It is only a mother who gives unconditional love. It is only a mother who is perfectly my side.

Is there any other who is better than a mother?

I once heard that God made human beings but couldn't take care of every single one of them, so he made mothers. As I grow older, I think that it is quite right.

It is mothers who carry one of the most common things as if it were the most valuable one.

Why would I have done that?

That's not what I thought. I thought that I knew some, although not all, of what my mother thought... I really don't know why I was so harsh to her, contrary to what I thought, and I hurt her.

When I shout and cry to her, it's because I am worried about and sorry for

her. But why do I always reveal my mind with harsh expression?

Manners with mothers are quite different from those with mothers-in-law. Take this as an example: they were swindled out of their pocket money by a con artist and came to complain about it. Daughters-in-law would say, "Why did you go there? But that's O.K. Forget about it and don't go to such a place. Please keep that in mind!"

But look at daughters. They would say, "Well done! Give me a break! Why did you there and get taken in? Look at you! I hate the very sight of you, mom!"

Apparently daughters-in-law are very polite, while daughters are very rude. But daughters are actually really anxious and heartbroken.

My mother also sometimes feels saddened by my brutality. That's not really what is in my mind. I don't know why. I am kind and charming to others but not to my mother. Even sometimes I fail to say, "thank you." Instead, I have a bad habit of misbehaving abnormally towards her."

My mother, however, has sent me Kimchi and other side dishes since my marriage.

Now, she doesn't have to bring them here on her head. Instead, she calls me after she sends them by quick delivery service. But when I get them I am always very distressed.

Originally food from ChunraDo is good and my mother is a wonderful cook so I am still dependent on her food. When I get her food delivered, I can't stop crying.

As for Kimchi, she prepares all kinds of Kimchi such as Kimchi of Lettuce, young radish, leaf mustard, leek, sometimes sesame leaf and sweet potato sprouts or cubed radish Kimchi, as well as dried side dishes and seasoned greens from every season. When she sends fish, she neatly cleans it and puts it in a disposable plastic bag for each so that I can easily store it in the refrigerator and cook it. Fermented rice punch, my husband's favorite, and salted sea foods...

She sends full packages of side dishes so when we unpack the package we can set a wonderful Korean set meal.

While I am undoing the package, my heart is broken. How hard it must be for her preparing all these, alone. She almost crawls with back pain.

If it is so painful for her, then I shouldn't accept them. But her food is so delicious that I can't avoid them...

After I arrange the food, putting it all into the refrigerator, I call her.

"Mom, I got the food. Thank you. I will eat well."

It would be pretty good if I did it that way. I really want to do that. But, on the contrary, when I call her, I show nervousness.

"I can't stand you. You drive me crazy. Why did you send so much leek Kimchi. I said you had backache. And I told you not to send it."

"My little child, I heard that leeks clear heads."

"Where have you heard of that foolish thing? Don't send me anymore, please. When I think that you are sitting down on your heels, trimming leeks in the yard, I almost get crazy."

"What are you talking about? That's what mothers do for their kids."

"Mom, don't care about me, any more. I will buy Kimchi from now on, alright?"

"Don't say that again. I will do it while I'm living. Daughters are daughters. You are a thief who I want to give everything to."

Oh my... She always had pains for her daughter, 'thief who she wants to give everything to' and who uses harsh language'. The daughter who doesn't know kind manners to her own mother, couldn't be more pleasant.

Whenever I set the table and eat with my family, I appreciate her. 'She is the best cook!' said my husband. Then I seem very proud, saying, "Honey, you should know you got married well", all because of my mother.

Mom Drives Me Crazy

My husband and I met in October, 1994, for the first time. Then I was 27 and he 32. I didn't have any mind for marriage then. But someone I knew said, "Just meet him once. He is very nice." So I had to go to meet him.

When I met him, he was neither good nor bad. I don't know, but I just didn't feel anything for him. But for him it seemed different; when he was waiting at an appointment place, a woman came in and he thought, 'Wow, I wish that were the woman I was supposed to meet.' But after just looking around, she went out. He then thought, 'I knew it. She is too much for me...' After a while, she reappeared, but this time with the one who he already knew. The one who had arranged the meeting."

I, however, went there without any expectation, so I just gave sassy replies to his questions. We spent some time together and parted from each other with a superficial goodbye.

But then he came to the Broadcasting company where I was working and waited for me recklessly on the next Monday. I didn't know what excuse he used to get out of his workplace, but he was tenacious.

I let him know my pager number and the phone number of my office, and asked him not to come without making an appointment. Then we met almost everyday later on.

Then, we went out for about a year.

One day, his father wanted to meet me. We met at a coffee shop in Myong-dong. I got a good impression from him and he was friendly to me. He suggested that we marry as we are old enough to marry. We accepted the proposal genuinely. Although there was no formal proposal, we thought of marriage naturally.

After that, things went on quickly.

A few days later, I was invited to his house for a dinner. I was to go to meet

the future family-in-law to be introduced for the first time.

I was really nervous. It was a difficult situation and I wanted to be seen as very nice to my future family. So I bought new clothes for the day and ordered a bouquet basket. I didn't forget to buy a cake and presents.

Finally the day came. While I was chatting a lot from excitement and nervousness, he was just driving calmly with a serious look.

Not expecting anything that was about to happen, I headed for his house. But, unlike my expectation, it was not a pleasant evening, even a little.

I heard later that other members of the family opposed the marriage, pointing out that I didn't have good qualifications. Especially his mother was very opposed to it. My father-in-law was the only one who was in favor of me.

When it comes to my husband, he got his master's and doctor's degrees in the U.S. He is tall and handsome and has a sturdy frame. Moreover, he is the second son of a rich father who owns a trading company. He has everything he needs, so it was natural that his mother wanted to choose the best bride of the best.

But suddenly one day she heard of the lady who he was dating; she is the first daughter of a very poor family in a remote town in JeonLa Province, she has three younger brothers, graduated from a collage and was working for a broadcasting company. The job she would do as a college graduate would be clear, she thought.

She then tried to stop our relationship from going on, persuading and threatening him.

But as he never showed a hint of that even once for the last year we spent. I couldn't even think about that.

But why was I invited there?

As the whole family badly opposed, the father was determined to intervene. He said to the others that it could be different when they met her, it was not fair to judge only on conditions without seeing her and the marriage is between the two people, rather than others. By his earnest persuasion, the invitation managed to be made.

Without mentioning a hint to me, although he knew the atmosphere, he drove

me to his house, and I prepared to meet them for the first time.

The car arrived at his house. I entered it courteously carrying the presents I had prepared for the family.

The atmosphere, however, was not usual. There was no one but his father in the living room. He and his father took a sigh, just studying my face.

After while, his sister-in-law came out and introduced herself superficially. But all of them stood absent-mindedly.

His father recommended that I sit down and asked his daughter-in-law to get his wife.

After a long time she entered the room, she came out and said that she wouldn't come out. He raised his voice, shouting her to come out now.

I knew that things were going wrong then.

While I was feeling vexed, his mother came out with his sister-in-law.

As soon as she sat down, she shouted at me, slapping the table with her palm.

"What a flirt you are! How dare you entice my son? Did I raise my son to marry someone like you? Don't even think about it! Over my dead body!"

I was so astonished and upset that I looked at my fiancé, not knowing what to say. He just lowered his head and said nothing. His father and sister-in-law were just looking far away.

His mother continued, "My son has never contradicted me so far. I can imagine how you have made him absent-minded. As I did everything to dissuade him from meeting you, even sometimes not letting him sleep all night long, he still wouldn't listen to me... You are from nothing, graduated from a college and you are working for a broadcasting company whose people I don't give a damn about. Don't even dream! I can't accept you. What a fool, boy! Where the heck did you find a girl like this..."

When I almost burst into tears, I struggled not to cry and then thought, 'Coming to an unknown place, why should I be humiliated by the one I saw for the first time. Collect my mind!'

After a while, I focused my mind and said fearlessly, "Calm down. I won't marry him. I didn't know you opposed the marriage. If I had known it, I wouldn't have come. And my family has strong roots. It is true that my family

is not great, but if your family is good, how can you act like this? You invited someone who you don't have any knowledge of and push her into a corner without offering a cup of tea. Is that the way a good family treats a visitor? Oh my god. You are so arrogant."

I was so mortified and vexed that I couldn't endure. My fiancé? He couldn't say a word and kept his head lowered; I hated him so badly.

'Why did he take me here, when he couldn't support me in any way? How could I rely on him for all my life?' This made me think I should strain every nerve not to lose my vigor by clenching my teeth.

"Well, I won't get married to him. I will never meet him again. Don't worry and please take care of your son. I will take the flower and cake back because given this atmosphere you would probably take them out when I leave. I'd rather dump them on my own."

I took what I had brought and left there. Until then, my boyfriend just sat with his head down calmly, but suddenly, as if he realized that he shouldn't do that, he came out when I got out of the door and grabbed my hand and shouted, crying, "Mother, I will marry her. I will die without her."

Holding back my tears, I concentrated all my resentment on him.

"Leave me alone! Did you take me here to make me feel shamed? Why didn't you tell me the situation? Do you feel good when you make a fool out of me? How great is your family that defames a precious daughter from another family at the first meeting?" You should know other child is as valuable as your own. If my parents knew I got unfair treatment, they would shed blood, tear out their hearts and die. Do you know that?

"I'm sorry. It's my fault. Marry me, please. I am nothing without you."

"No kidding. I can do without you. Marry a woman who your mother chooses for you and who has a great background."

"No, no. Please, please..."

Seeing the scene at the front door, his mother cried out his name in vexation and fell down. Unlike her thought that a greedy damned wench lured her son, she saw that he implored her to marry him.

All were busy looking for a sedative and some cold water. It must be rare that a woman who visits her future mother-in-law for the first time must help

her take a mashed sedative with a spoon.

She got better, anyway. But when his elder brother who came late and drunken joined the scene, the house was thrown into utter confusion. I said 'sorry' once again and got out of the house.

When I tried to catch a taxi, he wanted to drive me.

After the shameful trouble, I didn't want to see his face. At that time I thought, "This is it."

Although I refused his offer again and again, he was so persistent that I rode in his car. On the way, he said, "Let's go to the U.S., where we could get married and live. I have many friends there. I can get a good job there."

"Go if you want. Why would I leave my family, friends and job that I like? Moreover, you speak English well but what about me? I would be like a deaf and mute person. I don't want to go."

"Then, what can I do?"

"Marry a good woman. Don't spend time with a normal woman like me.

"O.K. Then, let's die together. There is nothing else we can do. Let's kill ourselves in the sea of Incheon."

He drove toward Incheon suddenly. I was scared and embarrassed, but I got angry at the same time. Then I shouted sharply.

"If you want to die, you do alone. You die in your mother's arms. Why are you trying to kill me with you? I don't want to. I won't."

"Can you live without me?"

"I can. Why not?"

"So, I'll show you how a man could be destroyed because of a woman."

"Such a threat doesn't work on me at all. Use that on your mother."

Then he stopped the car and suddenly cried and shouted, kicking the car. He looked so miserable that I sat down and cried too.

After we cried for a while, we collected our minds and went back to his parents to ask them to permit our marriage, kneeling down.

His mother seemed to have calmed down a little. Then she went back to her room, saying this coldly.

"Marry her if you want. But don't think you have your mother any more. I will live thinking nothing of you, either."

Back home, I went to bed but I couldn't fall asleep. Jolted from my sleep, I reached a conclusion that I wouldn't marry him. Early the next morning, I packed my things up and headed for my mother's house.

I lied to my mom that I came home on leave. My mom was busy asking what to eat or to want when she saw her precious daughter come home without any notice in advance. My father killed a chicken for soup and bought a box of the fruit I used to enjoy. My brothers were excited and repeated the word 'my sister, my sister' when I gave them some allowance.

At home, I am such a precious one and everyone likes me...

Such a tough day passed and I got a call that my boy friend came to Jeongeup to see me. As he was not able to contact me, he asked everyone he knew about my whereabouts. My family members were surprised, but welcomed him when he came on such a short notice. Everyone liked him and my parents said, "We would like you to marry if you want." While he appreciated their permission, bowing with his nose almost touching the floor, I heaved nothing but a deep sigh.

On the way back to Seoul, he said that his father wanted us to get married that year. It was October then. We had only about two months and we couldn't get a reservation for a wedding hall because it was too late.

But his father thought that things would be worse if there were delays. Then he just hurried with the wedding and we didn't have any other choice than to follow him.

His father asked us to arrange a meeting for both parents because they needed to see each other in person before the wedding ceremony. But it was quite a burden to me.

Until then I felt unfair that he didn't give a hint that his mother had objected to our marriage while he had been under huge pressure from her. But when I was in his shoes, I could understand him.

I myself didn't say anything about the complicated situation on the day they would meet. Well, I just thought that if I told them the truth things would go worse, therefore we'd better hide the fact and extend such a mood to the day of our marriage. We didn't expect a scene with such a simple mind.

But that day was totally opposite to what we anticipated. I can't forget it and will feel painful about it until the day I die and after my mom passes away.

We met each other at a coffee shop in Mapo Garden Hotel. My parents came to Seoul on the previous day and stayed at my aunt's house in Ahyun dong. They prepared some decent words and manners with my aunt so as not to make mistakes before the future parents-in-law of their daughter.

The next morning mom wore a beautiful Hanbok (Korean traditional cloth) because she said the first impression is very important. Then we headed for the meeting place.

Mom's face turned red as if she colored her cheeks with rouge, asking me if she seemed to come from the countryside when we had almost arrived at the meeting place. I shed tears with anxiety; what if mom were hurt deeply? I thought I wouldn't go on this way and said to mom in a roundabout way.

"Mom... Well, his parents don't welcome me very well."

"What?"

"His mother objects the wedding."

"Really? Well, I won't go. Why didn't you tell me before? If you told me in advance, I would not be here."

"That's why I didn't tell you the truth!"

"I, I don't want to go. Why should I? Come here, we won't go!"

While arguing in the middle of the street, the traffic lights turned red so we had to run toward the hotel.

My father soothed and asked mom to meet them just to say hello because we came here all the way from far away.

They had already arrived there. He and his parents and I and my parents were seated. When we said hello, his father and mine shook hands and welcomed each other, but his mother just looked out of the window, saying nothing. Mom started feeling hurt then and just did the same, looking out of the window. It was nerve-wracking, as if we were walking on a thin layer of ice.

The two fathers were sharing small talk but the two mothers were waging a nerve war, still looking out of the window. Then suddenly his mother loosened her tongue.

"I don't like your daughter. I don't care now. If I think I don't consider him as my son from now on, then it's O.K."

The mood was frozen for a second and I shed tears, feeling just powerless. Then I heard mom speak.

"Why the hell don't you like my daughter?"

"All of her."

"I don't think you have manners. You must not speak that way about somebody's child. Do you think I came here because I liked your son? No, I came here because my precious one likes him and I didn't want to hurt her. I also have many things to complain about your son, actually."

"Then, good. It's better for them not to get married, isn't it?"

"Does it depend on us? They have already fallen in love... There is an old saying, "Don't boast having a good husband, but follow one fortune as for marriage. We don't have to worry about our children's marriage because it is not made by human but by heaven. Then is it good for parents to be involved in it and wound their minds?"

Unlike her usual aspect, she said it very gently and elegantly. I thought that mom, such a pure and poor spirit, would have reacted like a victim in this case, regretting what she was and crying without saying a word.

She was so afraid of her low-education that she used to refrain from saying anything in front of strangers or in a delicate situation. But it was related to her daughter, so she couldn't just sit back and keep mum.

Anyway, I was quite surprised at her courage and logical remarks.

"Did I send my son abroad to study only to have such a girl as a daughter-in-law? Do you know how much I was supporting him when he studied abroad?"

"Do you mean that my daughter just had fun doing nothing, while your son learned abroad? Although my little one didn't go abroad for study, I did more than we were able to do for her education."

"She studied for just two years in a college but my son for four years in a university and six years abroad."

Mom maintained her decency up to that moment but she suddenly raised her voice.

"Well done. While your son studied abroad with rich parents, my precious one worked part time while studying. She just wore jeans for her two years of college. Right after graduating, she started working for a broadcasting company to support her parents and little brothers. ... She didn't eat well for

her poor family. Unfortunately we were so poor that we just received money from her without saying that we don't need money, we are O.K. There are many other lucky girls who study four year university courses and do nothing until marriage and have plenty of marriage gift money. But my little one had to be satisfied with a two year college course and has played a major role in supporting our family. When I think of her, I feel as if my heart stopped beating. You'd better be cautious when you consider her as just a poor girl because she is the most precious one for us."

"That is also another problem. When my son marries her, he will have a hard time supporting your family."

"Yes, I see. I myself don't want a son-in-law like such an idiot. I came here to learn what I totally didn't expect. But now that I fully understand, let's take all this back to square one. This marriage holds no good any more, right?"

"We have nothing to regret. The parents with a daughter have more things to lose."

"You are too proud of having a son. I have sons, too. I have three. What the heck is any problem for a girl?"

"Then you are so naive. A young couple has got along for two years and do you think nothing has happened? After the separation, who has things to lose?"

"Is my daughter pregnant? Or is the family registration problematic? What should we worry about? You have too many things to be concerned about. You think my daughter is so timid and incapable that she can't marry another man due to the fact that her marriage was once cancelled. Don't even imagine it! You'd better worry about your own. I'd better go, now!"

Then she stood up and left the scene without looking back again. Feeling as though nothing more could be done, I followed mom, helplessly. There was an absolute silence all the way back home in a taxi.

As soon as she got out of the taxi, she took off her clothes in the middle of the street, as if she were suffering high fever. Although I tried to stop her, she didn't care and almost ripped them when she took them off. My father said nothing while trudging along the road toward my aunt's.

Arriving at my aunt's, mom wept bitterly holding her. I tried to calm her

down but she cried out in sorrow.

"I have nothing to boast of. Did I have a high education? Am I rich? Do I have a comfortable life with a rich husband? I have nothing more than you to be proud of. Then I wanted to show off for you and when you reached the marriageable age I wanted to pick one of the best candidates... Why did you meet a man on your own and we had to face such a terrible scene... I am dying of resentment."

"Mom, I won't marry him at all. I won't. Then you can do whatever you want."

"I am helpless. I am dying because I think you met such a poor mother that you have suffered and suffered to death. My heart is torn apart. Now your poor parents kept you from marrying a man you love... Oh, mom! I regret my mom. If she had supported me to study a little more, I could help my little one have a better life. If her marriage were cancelled, I wouldn't be called her mother. If a mother makes her child suffer and stands in her way, she must not be her mother, but no one. Oh no! Mom, why didn't you help me study at school? You should have supported me to get educated."

She has never regretted the fact that she had little formal education. She said that few got educated back then. But she looked genuinely remorseful for the first time.

I've never felt bad for her lack of education. I've benefited a lot from her. I've just liked her. I've loved her just because she is my mother...

Believing her daughter was a great person, she has felt sorry because she was not able to support me with a strong background behind me.

She has never expressed it to me but because she felt sorry for me, my heart was hurt more.

Then she cried louder, shouting, "I live for you but you say you can't live because of me. What can I do? What can I do for all of this?"

Being overwhelmed, mom and I hugged each other and cried. I thought I wouldn't marry him.

But by the irony of fate, I married him that November, going through all the indignities and sufferings.

After the marriage, my mom and mother-in-law didn't have a lot of chances to meet each other but when they did they always tried to shun each other.

After a while, though, they began to get along very well as if nothing had happened.

Although my mother-in-law strongly opposed our marriage when we married, after some time, she considered me as her own daughter and took care of me sincerely.

But my mom always had a complex in her mind because mother-in-law opposed my marriage. She was feeling guilty all along, thinking that because she didn't have a high education I had to suffer. I ended up understanding her after I gave birth to my first child.

I got pregnant soon after I married.

But the elder brother of my husband didn't have a baby for several years after his marriage, which was a headache to the whole family.

All of us hid my pregnancy to the elder brother and his wife and we had a hard time assessing their mood. Especially mother-in-law was so serious and sensitive that she warned me not to speak about this issue.

As all who were pregnant know, however, it is not the matter of will when it comes to morning-sickness. Furthermore, what about the belly growing? Anyway, time passed and I gave birth to a son the next August, earlier than expected.

When mom visited me, I gave birth coincidentally. She had to stay to take care of me.

I left the hospital three days after the delivery.

As I delivered the baby earlier than the scheduled day and normally we don't prepare seaweed (food good for mother right after the childbirth) early, there was almost nothing to eat when we got back home.

Then, my mother-in-law brought two geuns of beef (1,200 grams) and a small bundle of seaweed to mom.

I didn't know anything while lying in bed with my child. My mom seemed to be dumbfounded when she received them.

The parents-in-law were quite rich and they had waited for a grandson for

so long that just two geons of beef and a little seaweed didn't seem like enough to my mom. She felt mistreated and unsatisfied with them but she said she tried to understand it because the mother-in-law must have felt sorry for the pains of the first daughter-in-law who didn't have children.

We ran out of seaweed a few days later. Mom needed to buy it but didn't know where the market or supermarket was. After she set the table for me, she went out to find one around the apartment complex, only to fail.

Sweating a lot, she came back home crying buckets. Being surprised, I asked her why. She said she cried because she felt embarrassed, crying that she was not smart and she failed to find a butcher. More over, her daughter suffered a lot of pains in giving birth but she was not treated well enough, she regretted.

Then she started telling old stories; that she knew what was going to happen from the very moment when in-laws opposed the marriage. She also complained that they preferred their first daughter-in-law, who they accepted without any objection, to me, and so on, and so on.

In fact I was somewhat heart broken and sorry for that, too. But I didn't want to hear mom speak ill of my in-laws and I felt ashamed a little in front of her. Then I expressed annoyance to her.

Suddenly she stopped crying and called daddy at home as if she realized something.

"Husband! It's me. Our daughter is almost starved to death without proper treatment after she gave birth to a precious son. We can't endure that. Please go to our neighborhood butcher and buy good beef, bones and tails. The best of the best. We must feed my precious daughter well.

That very night, one of my younger brothers drove them here. He bought so much beef and bones that it looked as if he'd brought a whole cow without leaving anything behind. Watching them, mom said one thing, satisfied.

"Right. That's right. My daughter had a son and she deserves this."

From that time on, I had enough steamed beef and beef seaweed soup. Finally I was almost fed up with it.

But a problem happened when mother-in-law visited me to see the child. Serving a bowl of soup with green onion in it, mom said sharply, "Have some. I boiled this with very good beef. You will know how good and nutritional this is. If a woman gives birth, she must eat something like this to recover soon. I told my husband to bring it here. If in-laws don't care, I have to, because if my

child suffers, it is I who is heartbroken and no one else but my child has loss.”

“Well, have you already run out of the beef and seaweed that I bought you?”

“Long ago. Your son ate more beef seaweed soup than my daughter. He has such a large stomach that when he finishes his soup, he serves himself unless I serve him. Here, there seem to be no one who really cares for my daughter. When you visit to see your grandson you care, are you really concerned about your daughter-in-law?”

As the mother-in-law got what mom tried to say, she seemed to feel her pride hurt, saying that she felt sick to the stomach and put her spoon on the table.

Then, mom added something more.

“You might not care for my daughter, but you should have brought her some beef bones to make soup for better breast-feeding for your grandson. Can you imagine how I suffered looking for a butcher to buy beef because you bought her such a small amount of beef that we soon had nothing left to make soup with?”

“If you just go to the base store of any apartment store, you can’t miss the supermarket and butcher. It doesn’t make sense at all!”

“If it is so easy to find them, why didn’t you buy beef bones? Didn’t they sell them to you?”

Without raising tones, they exchanged such nervous talks, which drove me almost crazy. Although I continued to send signs to my mom to stop arguing, she pretended not to see me and went on without reservation.

When in-laws went away, I exploded at her harshly.

“Mom, why did you do that to her? Why did you say such a thing? We bought beef and are now eating it well enough. But then why was your reaction to the in-laws so ignorant and ill-mannered?”

“Yes, I’m ignorant. But despite that, I know how you are treated.”

“Who said I’m not treated well?”

“Even a fool can see it. Considering your mother-in-law’s treatment of you, I can easily get the picture.”

“You are going too far. Why ... Stop saying that.”

“No, I feel distressed and disappointed. You shed a bucket of blood and suffered excruciating pains to give birth to a child. Does it deserve just two geons of beef? You risked your life. Then what they said was that they were

sorry for their first daughter-in-law. Does it mean that they bought her a luxurious house that might be a comfort to her while they gave you just two geons of beef? Does it make sense at all? I myself try to restrain my anger as hard as possible, you know?”

“Gosh, you are just killing me! Please, give me a break! You are making things harder. You really don’t know how painful I could feel for such reaction? You drive me mad, mom.”

“Well, sorry. It’s my fault. Don’t cry. If you cry during the postnatal period you might lose your eyesight. Please, don’t, my child.”

I shouted that I was ashamed of her crude love and heaped bitter reproaches upon her while she just repeated saying “sorry,” drying her tears.



Love of Hedgehog

Old people say, 'With marriage, sons become strangers, while daughters become real daughters to their parents.' 'Daughters can know what moms are only after their marriage.'

After I married and had children, I was finally able to realize little by little how much she made sacrifices for me and how she felt and suffered.

That was the day I gave birth to my first child.

My water broke unexpectedly, but my husband was so busy that he couldn't accompany me. I had to rush to a hospital with my mom who happened to visit me.

Arriving at the hospital, I was immediately taken to a delivery & waiting room, with my mom left behind.

In the waiting room, I changed clothes and lied down on a bed with an intravenous drip and other medical instruments. Then suddenly the pain came to me.

Nurses left the room, leaving some formal and cold words behind that I have to wait calmly and patiently because for every woman it takes time. But for me, it seemed a matter of seconds and I felt I would die soon...

Pains came regularly. Without them, I felt totally normal but when they started I felt such a pain of death that I almost couldn't breathe. However, I desperately tolerated them, thinking every mother has to go through them to bring life into the world. But I couldn't help crying, and kept saying "mom, mom" without knowing it myself.

Feeling such unbearable pains, the word 'mom' came to my mind unconsciously. Thinking that my mom also went through all this like me, I more earnestly kept shouting 'mom'.

Then, I heard a familiar voice outside of the waiting room.

"Ma'am, no one can enter this room except mothers-in-labor."

“I’ll just take a quick look at my daughter. I just want to ask her if she is O.K., please...”

“She is O.K. You know that since you experienced it, don’t you?”

“That’s why I want to see her. I know what a hard time she is going through right now. She must be crying and want to see her mom. I want to hold her hand once, just a second and that’s it. Please let me go in!”

“Sorry but you can’t. Please, go out, ma’am.”

“There is no law like this. I came with my daughter together and I was just left behind without getting any explanation... I believe that as a mother I have to tell her this, ‘You will become a real woman by giving birth.’ I prepared these words for this very moment and you say I am not allowed...”

“You can say that when you meet her after the delivery. Go out anyway, please.”

I cried and cried at the waiting room, listening to mom arguing with a nurse. I wanted to see her. I desperately wanted her to hold my hands.

Then mom seemed to be forced out and I heard her urgently shouting, “My baby, Hyejung, I’m here, right outside. Don’t worry about anything. Please, give a safe and easy birth, my daughter!”

Inside the room, I shed tears listening to her and I tried hard to tolerate all this, crying ‘mom, mom’.

It took 14 hours. When I came out of the delivery room at last, mom cried buckets, holding me tight. I truly promised her that I would become a good daughter from then on, saying that I could understand her after going through all that.

That promise was broken in less than a day. I said, “You drive me crazy” again and again.

Two years later, I had another child, this time a daughter.

For the second child, it was less hard and I felt less worried as I had already experienced it before. I also got even thrilled this time because I wanted a daughter so much and everyone said it would be a daughter. I was excited in my heart to see her sooner.

After the birth, however, the doctor said, “Wow, look at her head!” Well, the first words must be ‘Congratulations! Now you got a pretty princess’ or something like that? But ‘Look at her head!’?

I had to get the picture then... I was too happy and wildly excited to take a closer look at my baby. I just felt marveled at the baby itself, shown to me by a nurse. Well, frankly most newborn babies look the same, I believe, somewhat red and so on... Can we determine which one is pretty and which one is not? But probably old people know that at a single glance.

When I came back home, released from hospital, mom had waited for me, cleaning the house and preparing seaweed soup for me. When I rang the doorbell, mom welcomed me with tearful eyes.

“How hard and painful! Well done.”

I gave a little smile and handed my baby over to her. She held her carefully and looked at her face. She said nothing. Then I asked.

“Mom, isn’t she pretty?”

“She has a pretty big head.”

She handed her over to me back promptly and went to the kitchen. According to my husband, mom said this to him where I couldn’t hear them.

“The baby looks very ugly. I’m very worried about that.”

Then, he laughed loud and said,

“Don’t worry, mother. I will offer her an extreme makeover later.”

A few days later, the in-laws came to see her. My mom, however, wouldn’t bring her from her room, saying she was sleeping and then again she didn’t seem to be in good condition, and so on.

Finally in-laws tried to enter her room to see her sleeping. Then mom seemed to give up and brought her out. She passed the baby over to in-laws. She said, looking elsewhere.

“This isn’t all. Such babies get pretty as they grow old.”

She thought she felt so sorry for the ugly granddaughter that she made her bitter efforts not to show her to in-laws.

In-laws called her ‘ugly, ugly’ looking at her with laughs. But I did not feel bad at all. To my eyes, she looked very pretty. Therefore, I never thought about the possibility that she could actually be such an ugly girl.

For me the real problem happened later.

When I went out with her I’ve never heard that my daughter was pretty, not once.

What I always heard was that she had ‘a pretty head’ and she was ‘cute’, which is a common euphemism for an ugly child. Moreover, whoever saw her

said that such a girl would be pretty as she grows older.

I couldn't understand that. To me she looked very pretty. She had sparkling eyes, thick eyebrows as if they were drawn by an artist, her nose with two holes though a little flat, her lips that anyone would like to kiss... What would possibly be the problem? She was so beautiful that I absolutely didn't understand why others said that.

I was determined!

'O.K. Though everyone else calls my precious baby a Chinese quince, I will raise her as if she were Chundo peach.' Actually I brought her up with much care and love as if she were fragile as glasses.

Several years had passed when I visited my mom's house with my children while they had their vacation, Mom was surprised when she saw her.

"Look, do you remember what I said? The girls like her become pretty as they grow. Oh, she is pretty now. As a baby, I thought she must become a scholar studying all day long just inside her house when she becomes an adult."

She said so crudely with my husband next to her that I had to stop her immediately.

"Mom..."

"It's like a black hen laying white eggs. She had a huge head like a balloon when she was born... Well, well, well... She is much prettier than that.

"Please, stop. She might hear you."

"But, frankly speaking..."

"Is there anything else?"

"Son, can I be frank with you?"

"Sure."

"It will take still more time for her to look normal"

Mom is so frank that there are problems sometimes.

But what's strange is that my daughter looks exactly like me.

There was a mother of a child at the same kindergarten as my daughter's. She has never seen me before, but when she happened to see me at a supermarket she mentioned the name of my daughter to me. I said I was her mother and she burst out laughing, saying we resembled very much each other.

I was once surprised when I saw her playing because we really look so much alike. Everyone says I and mother were cast from the same mold. But my mom

was the only one who opposed it.

“You didn’t look like her when you were young. You were really pretty, with sparkling eyes and snow-white skin... You were so pretty that no one can say you and your daughter look alike.”

“Think twice. I myself can realize that we look alike... Or did I also hear when I was little that such girls as me would be pretty when they grow up? No, believe me! You were genuinely pretty.”

Well, is it really true?

When others say that my daughter is not pretty, she is the prettiest girl to me. And so was I to her?

“But mom, let’s make one thing clear. In fact, my daughter is a lot prettier than yours.”



The things that I would like to do for mom.

Handing new banknotes of one million won over to mom's hands.
Saying, 'Don't worry. I'm on your side,' when she has troubles.
Making a trip for just the two of us.
Finding truly good dishes at famous restaurants for mom who thinks the food she made at home is most delicious.
Helping her find a boy friend, either with his back bent or with half-bald grey hair or whoever, to maintain a healthy life, like hiking a mountain holding hands together.
Saying I'm happy now to mom who thinks that I have a proper job as a writer.
Saying that I thank you just because you are my mom who always feels sorry for me for her lack of education and lack of support as a strong background.
Reading the Bible clearly to mom who doesn't read well.
Setting the birthday table with seaweed soup I make instead of just giving an envelope of money on her birthday.
Holding her from behind and smelling her.
Saying, "thank you because you had me."
Always smiling at her.
Pretending to act like a child sometimes to allow her to nag me.
Making a surprise visit to her sometimes and sleeping at mom's house with her.
Grumbling over food without Kimchi made by her.
Going to church together to pray.
Saying to her, "I love you, I sincerely love you."

My Mom's Name Is...

My name is Ko, Hyejung. I'm satisfied with my name. There is no special reason to complain about it. My name has a special story related to mom. We had a lot of daughters in my family history. My family is the only exception with one daughter and three sons. All the other relatives have more daughters than sons. I also had an elder sister but she died of an illness when she was seven.

When I was born, my relatives had a lot of daughters. Far more than usual and I myself was the second daughter in my family.

The elder brother of my father made face when he heard of news of another girl. When asked to make a name for me, he named me 'Yeun Mi'; 'Yeun' because I was born in Yeun month (leap month) and 'Mi', 'beautiful' in Chinese character just because I was a girl. It was a kind of random name without any special care.

Back then, under the extended family system, my parents lived with their parents and elder brothers. They, therefore, had to tolerate many things, hiding their true feelings.

My mom, however, really didn't like the name.

Even though she had another girl, she couldn't endure the name for her pretty daughter like a moon. She was not able to express what was in her mind and she felt offended. She didn't call her girl 'Yeunmi', a name listed in the family register, but just 'my puppy.'

When I started crawling about, mom worked at a neighbors to make money. There was a famous person who would make names in Jeoungeup. We had to pay 5,000 won to make a new name. Mom worked hard to make 5,000 won and finally she got a new name, 'Ko, Hyejung', for me.

But she couldn't dare to call the new name in front of her in-laws. She called

me 'Hyejung' not in their presence, but behind them secretly. Then being satisfied, she patted my hip.

Later my family was separated from the large family. Then mom listed my new name in the family register. From then on, she asked others never to call me 'Yeunmi', introducing my new name.

Back then, it was not as hard as it is now to change a name listed in the family register.

Later, when I grew, I said she did a great job. She said with laugh, "A person should have a good name. Man deserves a name equal to his life. Well, if you made a bowl with gold from a gold piss pot and put some snacks in it, no one would call it a gold snack bowl. Whatever the material it is made of, once it is called 'piss pot', then its name never changes. That's why a name is very important."

Listening to her, it made quite a lot of sense. Anyway, I always thank mom for the name.

There was another episode that shocked mom, who was obsessed with names. In 1990, I started working for MBC.

It was literally an event in my town. They didn't know exactly what I did but the fact I worked for a broadcasting company itself was a surprise and everyone in town envied my parents for such a daughter.

When I first entered the company, I had to fill in a kind of form asking about my home environment; name of my parents, family members, home address, education background, and so on.

My colleagues kind of teased me because the name of my mom was not ordinary. Her name was different and rustic even to me.

Her name is 'No Jinyae.'

Though I felt ashamed, I couldn't write a fake name for her. Furthermore, it was not really an embarrassing or discouraging thing.

A few weeks later, I went back home. My family asked me about what was going on at the broadcasting company. My brothers were curious about the scandals and their truth and my dad asked me whether I saw Che Bulam and Kim Hyeja, the most famous actor and actress back then, while my mom worried about how hard my work was. I answered as much as I knew and they

were all excited.

Then I added one thing, which caused a problem.

“I was embarrassed to death because of you, mom.”

“Why?”

“Your name! Why do you have such a different name? The names of other moms are Bokhee, Sunwha... or such names. But your name, No Jinyae, I was really ashamed of it”

For me, it was not a serious talk, just kidding.

Since it was my rare visit home, I met my friends and hung out for many hours. I came back home very late at night.

Mom woke me up early next morning.

“Why?”

“Hurry! You have to go to Seoul soon.”

“...”

“You have something to do there.”

“What...?”

“You said you were ashamed of my name? Rush to your company and find the paper. Then fix my name.”

“Why, out of the blue?”

“Daughter, you know what’s going on in a broadcasting company. When the company knows a thing, so does everyone. If people there know my ugly and rustic name, it would be a shame to you for ever. So please, hurry so that you can fix it before anyone can see it.”

“Well, that’s O.K.”

“No, it isn’t. Let’s not make things regrettable over and over again. I made a new good name.”

“What is it?”

“No, Ji, Ye”

“No Jiye?”

“I slept on it very carefully. This name was the easiest one to fix with. Go to the company and find the paper. Then, erase ‘ㄴ’ of 진(Jin) with your spit. It will be easily and nicely done. Don’t you think so?”

I couldn’t help but laughing. Waking up in the middle of night, I giggled with bedclothes rolled over me. She tried to persuade me to go to Seoul as soon as possible while I said O.K.

It was such a funny happening that I thought ‘she was kind of a comedian.’ But with time, one day I realized it was not funny at all, rather I was almost choked with grief, bringing back the memory.

I went out with my friends without much care about her words. But she was so sorry for me that she mulled over it again and again and ended up trying to change her name.

She must have sweated it out when she came up with an elegant name that can easily be replaced with the name already written on the paper.

Thinking of her painstaking efforts, my childish behavior was regrettable.

But then I didn’t go to the company to fix her name. I was a bit sorry for her efforts but I was right. It was not that kind of matter.

Her new fake name, No Jiye, however, didn’t disappear in vain. Without our knowing it, the name played an active role here and there.

In the countryside promoters of medical appliances and drug peddlers frequently come and go.

When mom went there with some of her neighbors and had to apply or wait for something, she wrote her fake name. She always used that name, No Jeye, except when the comparison to that of the name listed in the register is required.

When I heard her say ‘No Jiye’ in reserving something on the phone, I was surprised and asked her why.

She said seriously, “Shh, all the neighbors say it is gorgeous. Don’t say anything about it. It doesn’t take a penny, does it? How wonderful! Pretty name makes one pretty, don’t you think?”

As she felt it was funny, she started grinning, reading my face. So did I, following her.

“You are just killing me, aren’t you?”

But I liked her very much.

My siblings used that name when we teased her.

“Mrs. No Jiye, You have to deserve your name, don’t you? What do you think, Mrs. No Jiye?”

Then, she grinned naively at us. I want to see her grin again so badly.

Mom's Sentiment

About 10 years ago, I was a writer for a very popular program. I started as a comedy writer.

At MBC, I wrote scripts for 'TV Life Drama', 'Sunday, Sunday Night' where I created a popular phrase 'Yes! I determined.' Later, at KBS, I wrote for 'People at Mrs. Geumchon's', a drama series describing the stories of country town people.

I became somewhat famous as a popular young writer. I also earned money and did some good things with my money for mom. My friends and relatives were proud of me.

Mom, however, didn't say anything about my works. All the others said, 'It was funny' or 'I enjoyed it', whether it was true or just an ostensible compliment.

When I called her asking if it was good, she answered, 'Yes' and nothing more.

Meanwhile, during the vacation, I went home and happened to watch one of my programs. Usually in a small town, at night after dinner time, town people come by one and twos together. In my town, my house normally became a place to get together. That day as usual a few town people came there and gathered around the TV set to see the drama I wrote.

As I tried to go to another room, feeling a little bit uneasy, one of them asked me, "Why does your family hate to see this drama? Your mom has never seen it. Neither have you?"

"Well, I already know the whole story as I wrote it."

I shuffled off and asked them if my mom really didn't watch the drama.

They said she has never watched it.

Forced by them, I asked mom why she didn't when she came to the room. Without a word, mom watched the tip of her feet leaning against the wall. Suddenly turning around to the wall, she started sobbing bitterly.

Looking at my helpless face, she grumbled with tears as a five-year-old child does.

“I don’t watch what you wrote. Never.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want to. Not a little.”

“Why? Why don’t you? Why don’t you want to?”

“Others... Others enjoyed and laughed watching it. I feel very hurt when I watch what you wrote. I can imagine how hard you spent sleepless nights with lots of thoughts and pains. As I feel also the same pains. I can’t. I don’t want to. Never.”

That’s what she felt. That’s who my mom is. While all others laughed watching it, the laughs hurt her.

That’s why she couldn’t see my dramas and just listed to the sound while pretending to do some chores outside the room. At the end of the drama, she would come to the room only to find my name on the credits.

I tried to dissuade her saying I was happy to do my work and it was not that painstaking. She told me not to say so. She felt it nonsense, arguing that even writing a letter takes a lot of effort and then writing that long and funny story must take far more time and sweat.

It is only mom that cares and thinks of me, which made me cry.

After marriage I wrote many dramas. My mother-in-law called to encourage me every time, saying, “It was wonderful. Good job.” My mom, however, has never called me like that.

I feel sad. Does she still not watch what I made...?

Mom was once offered the chance to appear in a TV drama. It became a legend to be handed down to our next generation because she turned it down and secured her pride.

It was March, 1996, when I was writing a script for the ‘People at Mrs. Geumchon’s.

I had to have a housewarming after the marriage, but I delayed it a few times because I was pregnant then with a so-called ‘honeymoon baby’. But at a certain point I couldn’t postpone it anymore and set the date.

It was almost impossible for me as a beginner housewife to prepare food for our drama team of more than 20, so naturally I sent an S.O.S signal to mom.

She came to the party date with all the seasonings and ingredients and with my aunt who was kind of an assistant. As my aunt thought of me as her own

daughter, she was happy to help me. They were almost like best friends and prepared various kinds of food consulting together.

They decided not to choose meat dishes as main ones because meat is very common these days. They selected seafood dishes to show the Seoulites what the food of Jeolla province really is: pot of seafood, raw fish, steamed shrimps and seasoned common octopus with some side dishes for lunch.

As we lived near Yeoi-do, our staff visited us during lunch time.

My mom and aunt welcomed them very gently at first.

While all of them sat at the table and started eating the food they had prepared, mom and aunt seemed to be anxious, wondering if the food was salty or if they would like it.

All the visitors ate well with compliments about the food. But to mom and aunt, they were not satisfied at all.

At a housewarming, who could eat and suck crabs well with two bare hands and who could eat Kimchi the Jeolla way, in which Kimchi is served whole, not cut by a knife because Jeolla people say it is not delicious when Kimchi is cut by a steel knife so it must be ripped by bare hands.

Mom and aunt were displeased with what they were eating. A senior of our staff placed his spoon on the table with a little bit of rice left in his bowl. He said, "I'm full. Thank you."

Finally mom and aunt seemed not to tolerate any more. Mom sat next to the senior without thinking of saving face at all. And she poured water into his rice bowl.

"Oh, come on. You can't finish your meal with just a spoonful of rice left! You can drink it with water. What is this spoonful of rice for, a dog or a beggar? Just finish this valuable meal, won't you!"

It was familiar to the senior as his hometown is Jeonju, Jeolla Province. He said, "Yes, yes" with laughs. Encouraged by mom, my aunt suddenly sat among the staff and burst out with what she wanted to say to them.

"All of you really don't know how to eat deliciously. Take this and crunch it with your teeth and then..."

She even demonstrated it. With a dialect, she introduced them each kind of food and how to eat it. She also added some more rice to their bowls.

Mom, sitting next to the senior, ripped Kimchi and placed it on his spoon.

Licking her fingers with which she had just ripped Kimchi, she ripped Kimchi again to serve others.

“This is exactly how to eat Kimchi. If it is cut by a knife, then it loses its genuine taste.”

Licking her fingers again and again, she served one after another.

The room was filled with laughs and joy. Now mom and aunt didn't have a hard time in serving and advising them even with some jokes.

I sent mom and aunt silent signs to stop. They were so simple-hearted that they went to the kitchen soon holding hands together.

The senior was so pleased with their affection and kindness that he asked me this.

“Ms. Ko. How about offering them to appear in our drama, ‘People at Mrs. Geumchon’s’? Isn't it a good idea? The characters of the drama are exactly what your mom and aunt are. They don't have to act. They have the same image as our mothers and country towns. Ma'am, what do you think about that?”

With that joke, all of them made explosive laughs agreeing with the opinion. Mom and aunt came back, this time also holding hands together and said.

“Well...”

We stopped talking and looked at them. Mom and aunt said with very serious looks.

“Will we get paid?”

Another round of laughs. The senior said looking at them.

“Of course.”

Then turning to PD Lee, he asked.

“How much it will be for a normal cast?”

Lee was delighted and helped the scene.

“In the case of the normal cast, it is too cheap for her. It will be about 100,000 won a day for a special cast.”

“Is it? If you attend four times a month, it will be 800,000 won for both of you, 400,000 for each. Isn't it good for some spending money? Please, join us.”

From his serious tone, mom and aunt exchanged looks and said they needed to talk, going back to the kitchen.

That was started with a joke but to mom and aunt it became a very serious

issue now, even with money at stake.

As all of us except mom and aunt knew that it was just a joke, we couldn't help but laugh for their serious behavior.

Though I was among those laughing, I concerned myself about mom and aunt while they took it very seriously. I followed them to the kitchen. Listening to them, they were really serious.

The others in the room were busily talking and already changing the topic. My aunt interrupted them, this time alone.

“Well...”

“Please, go ahead.”

“We are almost illiterate... What can we do, though?”

It got another big laugh. But the senior answered her with the same seriousness.

“That's got nothing to do with it. Both of you will just have to wash lettuce at the riverside and that's enough. The drama, 'People at Mrs. Geumchon's,' is the story of country town people. Therefore, the scene of you washing lettuce will make a perfect picture.”

“Yeah, I got it...”

She went back to the kitchen again and we had to try very hard to contain ourselves from laughing.

I felt annoyed. Why couldn't mom and aunt accept that simple thing as a joke? As soon as we had almost forgotten the topic, they showed up and reminded us of it. Before many others, I couldn't do this or that, but mom and aunt were still having a heated debate about 100,000 won, lettuce, allowance, and so on ...

While talking with others, all my attention was focused on mom and aunt. As if responding to me, they appeared again and dealt one final blow; while we were talking about other topics, they came close to us dauntlessly holding their hands more tightly, like twins.

“Well...”

“Aunt, what on earth is 'well' again?”

“We have to say this...”

“Yes, please go ahead. Feel free to say anything,” said my senior.

“Well, Sir, how many kilos of lettuce do we have to wash to earn 100,000won?”

Though she was very serious, all other staff there laughed to death.

Actually they were quite curious about how much they would have to clean since they were almost ignorant and didn't have any special skills but they heard they would get such a huge amount of money by just washing vegetables.

Then mom and aunt were embarrassed about not knowing why others laughed while I just repeated, "Mom, you are killing me. Please."

Realizing that the atmosphere there was weird and I made a face to her, mom seemed to be hurt and said in a determined manner.

"Now, I'd like to make one thing clear here. I won't attend the drama. I can't imagine how much lettuce I would have to wash for that money. I have such a severe backache that I can't do such a hard work. Though 100,000 won is not small money, I have to give it up. Sister, you give it up, too. If I don't do it, would you do it alone?"

"No, as long as you don't, I won't, either. How can I wash such an amount of lettuce alone? I won't."

Then turning back again, they retreated to the kitchen, still holding hands tight together.

Our staff was exhausted from laughing and the word, 'Big hit!' came from here and there. Leaving the place, they all said, 'We wished you joined the drama' out of courtesy.

I just laughed. It seemed useless to explain what was actually happening in detail, but mom still firmly believes that the deal was not struck just because she refused it.

My mom who said she wouldn't watch my drama because it made her think about my pains and agony writing it for those long and painful nights; My mom who would be willing to join a drama if it would help her daughter's work; My mom who will wash even a truck load of lettuce for her daughter... But why did she refuse to appear in it, making the excuse of her backache? She even persuaded her sister not to attend.

Otherwise, I suppose there would have been more problems to deal with...

Before it's too late

Asking a lot.

Playing the baby to mom.

Making a trip only with mom

Going to the sauna only with mom.

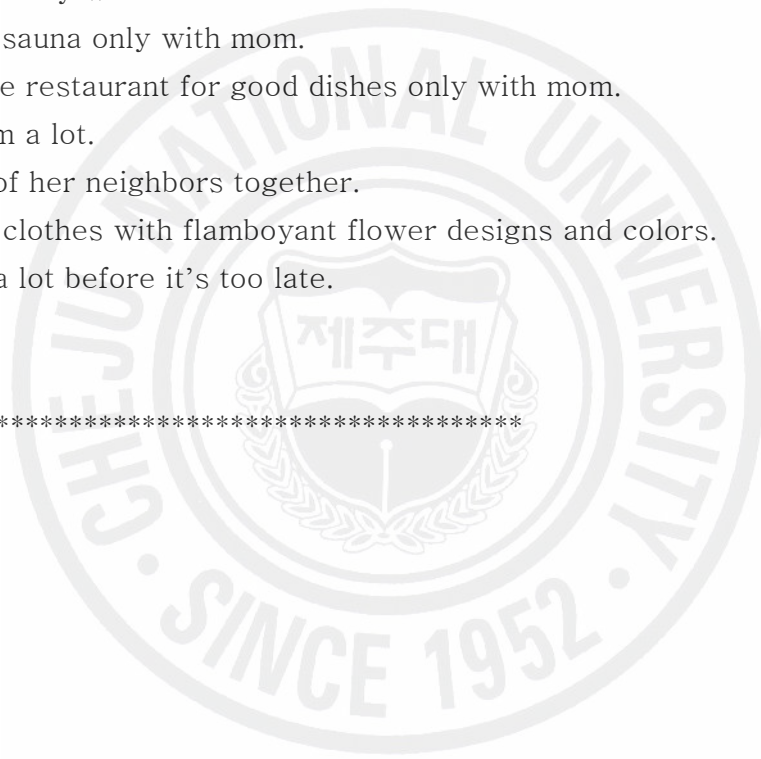
Finding a nice restaurant for good dishes only with mom.

Smelling mom a lot.

Speaking ill of her neighbors together.

Buying mom clothes with flamboyant flower designs and colors.

Holding her a lot before it's too late.



Why Do You Raise Dogs?

My parents used to raise dogs.

My dad raised them because he liked them while he was alive, while for mom they were like friends to comfort her because she had to live alone in a big house. The dogs they raised were big indigenous street dogs, not small and cute pet dogs.

As we always had dogs in our yard, thinking of my parents reminds me of the dogs, too.

Because of the dogs living together with us, we had many episodes. One of them almost made our house charcoal. It was the winter of 1986, 18 years ago. That year we didn't have a dog for the first time, I remember.

Until then, we always had dogs because of my dad. But mom hated dog's smell and their fur flying all over the house. Particularly it was mom who had to feed them and clean up their shit. Then she fiercely protested and urged dad to sell all the dogs we had.

She felt a little bit lonely but it was comfortable and she liked that way.

One day, dad made a trip to Jindo with some of his friends. Jindo is famous for Jindo Arirang and brown seaweed but also for Jindo dogs. When he got there and saw Jindo dogs, he was fascinated with their bravery and intelligence. He desperately wanted to raise them. He persuaded dog seller who insisted Jindo dogs should not go outside Jindo to sell him two Jindo dogs. He put them in a beverage box secretly and brought them to his house.

It was only for a short time to feel happy about raising Jindo dogs. He started worrying about how to persuade mom who hated having a dog and how to tell her that he had paid 500,000 won for the pair, 250,000 for each.

Back then, people could get puppies for free from neighbors when their dogs gave birth. Or they could be bought, but even good breeds of puppies cost only

10,000 or 20,000 won at most. It was almost impossible to imagine that a puppy could be worth a few hundred thousand won or million won like today. Then how did he dare tell her the price. There was no choice but lying.

“Not having the dogs that used to live with us, I felt kind of empty, so while I visited Jindo, I bought a pair.”

“They must have been expensive if they are from Jindo.”

“No, not at all. They were 50,000 won, 25,000 won each.”

“Come one, do you think that’s cheap? Who pays for dogs? You can get them if you ask our neighbors, can’t you?”

“Don’t say that. These are Jindo dogs, not any dogs. When they grow and have baby dogs, there might be even a competition to buy them.”

“I have a hard time just raising my children and you brought them here to me. How...”

Mom felt unpleasant but had to accept them once they came here. She couldn’t take them to Jindo for refund and dad liked them much and without dogs we felt somewhat empty... Anyway she decided to accept them.

He told her the fake price and when he saw her making a fuss he was determined never to tell her the true price until his death.

He named the female one Jinsuk and the male Jinho. Those are common human names, which showed how much he loved them. As they were Jindo dogs, they should have Jin in their names he argued. Mom didn’t miss the chance to interrupt.

“Gee, if you love them a bit more, you will insist on listing their names in our family register. What the heck! I’ve never heard of dog’s names like Jinho or Jinsuk. Just name them Bukgoo or Merry... they are more proper for dogs. Heavens! How about adding your surname?”

“Sure! Now they are Ko Jinho and Ko Jinsuk.”

“Ah, then, your mistress must be a female dog, huh?”

They laughed out loud.

Remembering back, my parents had a great sense of humor.

Well, the dogs became our family members and they were so young that they stayed inside the room with us during the winter. As they were too young, we used a milk bottle for human babies and fed them cheese that was too expensive for us to usually eat.

In spring, they grew fast. Dad told her they were just mongrel dogs but

keeping the secret about the dogs inside him, he knew he must take extraordinary care of them. No one knew except himself.

He didn't want to let Jinho and Jinsuk sleep under the floor like other dogs. He spent most of his emergency money to pay for a customized dog house. Mom complained a lot about the dog house worth 50,000 won, telling him that he wasted money on such a trivial thing. Meanwhile, dad asked her to condone him this time as if he were a little boy, while he thought the dogs deserved the house.

The dog house was located in the middle of our yard. They grew well. He was proud of them, watching them growing up as if he had babies in his late life.

“Jinho, Jinsuk, take care of the house. I'll be back soon.”

Whenever he came home from work, the first ones he tried to find were also Jinho and Jinsuk.

“Jinho! Jinsuk!”

The dogs seemed to know that he loved them. Listening to the sound of his steps or voice, they jumped up and down happily. On weekends, he took them to a playground for training and took care of them as if they were his children. He also fed them with almost the same food as ours. It is easy to imagine how well and slender they grew.

As it was a small town, people used to live with doors open. They could see our dogs when they passed by our house.

At home there were only Jinho and Jinsuk almost all the time.

One day, about a year later, an older man stopped by and played with our dogs with no reason. When mom asked why, he said he liked dogs, had nothing particular to do and just wanted to spend some time with dogs from time to time. She said yes with no doubt. Then he visited home almost everyday, feeding the dogs with some food.

Either was mom generous or fearless...

Some days later, he dropped a hint.

“Is there any chance you would sell your dogs?”

“Oh, no! You can't imagine how much my husband likes them.”

“I've realized that I also like them very much. I eagerly want them, you know?”

“If you go to the market, you can see tons of them. Why do you want ours?”

“I don’t know. I just want them, not others. Please, sell them to me.”

“How much?”

“How much do you want?”

He had the eyes to see good dogs.

Passing by our house accidentally, he realized they were pure-blooded Jindo dogs. Perhaps, he must have watched our dogs over a few days.

Without knowing that, mom responded to him with jokes when he tried to negotiate. Mom just thought they were mongrel dogs from nowhere.

She was asked insistently by him but she wouldn’t sell them because they were her husband’s favorites... Hesitating for a while, she just cast a joke.

“I would sell them if you pay 500,000 won.”

“500,000 won?”

“If you try to negotiate for even 10 won less, I won’t sell.”

“Deal! I will pay that.”

In a moment of bewilderment, she sold them for only 500,000 won.

At first, it seemed to be a windfall. In less than a year, she had earned ten times the original price of 50,000 won that her husband had paid, she thought at first. It was nothing less than a lucrative business. She offered 500,000 won because she wouldn’t sell them. As he said O.K. so easily, she felt delighted, surprised and sorry. Born and raised in a small town, mom was not bold enough to sell such normal dogs for that much money, so she also gave him the dog house, custom-made at an ironworks, with pleasure.

But it was the man who won the windfall. He called someone and a pickup-truck rushed in soon. They loaded the dogs and the dog house into the truck, paid her 500,000 won and started the truck. She suddenly stopped them and said good-bye to the dogs with tears.

She felt sorry for leaving them, remembering the time they had shared together. Patting them, she spoke as if they were humans.

“Don’t feel sorry. It’s your destiny. You can’t live with one owner forever. Stay healthy and live long. Don’t be reduced to a dog-meat soup. Good luck!”

As if struck by a sudden thunderbolt, Jinho and Jinsuk went wild in the truck.

That was the end. They went away to somewhere without seeing dad and our family anymore. Only mom saw them off.

Although mom shed tears sending them off, it was not long before she headed for the market, holding 500,000 won tight in her hands.

Arriving home after school, we found our house empty. As mom was not there, we didn't have anyone to ask about this. Finally the last one of the four siblings came home and we asked each other of what had happened to the dogs. Nobody knew it because it was a one-man crime.

After a while, coming back home, dad called, "Jinho! Jinsuk!," as usual. Silence! No dog house that used to stand firm like an arch of chastity in the middle of the yard.

We were surprised but it couldn't be compared to the surprise of our father.

"Gosh! Where on earth are my Jinho and Jinsuk?"

"We don't know, either... After we came back home from school, they were not here."

"Where's your mom?"

"Well, neither was mom."

"My! They might be stolen! What are you doing? Go find them. Hurry!"

Not knowing the whole house had fallen into a mess, mom had spent the money at the market and came back home with what she had bought. At the doorstep, she heard dad shouting outright.

"Where have you been while there was no one at home?"

Then she was so excited that even his roar sounded charming to her. She answered him with a smiling face.

"Where have I been, you ask? I bought some delicious food and presents for you and our children."

"What the hell? Leaving the empty house behind, you just wandered off... Can't you see a dog thief has stolen our dogs?"

"No. What do you mean by dog thief? I sold them..."

"Sold?"

"Husband, I got an unexpected windfall today. Remember the oldish man I mentioned before. Today he asked me to sell them all of a sudden. I offered an extremely high price because I wouldn't sell them. Yet he didn't even try to negotiate the price I suggested."

"My goodness! What was the price?"

(proudly showing five fingers) "500,000 won!"

"Gee! I'm dying, I'm dying! Go get them! Go!"

"Why? I'm sure I did a very good job, earning a ten fold profit in just a year."

"Didn't you hear me? Go!"

“I don’t know where they live.”

“Give me a break! No, no. Where are the matches?”

“Why the hell are you looking for matches?”

“I will set fire to this house and live alone selling charcoals! I can’t live with such an ignorant wife as you... What are you doing? Get me matches and a hatchet!”

We knew his temper so well that we all cried and tried to stop him. In the middle of that scene, mom said, “Husband, it is widowers who sell charcoal!”

That’s how Jinho and Jinsuk, dad’s treasures, and our family were separated in the end.

Over the next several days, we went here and there to find the dogs with 500,000 won in hands, only to fail.

Dad ended up telling the whole story. Mom felt more annoyed at his lie and tried to rationalize what she had done, arguing that everything began with his to her.

With that money, she bought his winter coat, my pajamas, my brothers’ shoes and pants and so on. She spent a large chunk of the money on herself because she thought it was she who had played the biggest role. For her were cosmetics, fur sleepers for winter and a nylon scarf with beautiful colors. Finally pork and apples for the dinner party. That was the first and the last time she’d gone on such a shopping spree, she said later.

After his death, mom said, with tearful eyes, she could remember only when she had treated him badly, but most of all, she felt sorry for him about the dogs.

I’ve never felt ashamed of mom.

The word, ‘mom,’ always gives us a feeling of warmth and immeasurable value.

Sometimes I get angry when mom does something I can’t understand. Before long, however, I can realize the depth of her love and sometimes find some kind of cute aspect in what she has done. There are many other episodes that always make all our family double up with laughter.

There was another perplexing episode after the dog episode. It was one year ago.

After dad died, mom started raising dogs again because she felt empty alone in her house; not just one dog but a few dogs and last year there were four. I don't remember when, but she started grumbling about the dogs whenever I called her.

"I can't do anything because of them. When there is a tour in my town, I have to worry about feeding them... Who will feed them but me? Although they are animals, I don't feel free to go anywhere when they have no one to feed them. Gosh, they are not just dogs but my seniors."

What can I say to her? I just answer her without much care.

"Just sell them. Why should they be your headache?"

"But I would feel empty without them."

"Oh, my! Why empty? After you sell dogs, you can learn something new or hang out together with your friends, making an easy life, mom."

"Hum? No, I think I need them."

A few days later, mom, who frequently changed her mind called me again.

She lowered her voice carefully as if the dogs would hear her.

"Daughter, I decided to sell the dogs."

"Good for you."

"Dog sellers were excited by them. Of course. Our dogs were well fed with fish bone soup mixed with hulled millet instead of livestock feed. They played out in the yard. They must be very tasty."

"Will you sell them to a dog meat restaurant?"

"It's their destiny. Or do you think they deserve more than that?"

"But... I feel sorry."

"They face terrible fate, but otherwise, I won't live long taking care of them."

"Yeah, well, mom, you made the right decision."

Several days passed. I had totally forgotten about it when she called me one night. I couldn't hear her speak, only weep.

"Hello? Who the hell is this?"

"Me, it's me. Your mom..."

"Mom, what's wrong? Why are you crying?"

"I sold them today."

"Oh, that's why you feel so sorry."

"But, there is more than that..."

“Then what?”

“If I had sold all of them, my house would have looked really empty. So I sold only two of them, leaving one behind. I got 200,000 won each. But the best of them... Oh, gosh...” She sobbed.

“Mom, stop crying and tell me. What happened to the best dog?”

“Your husband came to my mind suddenly. I haven’t done any particular things for him so far... Then I heard others say that such a dog as my best dog can be good medicine... These days, dogs are also imported from China, but I raised mine by myself.”

“My husband, Song, doesn’t eat dog meat.”

“But he can drink its extract, can’t he? That’s why I took my best dog there boldly, for Song. Then... Heuk, heuk, heuk...”

“Did the dog resist following you?”

“No, I lured it with dried filefish to a certain place and from there the owner of the dog meat restaurant took it.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“After the dog was taken and slaughtered, we realized that it had five little puppies inside its womb. Heuk, heuk, heuk...”

Suddenly I felt the bitter feeling with tears.

When she took the dog to such a place, it must have hurt her, but when she knew it was pregnant, the news must have been like a bolt from the blue sky to her.

Though I couldn’t tolerate shedding tears, I had to comfort her.

“Mom, there is nothing we can do now. Just forget it.”

“How can I forget it when it’s a matter of 250,000 won?”

“What 250,000 won?”

“A puppy costs at least 50,000 won these days. If I had waited for just a few months, I could have had the dog extract as well as the puppies... Just a few more months... What a pity!”

She was too frank for me to say any more words.

Tears of sorrow went away and once again my eyes were wet from laughing too much.

Listening to me laughing, she followed and said,

“You feel the same as me, don’t you? Nothing we can do. Now I tell you why I called you. Tomorrow some boxes of the dog extract will arrive there. Serve

them to your husband with much care and love. You can't compare it with normal ones. This was from six dogs."

That night, my husband and I laughed a lot talking about that. The extract box really arrived the next day. I felt so embarrassed with them that I couldn't even touch them. But my husband stored them in the refrigerator and drank one at every meal.

I said to him, "You must be happy that you married me? What other mother-in-law can get her son-in-law a dog extract from six dogs at once?"

"Do you know mother-in-laws bring good medicine not for their son-in-laws but for their daughters?" husband said.

Is it true?



Mom Made Her Son-in-Law Cry!

My husband is quite good. When he married me, he belonged to a group of Kingca. As he focused on studying, I worried that he might become narrow-minded, but he respected me so much that we didn't suffer any particular troubles. He ran a good business and made quite a lot of money.

Three years ago, however, he went bankrupt and failed in his business with piles of debt.

Until now, he always studied as much as he wanted and did whatever he intended, leading a very proud life. Then one day he lost almost everything. He was totally confused, not knowing what to do next.

Watching him wandering, I worried if he would end up being practically dead. I asked him what he wanted to do most. I heard an unexpected answer from him.

"I want to study. I feel happiest when I study. I'm not well suited to being a businessman, but my mom and elder brother almost forced me to start a business."

"What do you want to study if you start now?"

"Patent law. I want to be a patent lawyer."

I found it burdensome actually.

We had student children and a lot of debt and he wanted to study. That was perfect timing. Money would never be enough at this time although we would make a lot, and husband said he wanted to study. He was almost 40. I felt a headache. What can we do with that?

When my husband said that, many around me advised me to divorce him. Otherwise, I would be hounded by his creditors.

But I remember when we recited the marriage vows; either when we are sick or when we have hard times, we will be together forever. If a hard time came and I divorced him and lived away from him, it would be absurd. Keeping this in mind, I tried hard to tolerate it. Then again, when he said he would study and he hoped I would support him and our family financially, I almost

burst into tears.

But I made a decision.

When time passes, and he turns 60 or 70 and has some free time looking back on his life some day, he might regret something he really wanted to do but couldn't because of his children and wife. I didn't want him to experience that regret.

Furthermore, if he were not given hope now, he might give up on his life. I sat down with my husband and talked.

“O.K. Begin your study, but you have to pass it. I will take the responsibility of the family and you focus on your studies.”

That's how he started his study. He passed the first test in 2003 and now he is preparing for the second one.

Upon his decision, my mom cried a lot.

“If a woman is smart, she will be ill-fated. A woman must live her life with the money earned by her husband if she wants a comfortable life, whether it is one million or two million won. As he is now almost 40, how does he dare study again? There is always a proper time to study for everyone. You have to work to death to support his study. What's in your mind now?”

“Mom, if it's my fate, I must accept it. As long as he wants that, it's beyond me.”

“Always easier said than done. You will need more money when your children grow up... Though Song makes at least one million won a month, it won't be enough. Then, your husband will need money for education. Do you think you can take charge?”

“No other choice, you know.”

“Gosh, such an idiot! You are looking for unnecessary hardships on purpose. If your husband tells you such things, you have to look incapable; ‘I don't know. If you don't make money, we will die altogether.’ That can encourage men to work. Just make a scene. If not, it's only you who suffer. You drive me crazy. I don't know. No.”

As she said, the next three years were very difficult. I worked as hard as possible but I didn't have anyone to tell of my painstaking life. I was heard to marry a great man and have a very happy and rich life. I was too proud of

myself to tell that I lived a miserable life because my husband's company went bankrupt. Over the next three years after his bankruptcy, I lived such a seemingly elegant life, as if nothing had happened. Nobody would know how hard and desperate my struggle was.

My mom was the main backbone for me to remain strong and steady without complaining at all.

At first, it was mom who cried and hurt me the most but, after he started his study, it was also mom who supported me with all the possible resources. She sent not only side dishes but also seasonal fruits by home-delivery service and sometimes even restoratives for my husband. She always called me and encouraged me. She said, "Once you are determined, do it with pleasure. Be careful not to express any complaint to him." Mom knew me so well that she always wanted me to be brave and proud.

Regardless of others' opinions, once we started it, I supported him with clenched teeth, to mitigate as much pain as possible. She was the only one who supported me in any situation forever.

I know her.

While I said, "It's hard. Very hard," mom must have shed bloody tears. Trying to cheer me, she said, "Put up with the hardships as everything will be O.K. after a certain period. But then she must have felt unbearable pains. I knew all that.

I pretended not to know how she felt. If I talked to her about that, I wouldn't be able to control my emotion. So might she...

Her help and attention didn't stop there. She was always careful not to discourage my husband. Although she might not like him because I had to suffer so he could study, she never forgot to tell me to keep something in mind: Don't make him daunted.

When we visited some of my relatives, I felt bad as mom took too much care of him.

He knew so well about her love that he tried hard to become her real son. Actually, when his business was going well, his relation with mom was not as good as now. It was just an in-law relation. But now they are very close, almost a family.

At mom's house, he was a great eater. Seeing him eating, mom patted his butt, repeating with satisfaction, "My, my son-in-law has a heavy appetite.

Well done. Very good.”

Then, why did my husband end up crying?

That day, we visited mom’s house. After we loaded a lot of side dishes and other food that mom had made in our car, we headed for our home. While driving home, he handed something to me.

“What is this?”

It was seventy thousand won in multi-folded bills.

Before we left, she gave it to him with her eyes wet.

“You must have a hard time studying at your age and I guess you will suffer more when you ask my daughter for some allowance, won’t you? With this money, you will buy some cigarettes. I wanted to give you 100,000 won but I was not able to fill it up though I tried hard. Sorry.”

Mom didn’t have any source of income, back then. She lived on the little money we sent for her and that money was not enough for her living...

I was so angry that I cried at him; “Why did you take it? Were you happy when you took all the money she had in her hand at that time?”

I shouted what came to my mind without filtering.

Not responding to any of my cries and just driving the car, he suddenly stopped the car at the shoulder of the road and started sobbing with his hands covering his face.

He said he didn’t know how much she loved him and he had been concerned that she resented him for being too selfish. Therefore, he tried to refuse her money at first but he accepted it because he appreciated her, her genuine love for him as her own son. My husband, a big guy like a bear, cried like a child.

When I got home, I called her.

Instead of expressing my gratitude kindly, I once again grumbled, “Why did you do that?” Mom said to me with smile, “Listen. I heard that it’s very hard to become a patent lawyer. Anyway it ends with ‘Sa’ (usually the titles of the most prosperous jobs end with ‘Sa’ in Korean; for example, the title of doctor, lawyer, C.P.A., prosecutor, ...). If he had been a patent lawyer when you married, you would have prepared three keys (for a nice apartment, a new car, ...). Then we would have spent all we had, for sure. But as it is now that he made a decision to do that. What a relief! We need to give him all our support.”

That's my mom! She can make us laugh as well as cry. And with just 70,000 won she succeeded in making her son-in-law her own son.



Memorial Service Day or Birthday?

Five years have passed since my father died. Diagnosed with cholangiocarcinoma, a very rare cancer, he remained helpless with few treatment options and passed away three years later.

As he was the last son with 7 siblings of a rich family, he didn't suffer much when he was young. He, however, hated studying. While he said he went to school, he used to go to a back hill and enjoy things to eat that he ordered his servant to steal.

When his mother found out and chased him, he was such a troublesome child that he even threw a snake at her. He hated going to school so much that he ended up being a drop-out when he was in junior-high school.

Such a man married one of the gentlest women in the town. At first, our parents lived with the family-in-law but a few years they moved out. As he learned how to drive buses and trucks while in the military, he got a job as a bus driver for a while. He battered mom once in a while but they lived a happy married life and he was a perfect father to us.

Remembering back to the days when I was young, my family always laughed together while eating meals. Mom and dad didn't try to save money on food, saying that they were happiest when they saw us eat well and grow up healthy. When they steamed potatoes, they did a whole basket of them. When they cooked pan-fried food, it was always in a big tray. Moreover, when they bought fruit, they bought a big box and put them in a big red bucket. Then they poured water in the bucket so that we could easily eat one or two whenever we passed by.

We were not very rich but thanks to my parents, unlike others, I used to wear expensive red shoes, though not leather, and my lunch box was always filled with good food. Yogurt started coming out at the market then, but we drank it everyday by delivery service.

When we called him, shouting 'daddy', he answered back to us very kindly,

saying 'Uh-y'.

He suddenly passed away five years ago and mom missed him so much and was so agonized that we felt a lot of pain watching her. I was sad because dad died but also I was sad because she must sleep alone, all alone, at night. Sometimes I woke up in the middle of the night and wept thinking of how she felt alone.

I should have visited mom more frequently after his death, but I didn't. I hated visiting mom's house because dad's traces were felt everywhere. It was almost as if he were standing in the front yard. That's why I hardly went home.

How did mom feel, while even I suffered so? They lived together over the last 35 years...

Five years from then, mom and my brothers became a little numb. On every memorial service day for dad, we couldn't help crying, but our optimistic and vigorous mom said this.

"You, unlucky one! Good days are about to start for me, but you worked and suffered and died just before they began. Sometimes there's nothing we can do with our will. You were just unfortunate, that's all. I'd like to get all the luck and filial piety from our children on behalf of you. I will tell you everything when we meet someday."

She tried to create such a pleasant atmosphere. But... While she was laughing a lot like that, I knew what was really in her mind.

This year his memorial service day fell on May 7th by the lunar calendar. Every year our whole family went to mom's house for the day, but my family couldn't go this year. It is impossible to go and come back within a day, and the next day was Father's and Mother's Day. If I went there with my children, my parents in-law would stay home alone and that's not good from any perspective.

After consultation, we came to a conclusion, 'we can't make the living parents sorry while holding a memorial service for the dead parents.' I would go alone to mom's house after having dinner with the in-laws and our family all together that day.

I called her and said that I would visit her alone.

On that day, arriving at her house, she was preparing something just for us, not for the memorial service. While she was a Catholic from a long time ago, she

didn't used to prepare the ritual food for the service and the service itself was also very simple: with some memorial food we prayed, bowed and that was all. In terms of food, only some of dad's favorites, vegetables, pan-fried food, fruits, fish and meat were served.

This time, however, we didn't even prepare such simple food.

"Mom, didn't you prepare food for the service?"

"For whom? Let's make it simple."

"But however simple it is, we need some service food at least, don't we?"

"Well, actually I offered some service food so far because your husband came every year. But who eats such food these days? As he didn't come this time, let's cook some simple but delicious food for us."

I didn't quite get the picture and I simply tried to respect her opinion.

At dusk, with other family members gathering from remote places, mom's house was enlivened once again.

They were genuinely our family members. Except dad, we gathered all together and I felt the same as when I was single, watching those who I called my family before my marriage. My brothers also seemed to feel that.

If dad lived now and were here with us, it would be a perfect time as a family.

As others seemed to have the same feeling, we felt gloomy and some of us were moved to tears.

Then, suddenly mom loosened her tongue.

"If your dad didn't die and were here with us now, I would be the happiest... I was happiest while I was raising you. Now as all of you left this place and I'm alone, nothing pleases me any more."

That night, we felt comfortable in such a cozy corner.

Though there was no one watching us, I thought the food was too simple for the service. But mom kept saying there was no problem.

At about ten o'clock, we held the service and strange food was being put on the table.

At my in-laws' house, the appropriate food would have been served, but that day, except for some food like chestnuts, jujube and dried persimmon, all the other food was not quite understandable. She had prepared melon and a pot of croaker soup.

I was surprised and asked her what they were. She said that it was all of dad's favorite foods.

I didn't try to pursue the exact tradition, but how in the world could croaker soup be served for dad's memorial day? Mom said so proudly that we couldn't do anything about the food.

Mom told us if we wanted to pray and bow, we should. We bowed and sat there, thinking about that day's service, which didn't make sense at all to me. He was dead. But 'the pot of croaker soup?'

Mom seemed to feel awkward, too.

"If others saw it, they would think it was food for a birthday," she said laughing.

Then, she turned toward the table as if it were dad.

"Wow, it looks delicious. Husband, help yourself. Although there are special foods for memorial services, but if that's just for the ritual and for bows, what's the point? So instead of such food, I prepared your favorites. I'm sure you understand me, don't you?"

We giggled at what she said.

"Am I right or wrong?"

"You're right. Absolutely right. You are very smart."

"Sure, I am a great speaker. With more education, I would be far more than Kang Keumsil, the famous lawyer."

My goodness, TV had made mom an intelligent woman. How could she have known her...

My Birthday and Mom's Birthday

My family all heads for mom's house in the country when it is her birthday. As the day falls during winter vacation, we are always happy to go there. But we ended up becoming a burden to her.

'You like cash, don't you, mom?' Quite an easy and simple birthday present for a few days of indulgence; we are fed by mom, idling our time away on the hot Ondol floor.

With cash money as her birthday gift, she devotes herself to serving her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren. On her actual birthday, she woke us up and prepared breakfast for all of us, instead of being served. My husband said something about that and I just made little of it.

"She cooks better than me, doesn't she?" Then I didn't even wash the dishes. I was such a lazy one. If mom says, "I'm O.K. It's my joy," I believe it. No, rather, I may want to believe it. Why? Because I didn't want to do the chores.

I'm almost 40 and I think now, looking at mom's bent back; 'I want to set the table for her before she dies, instead of just giving her cash money for her birthday.' Mom has set the birthday table for me over quite a lot of years. For her daughter, wishing her happiness and a healthy life with all her heart.

I love red-bean noodles. When I was little, mom cooked them for me. She prepared them particularly for my birthday. They help one to live long life, according to old people.

But this takes a lot of time and efforts. First we wash red beans and steam them well. Later, steamed red beans are put into a net. We make dough and press it with roller and finally boil them in a big pot.

As my birthday falls in August, it is usually sizzling hot. But under the heat, she cooked it every year for my birthday because I liked it and she wished me a long life. Literally, she cooked it with a bucket of sweat.

I considered it a trivial thing. I should have noticed her bottomless love. An old saying has it that when a daughter marries, she will be a real daughter. After marriage, I could understand her mind bit by bit. ‘

There is another saying that when a husband makes trouble, his wife feels sad but when her children do, her heart melts down, which I have come to understand dimly.

Women learn to know what mom is by going through all sorts of difficulties. I’ve never had the red-bean noodles on my birthday since marriage.

Does it mean that everyone lost interest in my longevity since then? Then, I realized that there is no one except mom, who earnestly cares for my birthday. On my birthday, when there is no one who knows it is my birthday unless I noticed, mom never forgot it and always calls me in the morning. ‘If you eat well on your birthday, you will be fed well all the year round. Eat noodles at least once today for a long life.’

Who else will remember the birthday of a married woman except her mom?” She experienced extreme pains in giving birth of me and I had to try hard to be born. We came up with an idea of how to celebrate birthday.

I don’t remember when I started it but I gave money to mom and called her.

“Mom, you must have had a hard time in giving birth to me. I wired some money. Just cool off and have a drink.”

At first, she was so surprised and deeply moved that she cried a lot. While there may be a daughter who complains about her birthday present, there may be no daughter who wires some money to her mom because she tried hard in delivery.

She boasted to her neighbors over and over again. The next year, she was very happy, telling me who she ate some delicious food with.

I’d like to recommend this to all children:

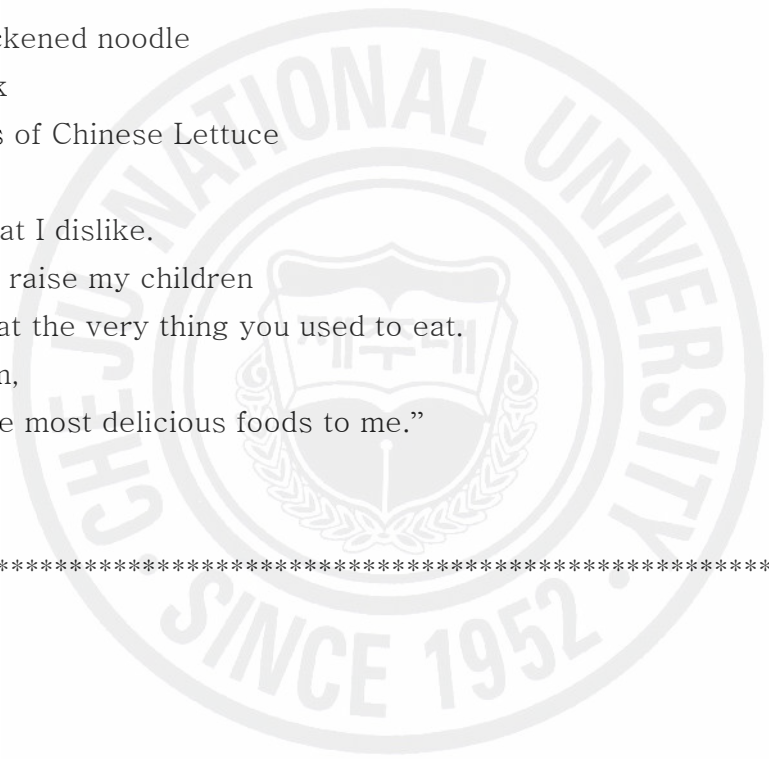
On your birthday, give your parents small presents or money and they will be proud of you and will praise you loudly.

As they get older, they feel energy and encouragement when they have things about their children to praise to others, which their children might not know well.

Things Mom Calls Delicious

Pork fat
The inside part of melons
Stale Coke
Cold and thickened noodle
Chicken neck
Green leaves of Chinese Lettuce

She liked what I dislike.
Mom, when I raise my children
Like you, I eat the very thing you used to eat.
I said to them,
“They are the most delicious foods to me.”



Priest Has No Children

Those who know my mom soon learn that she has a good sense of humor. It's not only because she is very optimistic and positive but also because she has a pure spirit that can sometimes be an ace card up her sleeve.

When she acts as normal and talks about her daily life, others around her laugh their heads off. Then she asks back, "What's the matter?" with her eyes wide open. As if she hadn't intended to be funny, but we couldn't help laughing listening to her.

There was a funny episode when she embarrassed a priest because of me, at the church she would go to.

When I had some problems sometimes, I called mom. I called her because she just came to my mind, not because she always had some answers. It is strange. When we don't have any problems, we totally forget the existence of mom. Still, hardship always reminds us of mom.

When I went to a singing room, I found some lyrics that evoked my sympathy.

Mom, mom, my mom
Why did you have me?

If you had a child, you should have had a good one, otherwise, you should not bear a child.

If I maintain a life, it's not an easy task, but if I die, I'm still young with so many days left.

What a destiny!

Mom, mom, my mom

Why did you bring me in this wild world?

The lyrics were appealing and made me think ardently for a while.

Mom is like air. I don't realize her real value until I face hardships.

In my heyday, I was so arrogant that I took credit for all the achievement I'd

made but when I had trouble, I called mom and showed my resentment to her, asking ‘why did you have me for all these pains.’

How painful might it be to her back then?

Anyway, whenever I’m in trouble I called her to listen to her voice. With my agony, she just heaved a deep sigh. When there was no way to help me, she would go to a fortune teller’.

She wanted to help me with all ways available but she couldn’t come up with any particular solution. Then she would go there to seek a good answer as if trying to grasp at straws.

Mom, however, delivers only the good words from the fortuneteller to encourage me, never even a single unfortunate word. In return, I laugh and ask her carelessly why she did that. But for her, consulting a fortuneteller was never an easy decision.

Mom started going to church 10 years ago after she was a believer in Buddhism for a long time. She hasn’t since consulted a fortuneteller.

When I faced a strong opposition against the in-laws about marriage, however, she felt a shortage of power of prayer and went to a fortuneteller again.

Later, she went to church again to confess that and swear not to do it again. But when I had trouble again, she went there again. The father kindly advised her not to go there again. She briskly said, “Yes, father,” but she always repeated it depending on my situation.

Moreover, she strongly believed that what she did wrong could be condoned as long as she confessed it to the father. Therefore she used to go to see the father on her way home from a fortuneteller’s.

That day she was doing the same thing as usual.

“Well, I committed a sin.”

He asked her outright.

“Did you go to a fortuneteller?”

“... You became a fortuneteller?”

“Agnes, don’t you remember you swore not to go there?”

“I know. I made the promise but I believe the Blessed Mary could understand me because she also had a son, Jesus.”

“You have to keep your promise with the God. I know the matter was related

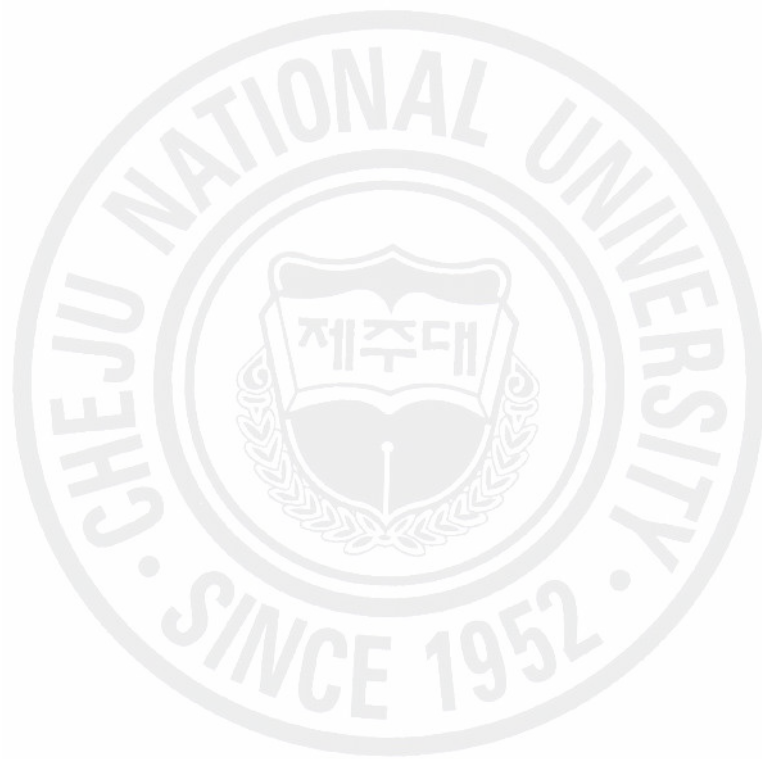
to your

child, but what if you go to the hell, not heaven?

“My, there is nothing more important than children for parents. There must be no parents who are afraid of being sent to the hell when it comes to their children. Father..., Aha, you don’t have children. That’s why you don’t understand how we feel and speak like that. You would speak like that as well if you were wearing the same shoes, I’m sure.”

She complained that he didn’t know what parents feel because he had no children. Then she marched out of the church justifiably. That’s my mom.

How could the father handle such an open, dignified but pure country woman?



Residents, If You Are in 63-Story Building, ...

Mom came to see me in Seoul. While talking about this and that, I asked her what makes her happy these days. She told me a few things, but there was one particular thing for her recently, which was her “63 group” in which she and some friends were all saving 10,000 won per month for one year so they could take a tour to the 63-Story Building.

As I lived near the building and frequently visited there, it didn't seem like a big deal to me actually.

Going to the top of the 63rd floor, however, is really something for the old people in the country. Listening to her small dream about the building, I felt sorry for her inwardly.

Then I suggested that we go there together now that had we talked about that. She was excited like a child, because her plan was advanced by a few months.

When we got there, mom looked up that high building and suddenly she was in a hurry, saying, “Come on, we don't have all day. How can we see all the things in the building today?”

Watching her being excited and lighthearted, I was so happy as well as sorry that I became a very kind and gentle guide to her. The first stop was the Aquarium, followed by the IMAX Movie Theater and lastly the Observatory where we saw all the places in Seoul from the high above.

Then, we went to a restaurant. While eating, she was too excited to enjoy lunch. She said that she wanted to continue the tour because eating is an every day thing but this was a rare chance and there were a lot more things remaining to see. I explained to her we've seen all we could see there. Her face, however, was full of doubts. But it was true that there was nothing more other than the three things we'd already visited.

When we were about to leave the place, she repeated the question she had asked. She thought it didn't make sense because the building was 63 floors, but there were only three things to see. I told her all the other spaces were for offices.

As I answered her seriously, she said O.K. with her doubt still unresolved.

But then she approached a guard and asked.

“Mr., please tell me the truth. This 63-Story Building has more offices than things to see... Then, why do you promote this building as a tourist place? I thought there were far more wonders here.”

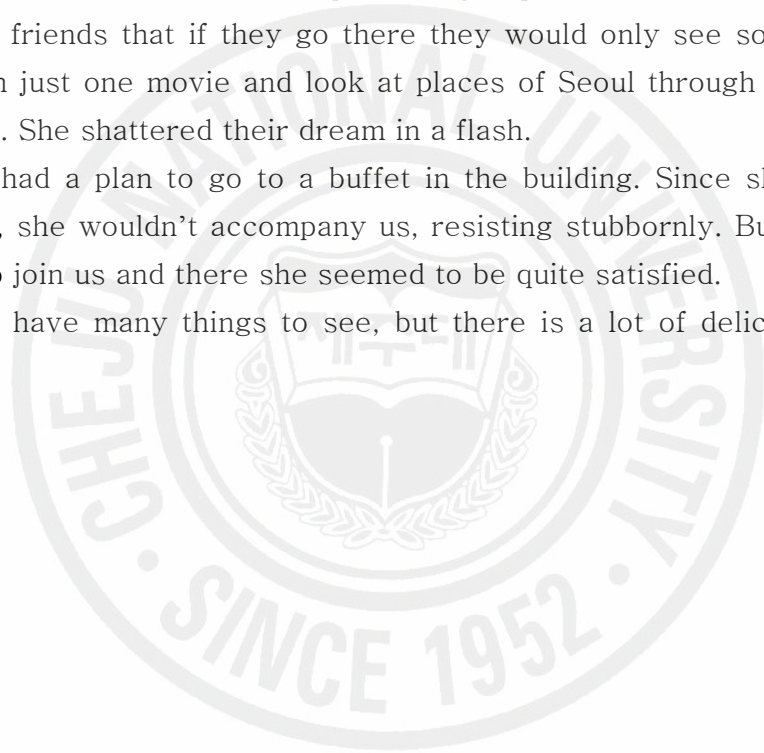
She was so disappointed that she grumbled to him.

Going back to her town, she broke up the 63 group.

She told her friends that if they go there they would only see some fish, not edible, watch just one movie and look at places of Seoul through a telescope, and that's all. She shattered their dream in a flash.

Later, we had a plan to go to a buffet in the building. Since she had been disappointed, she wouldn't accompany us, resisting stubbornly. But we almost forced her to join us and there she seemed to be quite satisfied.

“It doesn't have many things to see, but there is a lot of delicious food in there.”



The Affection of My Mom toward Her Sister

Mom's hometown is Heungduk, Jeung Eup. More specifically, Gaebigol, Anyol Li. The town was named after a dog that had saved its owner and died a long time ago. But the town people called it 'Gaebutgol' because it was easier to pronounce.

Mom was born as the third daughter of five in one of the poorest families in Gaebigol. The first and the last were sons and the others were daughters. Although they lived in destitution, they were a very loving family. Back then, in most families, only sons had opportunities to learn at school and daughters only worked for the family because of the poverty. Mom and the other sisters barely learned how to read Korean without much modern education.

But they were always praised for being optimistic and generous. Among them, the first sister, who was the prettiest and smartest though she didn't get a higher education, was supported fully her husband who raked in a lot of money with a successful business. The second sister, who was very generous and had a good character, married early and settled down in Seoul where she helped other family members to stay temporarily. As I studied at a university in Seoul, I also got much help from her.

The children of her older sister or mom had to get help from her at first when they came to Seoul, either for school or a job. That's why we think of her as our mom and we don't forget her help. But unfortunately the first sister and her husband died early. Only mom, her second elder sister and her husband were left. When it comes to male relatives, they feel affection, but talk only when they meet. It was mom and her sister who genuinely set their affections on each other. They were like true friends.

Mom, who was living in Jeongeup and her sister in Ahyundong talked on the phone once or twice every day; talking about things that they can't tell their children or husband and rumors about their neighbors. If her sister talked about food that she used to eat in the old days, mom sent it as long as she

could get it or cook it, and if her sister found something new and good, she also bought it and sent it to mom.

Since her husband died five years ago, mom has depended more on her sister, while the sister took more care of her sister who ended up being alone. Their children were so absorbed in their own affairs that they couldn't afford to pay any attention to their parents.

Mom had to fight against loneliness and emptiness after she said a permanent good-bye to dad who had a 40 year-marriage with her. When she called me every night, crying that she wanted to follow him, I showed nervousness at her but I shed tears after I hung up the phone.

Why wasn't I kinder? That's not what I intended to do... Why didn't I go to Jeongueup to soothe her as many times as possible? How coldhearted I was... That's why mom told more things in her mind to her sister and depended more on her.

Thanks to her sister, mom gradually got better and a year after his death, she came back to almost normal. It was, however, not long before some news came like a bolt out of the blue.

Suffering high blood pressure and heart disease, her sister suddenly died when she consulted a doctor at a hospital.

A few days before that day, she was not in good condition but she still worried about her family. She just talked about it with mom on the phone. Mom was so concerned that she told her sister to see a doctor immediately if she didn't want to die.

That morning she told my mom that she would go to a hospital. During the checkup, she fell down backward and died on the scene.

At that time, she was already in a serious condition. She was afraid of letting her children know her condition and she just tolerated the pains. Her sudden death couldn't be described with mere words like shock or sadness to our family who had got so much help from her in Seoul.

All of us couldn't believe the sudden news and all we could do was cry. Some time later, the problem was how to let mom know it because mom and her sister were almost like best friends.

Even as a daughter, I had no idea. Just a year after dad passed away, mom lost her sister who she heavily depended on. How could we possibly tell her? But we had to.

I had to muster up my courage to call her.

“Mom, don’t be surprised, will you? We are with you.”

“What happened?”

“Mom, you have high blood pressure. Never be surprised, right?”

“My, don’t be such a fool. Why, daughter? Tell me, right now.”

“Mom, your sister... I heard she died today.”

“...”

“Mom, mom”

“Oh my. What? Sister, what do you mean by that?”

By a night train, we arrived at the hospital just before midnight. She cried so much that her eyes were swollen, which made her uncomfortable when she opened and closed them. Out of breath, she managed to enter the mortuary as if she were blind.

“Sister, sister, where are you? Where is my sister?”

I led her to the portrait scroll. While looking at the portrait with her swollen eyes, she lied on her face outright and wept bitterly.

“Oh my, what can I do? My sister died. It’s true. What can I do now?”

Following her, all of us sat down behind her and wept loudly. Her sister meant a lot to all of us, too. When we came to Seoul, it was the first time to experience the life in a big city and she helped a lot, like our own mom.

It was mom who was saddest and all of us shared her sadness. She couldn’t control her tears and cried jumping up and down and stamping her feet in with anger. It was the moment when exclamation words just came naturally.

But after a while, the atmosphere there abruptly changed and those crying sadly were reading each other’s faces with their heads still down.

My cousin sister met my eyes and gave me a signal telling to look toward my mom. I carefully listened to mom who cried bitterly. Well, she didn’t just cry but said some things rhythmically.

“Ahygooh... Ahygooh... oh... She was the smartest of the five siblings. Oh... All the smartest were gone... oh... Two dullest remain... oh... Only two of us are left behind.. oh... Ahygooh... The smartest has gone... the smartest of five of us...”

Listening to her sing very carefully, she repeated some of the phrases again and again in a rhythm like a rapper.

Behind her, we listened and could figure out what she said finally. All of us

who were crying had to bite our lips to keep from laughing.

Mourning behind mom, my youngest uncle, who was 50 frowned at her in front of many other cousins as her words seemed harsh to his ears.

He poked her in her ribs.

“Sister, why am I a dull? I’m not.”

She could see nothing because of her sorrow. When she felt someone giving a poke in her ribs, she turned to see her only living brother.

She had a hard time confirming who poked her because of her extremely swollen eyes. Suddenly she hugged him and started another rap-like mourning. “Ahygooh... oh... there you were. Ahygooh, now you are my only blood. All the smartest have gone and only two dull...(she stopped mourning as if she remembered something important.) Ah, you did get university education, didn’t you? It was only me who is dull. I’m so sorry. (Continuing like rapping) Yes, I’m the only foolish. Ahygooh... All the smartest of five of us have gone and one dull and one with university education are left behind... Ahyhooh, oh...”

There could not be a more harmonious and fantastic masterpiece than mom mourning raps and her brother with a strange frowning! Watching them behind them, we shrank with laughs, failing to endure them.

Then as if she realized she was seeing others she knew, she greeted them holding their hands.

And again, she started rapping.

“Ahygooh... oh... All of us are here, but mom...”

While she cried sadly, we all laughed ourselves into convulsion.

Before the death of her sister like her other self, she made us laugh because of her simple and honest nature, which I love.

Although I didn’t learn the Korean alphabet or basic mathematics from her, I love her warm heart and simple mind.

My aunt’s story reminds me of one more funny story, also related to my mom’s simplicity.

The story dates back to the days when she was live.

As I continued to work after the marriage, mom visited me with Kimchi and other side dishes or sent them by home-delivery service.

Whenever she came to Seoul, she went to see her sister’ and the sister came to see mom, back and forth. When they met each other, they tried to do more for each other.

For them, the best food when they were in an upbeat mood was the Chinese dish, Tangsooyook, sweet and sour pork.

That day, mom came to my house and called her sister.

“Sister? It’s me. I came here. Do you want to come here, or should I go there?... O.K., come here. I will ask my daughter to order Tangsooyook to be delivered. ... My, however expensive it is, it’s just Tansooyook. As my daughter makes enough money, you know. Hurry. I’ll tell her to order a special big size. ... Yes, come soon. I miss you.”

While listening to them, I laughed with a quick smile. It was a bit funny because when mom talked about just Tansooyook, she said that I made money, or such things... Hanging up the phone, mom studied my face not knowing what to do. I couldn’t help but laugh but I tried not to. Then, she came close to me secretly.

“Your aunt said she would come here...”

“Did she?”

“I guess she didn’t eat yet.”

“Yeah.”

“I’d like to treat her with good food.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I think Tangsooyook is most delicious. So does she.”

“Then, should I order one, a special big size?”

“Really?”

“It’s nothing. Why did you bother to ask me such a thing?”

“Because I feel sorry about making you spend money...”

“Don’t bother. Why don’t you have something better? How about going to the Buffet at 63-Story Building?”

“No, no. Tangsooyook is our favorite. That’s best.”

I told mom that I would call a Chinese restaurant to order it for when the aunt would come and I did my chores.

After a few minutes, I felt I needed to trim my hair and went to a hair salon. Before I left home, I told mom that I would come back soon. But mom seemed to be a little bit uneasy and told me not to go before the aunt come.

I persuaded her that I would be back soon.

At the hair salon, the stylist advised me to have a treatment course because my hair was severely damaged. It might take time. I called mom and told her

not to wait for me.

“Did your sister get there?”

“Yes, will you be late?”

“Well, yes, a little bit. I need to get my hair treated. Instead, I will call the restaurant to deliver it to the house. Enjoy it. Don’t wait for me.”

“I got it. Do your job.”

When I was about to order it, it suddenly occurred to me that the old people think Tangsooyook is the most delicious because they haven’t tried other more delicious food. Therefore, I added Yangsanpi, another Chinese food; more expensive than Tangsooyook, to the order. I felt pleased when I imagined the two enjoying it.

I headed for home after having my hair done. When I got home, I heard the two of them murmuring together.

“Mom!”

Entering the kitchen, I was told to come to them. They talked to each other, frying something in a pan.

“How about putting some more soy sauce?”

“No, I put some salt on it already and it will be too salty with more soy sauce.”

“Not too salty. Food has to have a certain amount of salt.”

“Now, try again. Well cooked. It seemed to be delicious.”

“(after trying it) Good. Let’s eat now.”

Mom and aunt came to a kitchen table with the food on pan.

“Hey, the service here is very good.”

“Service?”

“You ordered Tangooyook. Then, a delivery man came with additional food we didn’t order, a dish with various kinds of vegetables. But it was not seasoned and it doesn’t have any taste. So we cooked again with some salt and other seasonings.”

“Mom, did you possibly cook Yangsanpi?”

“What’s that?”

That’s right. They fried it!

As they have never tried it before, they mistook the expensive Yansanpi that I ordered with the Tansooyook for just a service dish. But when they tried it, it was not tasty at all and they cooked it with some salt and seasonings without

the sauce delivered together with the dish.

I was dumbfounded. I explained to them that I ordered it for them to try something new and special and it is more expensive than Tansooyook. They also felt speechless and laughed.

“We’ve never tried before. That’s why...”

Bringing out a small, wrapped dish, mom said,

“What is this yellow one? Its color is so good and it is so well wrapped that I didn’t open it thinking it might be something important.”

“Let’s see.”

It was the sauce for Yansanpi.

I was struck dumb but I also reflected on it a lot. When I heard, ‘I’ve never tried it before,’ I felt ashamed of myself.

When I asked her to eat out sometimes, she used to cook some food with her back bent and presented it before me, saying that the food she made by herself at home is the most delicious.

“See? It’s good enough, isn’t it? Then, why do we have to spend money eating out? I don’t find it delicious at all.”

Do we consider it true?

For women, the most delicious food must be the food cooked by others even though it is just a bowl of rice with water.

Do I truly believe her when she said she didn’t like eating out because in fact she didn’t want her daughter to spend money?

Because of this terrible daughter, she thought that Tansooyook was the best dish and Yansanpi, the more expensive and better food, was a service dish and cooked it. I’m afraid that there might be another mom like mine somewhere else.

After 10 years of my marriage, while raising two kids, the biggest headache is what to feed them whenever I come back home from work. What food for today? What can I prepare for our children who seem to have lost their appetites these days?

My mom must have had the same worry as mine when she raised us. While I make food for my children for every meal, I don’t remember if I have worried about what mom eats.

The only words I say to her are ‘Eat well’, just a superficial...

If It Were Not for Mom...

What if I wanted to eat what mom cooked.

What if I wanted to smell mom?

What if I wanted to see when it rained?

What if I wanted to talk to mom and listen to her?

What if I wanted to call, “mom” out loud?

What if I remembered what she did for me with all her heart?

What if mom came to me in my dreams sometimes?

Who will call me, a woman who is almost 40, “baby”,?

Who will pat my hip gently?

Mom, who always told me that I was weak.

Mom, who always asked me when I became so old like that when she heard how old I was.

Mom, who always asked mosquitoes, “Please, bite me instead of my daughter.”
, shooing mosquitoes with a fan next to me.

Mom, what can I do without you?

I’ve never thought about life without you, even once.

When I saw you fall down in the yard last time, I was astonished.

My mom I that remembered was always young and healthy.

The time that I can share with you is being taken away from me, isn’t it?

Mom, please stay longer with me, next to me.

To Dad in Heaven

Dad,

It's been quite a long time since I called you. After you passed away, I had nobody I could call dad.

You used to say that daughters would go away after marriage and should be taken good care of while being together. You bought us shoes every season holding our hands together and while other friends of mine played with paper dolls, you bought me a plastic doll with beautiful yellow hair.

Thanks to the doll, I once became the most popular girl in town.

Dad, why did you leave us so early?

I wish you stayed with us a little longer... Mom looks very lonely and sad without you. She is always lonely since her sons and daughters are always busy. But she has never complained outright to us. She used to talk proudly about the days when we were young with albums open. After you went away, however, she never opened them. She didn't because the albums filled with her young days and memories and happiness would have just the memories of you.

Mom went to a mill house to have dried red-peppers grinded once. While waiting for her turn, she saw an old man help his wife with some heavy ground red-peppers and carried it on his bike. Watching it, she thought that if her husband were alive, he would do the same thing. Suddenly her heart was torn with sorrow and on her way home alone she cried bitterly.

So did I, dad, when I heard one of my friends talking about taking a trip with her parents and I heard just the word 'my dad...', I felt like crying.

I have nothing to expect from you. But I wish you stayed next to us...

I wish you answered us when we called you...

I want to hear your voice so much.

You used to say, "Yeah, my daughter" when I called you...

You used to kindly talk to us, "Help yourself, my kids," when we gathered at

the table...

When we showed you an award from school, you used to say, "What a smart child!"

When my in-laws opposed my marriage, you said, "I'm sorry for not being a rich father..."

On my wedding day when you saw me with bride make-up, you said, "How beautiful you are, my dear! Don't cry today so you'll have pretty pictures. They remain forever." And you already had your eyes wet...

Dad, I wish I could hear your voice even once... While you always make a smile even in my dreams, why don't you say a word? Why? If there were a phone in heaven, I wish I could call you and hear this one word, "Yeah, my daughter," even once, just once!

Dad, I have a good life here.

Sometimes I have a hard time in living but when I think that you are watching and helping me, then I look at the sky once and I get energy to start again with a smile.

You must know, dad.

I might grow up now and get some wisdom. I'm sorry I didn't take care of you more while you were alive. Please, dad, always watch and help us whom you gave so much love.

Dad, I miss you so much.

Author's Note

At first, I tried not to tell mom about this book. I thought I would bring this to her first after it was published. As mom and I, however, had very frequent calls talking about every thing in detail, I couldn't help but confess the fact after all while talking on the phone.

She said nothing when I told her that I was writing a book about her. As I repeated her name on the phone, she was choked with tears.

"I did nothing for you. I didn't deserve being your mom, which made me regret being your mom million times... Aren't you ashamed of me?"

Mom did everything she could for me but she always spoke like that. She said she felt sorry for me because she was my mom. I have never thought of it even once. On the contrary, I feel very happy and grateful to be her daughter. Before hanging up the phone, mom told me carefully, "Daughter, though I feel pity for you, I thank you very much for being my daughter. Were it not for you, who would know that I, nothing more than dust, had once lived in this world? Thank you."

I don't remember when it was exactly. I brought a school award to mom. She held it with her two hands as if it were a treasure, saying, "My daughter got an award that I've never been given." And she read it stuttering. Then she suddenly went to the kitchen and came back again with some steamed rice. She put some on the back of each of the four corners of the award to paste it to the middle of the wall in our room, where it could easily be seen by anyone.

Mom, I am not ashamed of you at all. Not ashamed of being your daughter. You didn't teach me math or the Korean alphabet but I learned a lot from you, and most importantly, I was raised full of your love.

As you didn't get a regular education at school, you don't have any school awards, so I'd like to pin a decoration upon your breast. As you show off my school award to others, pasting it in the middle of our room, I want to tell your story proudly through this book.

I'd like to devote this book to all the mothers who always regret not giving more to their daughters and all the daughters who are thieves to whom mothers want to give.

