# Chapter 0: Moving

"Can I leave it here?"

"Ah, yes. Please put it there."

I responded with a nod, and the moving man replied, "Got it~" and set down the box.

With that, the move was nearly complete.

I looked around.

A tidy, spacious room with a large bed and a fancy desk.

It reeked of a fresh move.

Memories of living confined in a tiny room flashed by like a flickering lantern.

Having overcome a difficult past, from today I would be living in a clean and spacious apartment.

I felt so moved that I almost choked up.

"But do you really need such a big place?"

I turned towards the sudden voice. There stood my friend who had come to help with the move.

Same department, same year.

We had been friends since the beginning of university, the only one I'm close to.

Despite my insisting that there wasn't much to help with, he came anyway.

I couldn't be more grateful.

"Not really necessary, no. A size that's just right is more comfortable."

"I'd feel the same. Why did you buy a place like this?"

I gathered my thoughts for a moment.

"It's a kind of investment. I'd saved up money and was looking to move, and the price for this place was a bit low. Seemed like it'd be good to buy for later."

"I see... That's very like you."

My friend gave a wry smile.

Thinking about it, it was indeed a very me thing to do.

Over the past few years, I have grown my wealth through various investments.

Stocks, cryptocurrency, funds, and other financial products.

I had tried my hand at everything.

This house was no different.

While I bought it primarily to live in, it was also part of my investments.

"I get that it's an investment, but how are you going to clean such a big place? There are four rooms. You're only going to use one, right?"

"That's right."

"And is the house even in good condition? The doorknob in this room is already loose."

"Doorknobs aren't important for living. I plan to live alone anyway."

"That level of indifference is pretty impressive, man."

"I'm impressive? Thanks."

"That wasn't a compliment."

Was it an insult then?

Just looking at the square footage, it's not so big as to warrant such comments.

But this guy knew well the state of my old dorm room.

Littered with trash and clothes, with just enough space for my laptop and me.

The typical male university student's room.

Knowing my past, he can't help but worry.

But I have plans of my own. No need for concern.

"I'm thinking of buying a robot vacuum."

"Oh, that's pretty impressive."

Though I spoke seriously, the expression I got back was one of exasperation.

"Fine. You're rich, so cleaning is settled with that. What about laundry? Going to shove everything in the washer like before? And meals, just ramen and takeout?"

"...How did you know?"

"Because I know you're not interested in anything other than investing. Pay attention to other things for once. Even if you don't clean, at least take care of your meals. Making money is useless if you die."

"At this age?"

"Living like you do, you really might."

What an ominous thing to say.

"And learn a bit about people. You have a decent personality but maybe it's your unique way of thinking. People find it hard to approach you."

"I can't be bothered. I'd rather spend that time studying investments."

"I knew you'd say that."

Now he seemed genuinely amused by my honest response. Probably.

Then, he folded his arms and shot me a pitying look.

"It would be nice if you had a girlfriend like I do to come over and cook sometimes. Looking at your situation, it doesn’t seem likely..."

He trailed off, then suddenly widened his eyes as if he had an epiphany.

It was an incomprehensible gesture.

"What's up?"

"Hey, how about hiring a housemaid?"

His suggestion came out of nowhere.

"A housemaid?"

"Yeah. I don't know much, but if you hire one, wouldn't she take care of laundry, cleaning, and meals?"

"Oh, how much would that cost?"

"I don't know. You're the rich one, you figure it out."

"I can't be bothered. Better to look for investments with that time."

"..."

At my response, my friend finally shook his head in disappointment.

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Raei Translations

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After my friend and the moving company had left, I was alone in the spacious house that evening.

Staring at the monitor on my desk, I was deep in thought.

A housemaid.

It was a good idea.

I have quite a bit of money anyway.

It was better to spend that time coding than to bother cleaning.

Why hadn't I thought of this before?

It would solve all the headaches I've had with daily chores.

Hiring one would be a good investment.

Let's see how to hire one.

How do you hire a housemaid?

Since it's a kind of part-time job, should I post it on a job site?

Believing that should work, I opened a job site.

I clicked the 'Find a Part-timer' button, and a form appeared.

It seemed I just had to fill in the title, description, salary, and check some options.

For the title, I wrote 'Looking for a Housemaid'.

How much should the salary be?

Considering the money I could make day trading in the time it took to cook, clean, and do laundry... a generous 500[1] per month should suffice.

With this amount, I shouldn't have trouble finding someone.

I have plenty of spare rooms to offer.

And they can just make two servings of food to share.

I checked the box for providing room and board.

That should be enough.

After pressing the confirm button, a message appeared, "We'll send you a KakaoTalk message when there are applicants."

Now I just had to wait for a message.

...Just as I thought that, my phone rang.

Checking the screen, there was a notification that a KakaoTalk message had arrived.

Was there already an applicant?

I reopened the website and clicked 'Check Received Applications'.

There was a listing for a woman named Yoo Si-eun.

Yoo Si-eun.

It was a familiar name, but I couldn't remember where I had seen it.

It might just be a coincidence.

Clicking for more details, there was a lengthy list of ambitions and reasons for wanting the job.

Of course, I couldn't care less.

I scrolled down to find the contact number, then picked up my phone and wrote a text.

[Hello, I'm the one looking for a housemaid. Please come for an interview tomorrow at 1 PM at this address.]

Although I said I'd conduct an interview, I intended to pass anyone as long as they were human. Surely no one could be worse at housework than me.

Besides, my abilities don't revolve around choosing people. Unlike stock picks.

Soon after sending the text, I got a reply.

[Yes! I'll work hard!]

I'm not sure what she means by working hard when the interview hasn't even happened yet.

Chuckling, I tossed my phone onto the bed.

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Raei Translations

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When I woke up the next day, it was already past noon.

Changing places doesn't change the person.

I confirmed this simple truth once again today.

Fortunately, I woke up just in time.

I had told someone to come for an interview at 1 PM.

It would be a disaster if the host was still asleep.

As I tried to collect myself, my stomach grumbled.

The interview was just a formality.

I had no intention of rejecting her.

If possible, I'd like her to prepare dinner starting today.

No, if possible, I'd like to ask for lunch too.

After a quick wash and change of clothes, the doorbell rang not long after.

For someone like me with only one friend, there were no other visitors. It must be the person coming for the interview.

Thinking this, I opened the door without checking who it was.

A woman stood there.

"Hello! I'm Yoo Si-eun, here for the interview today!"

She greeted me with a deep bow, not even making eye contact.

A person of manners.

"Ah, hello..."

As I returned the greeting, the woman lifted her head.

And then.

"Ah."

"Huh?"

Only then did I recall the thought I had yesterday.

The name Yoo Si-eun, familiar yet unplaceable.

I didn't know where I had seen it before, but now, far too late,

I remembered.

"Are you, by any chance, Yoo Si-eun from the computer science department?"

"Then you, could you possibly be Lee Hwi-min?"

As I thought.

With hair black as night and long enough to catch the light, small ears peeking through, well-defined features, and a modest mole near her mouth.

There was no way this could just be someone who looked similar.

The applicant for my housemaid position was the most beautiful girl in my school.

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[1. raei: no currency is used, he just says 500 a month. Assume 5,000,000 won here which would be about $3.75k - $4k a month. $45k ish a year plus accommodation.]

# Chapter 1: Interview and First Cooking

"So... I invested here and there, made some money. Cleaning, laundry, cooking were all a hassle. So, I posted a job ad. Is that what you're saying?"

"Um, right."

First, I let Si-eun inside and explained the situation to her.

I had only told one friend about making a lot of money. And now, there was a second person.

I had tried not to spread the word as much as possible.

As Si-eun stroked her chin and mulled over the story, she soon nodded.

"You were always just tapping away on your laptop even during lectures. Always busy with something else."

"Investing is about not missing the moment; otherwise, you'll regret it for life."

"Really? Well, if you say you've made a lot of money, you must know what you're doing."

That was a refreshingly straightforward answer.

Even in this situation where the job applicant turned out to be from the same department, Si-eun didn't show any signs of panic.

If anything, I was more embarrassed.

Noticing my gaze, Si-eun spoke up.

"Why?"

"No, just... wondering if it doesn't bother you to see someone from the same school at the interview."

"It's fine. I was a bit worried because the person was someone I knew. But it doesn't really matter."

"Isn't it possible it could matter to me...?"

Of course it's fine. It's actually better this way. I could ask if there were any announcements in class.

But there was one thing I was curious about. I asked without making eye contact.

"Why do you want to do this kind of job?"

"I don't that's something the person hiring should say?"

"That's true, but, what was it..."

After organizing my thoughts for a moment.

"You study hard and even took on the role of student council president in your department. And you seem to know a lot of people. Anyway, I know you're busy with various things."

Si-eun looked astonished.

"How do you know all that?"

"We're in the same department and year; I've picked up that much."

Though I said that, the truth was slightly different.

Yes, we were in the same department and year, but Si-eun was famous throughout the school.

Mainly for her looks, figure, and unique charm.

There were rumors that she deliberately enchanted the male students. If such talk had reached me, the ultimate loner, there might be something there.

Si-eun lowered her gaze to the table and replied.

"I'm busy, but I have no choice. I need the money."

"You need money?"

"Yes. My mom is ill."

Her tone was serious.

"Plus, my dad passed away when I was young. So, I have no choice but to earn money. I would have taken a leave of absence, but my mom was against it, so I had to continue attending school."

Despite that, she was enjoying her school life.

Perhaps reading my thoughts from my eyes, Si-eun continued to explain.

"I need to get a job right after graduation, so I'm building up my resume as much as possible now. If I do well in my studies, I get scholarships. Networking is important for job hunting, and I save on food expenses because people I know often treat me to meals."

"..."

"Sounds pathetic, doesn't it? Think whatever you want. I know it's not the coolest thing, but right now, I need to earn as much as I can and spend as little, to contribute to the medical bills."

"Hm."

I didn't look down on her just because she was poor.

It just made me realize we were complete opposites.

My family was quite poor when I was young too.

But I grew up differently from Si-eun. I always found it difficult to make friends.

Instead, I found more joy in tinkering with a computer that couldn't even run games.

I enjoyed predicting how graphs would turn.

So, I gave up on making friends with people. As a result, I made a lot of money but still only had one friend.

On the other hand, Si-eun faced her difficult situation without getting discouraged, opting for a head-on approach. It was a significant difference.

Si-eun continued her story.

"So, I kept looking for part-time jobs until I found your post. A job like this pays 500 a month. Lucky I found it right away."

"I see. Your application looked like it was copy-pasted."

"I had it ready, just waiting for a good job to pop up."

Is that so.

"Plus, it said board and lodging were provided. This is like a dream job."

"Um, well... huh?"

"Why?"

Si-eun cocked her head in confusion.

Looking back, I wondered if I had checked the "room and board provided" option when I posted the job listing.

There are plenty of empty rooms, and I can cover the cost of food supplies.

So, I meant that I could provide room and board if needed.

But the idea of having a female housemaid from the same department living in my house felt a bit... awkward.

"No, never mind."

At this point, the thought of recruiting someone new was too bothersome.

I might as well spend that time studying investments.

After all, we're going to be using separate rooms, so it fundamentally shouldn't matter.

I was more surprised that Si-eun didn't care at all.

"Are you okay with it?"

"With what?"

"Living in the same house as me."

"What about it?"

Si-eun chuckled then said,

"It's fine. From what I've seen of your usual behavior, I doubt I'll run into any trouble. You're always just tapping away on your laptop anyway."

"Uh-huh."

That's not exactly a compliment.

It seems like she sees me as a pushover.

But she's 100% right, so I can't argue. I just have to accept it.

"So? What are you going to do?"

Si-eun asked, squinting her eyes.

"You passed...?"

Her question was laced with desperation, as if she didn't want to miss this opportunity.

When a fellow student from the same school, department, and year proposes to live with you as a housemaid, how would most people react?

The typical choice might be to look for another part-timer. It would be understandable to refuse due to the awkwardness, and Si-eun wouldn't have much to say.

But I'm different.

The reason is simple. I can't be bothered.

"Well, yeah. You're hired."

"…Okay. Thanks."

As soon as she heard my response, Si-eun stood up.

"When do I start? Not decided yet? Oh, can I send my stuff over by courier in advance? I'll start preparing to move in from tomorrow."

"Uh..."

"Why?"

Si-eun tilted her head, expressionless.

Sorry, but it seems I need to bring up a really unpleasant topic.

"If possible..."

"Yeah?"

"I'd like you to start cooking from lunch today..."

"What?"

Si-eun asked back, speechless, and I slightly regretted approving her for the job.

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Raei Translations

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"What is this?"

That was Si-eun's first reaction upon opening the refrigerator.

It was a natural response. The fridge was completely empty.

Not an exaggeration—there was literally nothing inside.

Hearing that I wanted lunch prepared, Si-eun laughed in disbelief.

But she didn't refuse. Instead, she cheerfully accepted, saying, "Okay."

"Since I'm hired, it's my job from now on. I'll do whatever you ask."

"Thanks. Can you make do with whatever's in the fridge?"

Then, without waiting for a response, Si-eun opened the fridge to find it astonishingly empty.

This led to the current situation.

"Even I'm not this bad, and I'm broke. You, on the other hand, have money. So why is your fridge in such a state?"

"There's a reason for it."

"What reason?"

"I can't be bothered."

Si-eun gave me a sharp look.

With over 20 years of experience living as an outsider, I had no comeback and looked away.

"What did you eat yesterday?"

"Cup noodles."

"And the day before that?"

"Cup noodles."

"And the day before that, cup noodles too, I guess."

"No."

"Then?"

"…Instant noodles in a bag."

Si-eun sighed at my response.

Aren't noodles the greatest invention?

A dish created by brilliant scholars.

It's bound to be delicious.

Plus, delivery takes at least several minutes, but noodles are ready in just a few. Noodles are the only food that's both convenient and tasty.

I wanted to defend myself with these arguments, but I chose to keep quiet.

Soon after, there was a rustling sound from where Si-eun was.

Glancing over, I saw her opening the cabinet with spices and cooking utensils.

"All there is are chili powder and a pot. It's actually surprising that even these are here."

"You need them to make noodles."

"I suppose so."

Si-eun just nodded in resignation, then suddenly looked up.

"Now what? No one can cook without ingredients and tools."

"Uh, well, there's a market right in front... If you buy stuff, I'll pay you back later..."

"Sorry, but... I don't have the money for that."

Ah, right.

"Originally, these are things we'll use for the house. Wouldn't it be better if the homeowner and I go pick them out together?"

Si-eun said this and closed the cabinet door.

She has a point.

If Si-eun quits the job, everything we buy will end up being my stuff.

Besides, I'm not too keen on handing over my card to a part-timer I just hired today.

It seems more proper to go together, pick out what we need, and pay for it.

The only problem is...

Suggesting we go together means I have to go out too...

I hired her to reduce my chores, but this feels like adding more work. I should've just stuck to instant noodles.

But, well. If I endure this once and go out, I should be comfortable for a while.

"Okay."

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Raei Translations

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Numerous families live together in a large apartment complex.

It's a prime shopping district with consumers ready to spend. That's exactly what the supermarket in the apartment complex is.

Maybe I'll consider investing in such places later.

"What are you thinking about?"

Si-eun, walking a few steps ahead, turned her head to ask.

"Just wondering whether or not to buy something."

"It seems you're feeling ambitious. What do you want to eat?"

"No. I was actually debating whether to buy E-Mart stocks."

"Our scales are just too different..."

Si-eun muttered, pressing her temples.

Anyway, we entered the supermarket.

Maybe because it's Sunday, the place was crowded.

On one side, a couple with a young child was pulling a cart, and on the other, two people who looked like a young couple were holding a basket.

Si-eun naturally took out a shopping cart and started pushing it. It seemed she intended to push it to the food section on her own.

It made me feel guilty, as if I was dumping everything on her. I hurried over to push the cart, but Si-eun looked puzzled.

"Why?"

"I feel like I'm just ordering you around."

"So what if you are? It's all paid work. You can order me around more if you want."

She answers with a small laugh.

Always so cool about things.

She didn't seem like this at school.

We soon arrived at the food section.

Frozen foods were stacked in front of us.

To the left were spices, and to the right, it seemed, were vegetables and meat. The supermarket was indeed spacious and large.

But Si-eun, holding the cart, didn't seem to want to move. She stood frozen as if turned to ice, not moving an inch.

What's going on?

"That looks like the spice section."

"..."

Even when I spoke to her, there was no response.

Wondering what was wrong, I followed her gaze and saw a lady cooking dumplings.

It was the tasting corner.

"If you want to eat, just have one."

My casual remark made Si-eun flinch, then she raised her eyebrows.

"I don't want to eat."

"Then let's move on. Time is money."

"Okay."

Si-eun answered without hesitation, but her eyes rolled back to the dumplings. She still hadn't moved.

"Just go have one."

"I'm not looking because I want to eat."

What does she want, then?

Fine.

I like dumplings anyway.

Frozen food is the result of smart people gathering at food companies to create dishes. They have to be delicious, though not as much as ramen.

I opened a small freezer next to the tasting corner and placed a pack of dumplings in the cart. Si-eun was surprised by this and looked at me.

I wish she wouldn't stare; it's unnerving.

"Let's go."

I spoke up, trying to break the awkward atmosphere. Si-eun had something to say but instead started pushing the cart again.

"Is there any food you want?"

"Anything."

"What's your favorite food?"

"Ramen?"

"You could just make that yourself."

"Right..."

Her point was too valid to counter.

As I was pondering, Si-eun chuckled.

"You're really unique. Is that how you made your money?"

After letting out a snort,

"Forget it. Then I'll make something I want to make."

With that, she began to load various food ingredients into the cart.

Spices, vegetables, meat, and other groceries filled the cart. Seeing this, I internally felt glad I found a housemaid.

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Raei Translations

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The shopping spree finally ended after we bought cooking utensils.

It was well past lunchtime.

Starting to cook now, it would end up being lunch and dinner combined.

That prediction wasn't wrong. Clutching my growling stomach, it was about an hour later when Si-eun called me.

As I went to the kitchen, a lavish feast was laid out on the dining table.

Spicy pork bulgogi, soft tofu stew, various seasoned vegetable dishes, and fried eggs.

It had been so long since I'd had such a meal, I could barely remember the last time.

"You must be good at cooking."

"How would you know without even tasting? …I am confident, though. I've done it a lot since I was young."

I see.

Si-eun had lost her father early. It's likely her mother couldn't always be at home. She must have had to learn cooking from a young age.

Nodding to myself, I took a seat, and Si-eun flopped down opposite me.

"Eating together?"

"Why? You don't like sharing meals?"

"No. I thought it might be uncomfortable for you to eat with me."

"It's better to eat at once and clean up at once."

That made sense.

I nodded slightly to show my gratitude and picked up the chopsticks.

I decided to try the spicy pork bulgogi first. Stretching my arm, I picked up some meat and brought it to my mouth.

Chewing thoughtfully, I savored the taste.

"How is it?"

A look of hopeful anticipation came my way.

Even if she was confident in her cooking, it's not every day that one can receive an evaluation.

After swallowing the meat, I opened my mouth.

"It's delicious."

"Right?"

Si-eun chuckled quietly.

Honestly, the food was delicious.

Having been stuffing myself with ramen and greasy delivery food, I could easily finish several bowls of rice right there and then.

Only then did Si-eun pick up her chopsticks. After tasting her own spicy pork bulgogi, she exclaimed,

"Yep, this is it!"

And placed a hand on her cheek, sporting a content smile.

It was like she'd tasted lemon.

Given how she couldn't take her eyes off the tasting corner earlier, perhaps she hadn't been eating well regularly.

Watching her face, I got lost in thought until our eyes met.

Seemingly remembering my presence, Si-eun straightened up and managed her expression, clearing her throat.

"Anyway, is this setup okay?"

Si-eun asked with a more composed voice.

"Well, it's fine. The food's delicious. Mmm, makes you wanna go 'Yep, this is it!'"

"Mind if I smack you just once?"

I quickly averted my gaze, silently apologizing.

"When should I start working?"

Accepting my silent apology, Si-eun asked with a slightly sulky tone.

"You'll need time to prepare, so come over from Friday night. Next time you come, just cooking, cleaning, and laundry will do. I'll order the washing machine and vacuum cleaner today.

Oh, and send your stuff over by courier. It's okay if you bring it yourself too."

"Got it."

Si-eun responded in a proud tone, a stark contrast to her earlier self when eating the bulgogi.

Glancing up, our eyes met.

"Please take good care of me in the future."

"What, yeah."

As I looked away in response, a soft laugh came from the opposite side.

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# Chapter 2: School

Even someone as lazy as I had to go outside on weekdays. I had no choice. No matter how free a university student is, they're still a student. They have to attend classes.

Monday afternoon.

I left the house with my laptop in its pouch.

The spring air felt refreshing.

Ugh, instead of feeling better, I wanted to go back home immediately.

It took about ten minutes to get to the back gate of the school from here. If it had been any farther, I would have taken a taxi.

It was an awkwardly in-between distance.

As I got closer to my destination, I saw groups of people bustling around. They were probably returning to school after a late lunch.

I squeezed through them and moved towards the back gate, then to the building where my class was.

After setting my laptop down on the desk and sighing.

"Oh, you came."

My only friend spoke to me.

"Yeah, I came. Why?"

"I was thinking of contacting you, worried you might have starved to death."

A friend who sincerely cared about my health. Probably.

"It's fine. You don't have to worry anymore."

"Did you buy a ramen pot?"

"No. And no matter how lazy I am, I can cook ramen by myself."

"Really?"

My friend, sounding utterly disinterested, soon rummaging through his bag.

"Then what?"

"I hired a housemaid."

My friend's hand froze.

"What? Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"You were just saying that, and you actually got one? That's unlike you to act so quickly."

"I thought about it and realized it's not a bad idea. Housework is annoying, and I felt like I should eat a variety of meals."

"True. If you have money, it's better to let someone else handle it."

My friend shrugged.

"So? How much are you paying?"

I opened my pouch and took out my laptop.

"500 a month."

"Hmm... What? 500 a month?"

"Yeah."

When I nodded nonchalantly, my friend furrowed his brow. He looked like he had heard something absurd.

"What's wrong?"

"What's wrong? 500 a month? That's a steal!"

"But she stays at my place without commuting, so she's basically working 24/7. If you calculate it by multiplying 24 by 30, it's roughly below minimum wage, isn't it?"

"There are sleeping hours too, so you can't calculate it like that... Wait, she stays at your place?"

"Yeah."

"...."

He was at a loss for words. His reaction was a bit exaggerated today.

Soon, he seemed to recall something and asked.

"Just in case, the person you hired... is she a girl?"

"Yeah, she's a girl."

"This is insane."

He looked at me with a bewildered expression. That look can hurt a loner's feelings.

Before I got hurt further, I turned my gaze to the laptop screen.

My friend chuckled dryly.

"What can I say? You break social norms quite easily."

"Maybe a bit..."

Living with a girl I've never met before wasn't exactly a common thing. I knew that well.

"Even so, considering you make profits from investments and all, it makes me wonder how our economy works..."

"I basically write programs for investment, so I just need to deal with numbers."

"Alright. I don't know much about it, but let's leave it at that. But a housemaid who's a girl, living at your place?"

"Yeah."

"You're something, but she's something too."

That was true. If she were a complete stranger, she wouldn't have agreed to live in my house.

But she had been watching me from afar. She knew well that I wasn't the type to bother her.

"That's because she's in our department..."

I was about to say she's Yoo Si-eun, the president of our student council, but I shut my mouth.

Even if it was fine for me, it might be something Si-eun wanted to keep secret. It wouldn't be wise to come out with it recklessly.

"From our department?"

"Yeah, she's from our department, like us, a computer science major."

"…Really?"

For a moment, my friend looked doubtful.

"Well, it's better than opening a chicken restaurant after majoring in computer science. A 500 a month job isn't bad."

He accepted it. Phew, what a relief.

At that moment, I saw Si-eun walking into the classroom.

With her long black hair shining, she was smiling brightly and greeting everyone she passed by.

She looked just like the usual Yoo Si-eun.

Completely different from when I saw her as a housemaid. It was hard to believe it was the same person, as if she had a hidden twin sister.

"You’re staring hard."

"What?"

"Yoo Si-eun, I mean."

I turned to face my friend. He looked at me with a smirk.

Then he teased.

"Do you have a crush on her?"

"No."

"People usually deny it if they're guilty."

"I'd deny it even if I wasn't guilty."

"So what? She's one of the prettiest girls at our school. She's got a good personality and good grades. Probably the most popular girl."

"I'll tell your girlfriend."

"You don't even have her number."

My friend added, "My girlfriend is 100 times prettier, so I don't care."

Well, I remembered hearing rumors about his girlfriend. They’ve been dating since high school, I think.

Stretching, my friend said.

"Don't you think you should get a girlfriend too? Yoo Si-eun might be... a bit, no, a lot difficult."

"First, I think I need to make some friends."

"That's true."

He laughed happily and agreed.

"You're fun to hang out with once you get close. You're just a bit unique."

"They say it’s the odd stones that get hit."

"But you don't look bad. For someone who stays cooped up at home, you're in good shape. If you tried, you could easily find someone."

It's easy for him to say with a girlfriend. As I stayed silent, he patted my shoulder.

"Now that you hired a maid, get closer to some girls."

"She's not a maid, she's a housemaid[1]."

"Aren't they the same in English?"

"Are they?"

"Who cares about the official term? 'Maid' sounds better than 'housemaid.' It's easier to say and has a more attractive ring to it."

I'm not sure about the attractive part, but it's easier to say.

"Anyway, they say you can't buy youth with money. You should at least try dating."

"You can't buy time with money either. I'd rather sleep than waste time on a relationship."

"I knew you'd say that... Just think about it."

"Okay."

Giving a vague reply, my friend left with a bitter smile.

He was a model student, sitting relatively close to the front for classes.

Meanwhile, I sat at the very back. Sitting here was practically a declaration that I wouldn't pay attention.

As for Si-eun, a top model student, she naturally took a seat right in front of the professor. Her enthusiasm was impressive.

Watching her with admiration, I suddenly saw Si-eun turn around.

She looked around as if searching for someone, then made eye contact with me.

She quickly turned her head back around.

What was that?

I was briefly puzzled by her inexplicable behavior, but it probably didn't mean anything. Deciding not to think too deeply about it, I shifted my gaze back to my laptop screen.

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[1. raei: maid and housemaid/housekeeper, mean pretty much the same thing but the first is used for the traditional maid in black/white uniform.]

# Chapter 3: Maid's Room

The days passed by lazily, and Friday arrived.

I hardly listened in class, ate quick meals at the cafeteria or had ramen, and then spent all day staring at my monitor when I got home.

Living like this made time fly.

After enduring the last lecture and returning home, I noticed a box occupying a corner of the living room.

Three postal parcels from the post office. The sender was, of course, Si-eun.

One arrived on Wednesday, another on Thursday, and the last one today. It seemed she was sending her belongings in an orderly manner.

And today was Friday.

This meant that from tonight, Si-eun would start staying at this house.

An hour passed, and the doorbell rang.

There weren't many people who would visit. At this time, on this day, there was only one person it could be.

When I opened the door, it was indeed Si-eun.

She had light makeup on her face, wore a thin outer garment, and a miniskirt.

It was the same Yoo Si-eun I usually saw at school.

Si-eun raised one hand and spoke.

"Hi."

"Oh, yeah, uh... Hi?"

"Why are you acting so awkward?"

"Well, I've never greeted a housemaid starting her job before."

"It's my first time starting as a housemaid too."

Si-eun responded with a snicker.

She had a point. Maybe I was just awkward because I was a recluse.

Si-eun took off her shoes and neatly placed them before stepping inside.

A strange fragrance filled the air. Maybe she wore perfume. It didn't smell like this when she visited last week.

Thinking back, her outfit was plain last time too. It seemed there was a difference between Si-eun as a university student and Si-eun as a working adult.

Si-eun then looked at the boxes piled up in the corner and said.

"You gathered my stuff?"

"I was going to open and organize them, but I just stacked them."

"Good job. If you had opened them, I would've sued."

I breathed a sigh of relief and asked.

"Is this all your stuff?"

"Yeah."

"That's less than I expected."

"I got rid of things like cooking utensils since I won't need them anymore."

"Hmm."

She would be living here as a housemaid for a while.

There was no need to bring items already available here.

But to have only three boxes, including clothes and her own bedding, meant she had very few belongings.

While I was lost in thought, Si-eun turned to me.

"Which room should I use?"

"Oh."

I hadn't decided that yet. I had only thought about letting her use any room other than mine. That was as far as my planning went.

After a moment of consideration, I spoke.

"I only use my room, so any room but that one is fine. Choose any of the remaining three."

"Really, I can choose whichever I want?"

"Yeah."

"Hmm~"

Given the choice, Si-eun seemed to ponder deeply. Any room would do for me. I could have used all three rooms without issue.

Eventually, Si-eun opened the doors of the three rooms, roughly comparing their sizes.

"Then, I'll use this one."

She pointed to the smallest room.

It was the farthest from my room, so it would be safe in case of emergencies.

Not that there was any need for such worries.

"Alright. From now on, that room is yours."

"Okay. I'll move my stuff."

With that, Si-eun picked up a box and headed to the room she chose. I followed with the other two boxes.

Placing her belongings in the empty room, Si-eun said.

"It's clean and nice."

I also set down the boxes and agreed.

"Yeah, it is."

As Si-eun said, the room was clean. It had been spotless before the move, and the moving company cleaned it thoroughly after the move too.

But, isn't it excessively tidy?

"Come to think of it."

"Huh?"

"There isn’t any furniture here."

"Oh."

It seemed Si-eun had just noticed as well.

I had already bought and set up the necessary furniture for my room, but there was no way I had prepared anything for Si-eun. After all, we had only decided on her room today.

I didn’t know much about girls' rooms, but surely a vanity and a bed were necessary. She’d also need a desk and a chair to study.

I asked Si-eun.

"Should I just pick some furniture out?"

"No."

Si-eun waved her hand dismissively.

"Why? It’ll be uncomfortable.”

"It would be uncomfortable if you bought that kind of stuff for me when I’m just an employee."

"The furniture will stay at my house anyway. I might need it later too, so it’s fine."

"Even so…"

Si-eun still looked reluctant. She seemed to think that asking for this much was shameless.

"At the very least, you need a bed. If you sleep on the hard floor, your body will ache. You may not feel it now because you're young."

"We’re the same age. Besides, I don’t plan to do this job until I’m old, so it’s okay."

Though she said this, Si-eun seemed to realize she couldn’t firmly refuse and soon added, "Alright."

"It would be strange for me to refuse if the homeowner wants to buy it."

"Yeah. Just make a rough list of the furniture you want and let me know. I’ll order it online."

"…Okay."

Si-eun looked like she had something else to say but just chewed her lips instead of speaking. I didn’t feel the need to pry.

A moment later, Si-eun turned her head and spoke.

"What about dinner?"

"Not yet."

"Then I’ll make it. Just cooking something simple with the groceries we bought before is fine, right?”

"Oh, sure."

The cooking utensils and ingredients Si-eun had bought were all untouched. Luckily, she had chosen items with long expiration dates.

"We have the tools, and I have enough money to buy the rest of the ingredients. I’ll go out and get them myself."

"Alright."

After hearing my answer, Si-eun walked out of the room.

This was now Si-eun’s room. I shouldn’t intrude on someone’s private space. I quickly left the room as well.

When I stepped out, I met Si-eun’s gaze at the entrance.

"I’ll be back."

"Oh? Uh, yeah, okay."

I ended up seeing her off unintentionally.

As I stammered a reply, Si-eun looked like she wanted to say something but didn’t, turning around and heading out.

Hmm, maybe I should do some coding while Si-eun is out shopping. As I was thinking that and turning to enter my room,

"Hey."

Si-eun suddenly spoke, standing by the door that she hadn’t closed yet.

"What?"

I asked, puzzled, and after a brief pause, Si-eun said,

"Well... thanks for being considerate."

With that, she closed the door.

The sound of the door lock echoed through the house, and the scent Si-eun had left behind tickled my nose.

Standing there, I pondered Si-eun’s words.

Thank you for being considerate. Was it because of the furniture? I told her not to worry about it.

No, rather than that. Was she hesitating all this time just to say that?

The thought made me chuckle bitterly.

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# Chapter 4: Maid's Duty

“It’s delicious today too.”

“Right?”

Si-eun responded with a happy face, savoring the meal.

Again, she couldn't hide her expression. She must really love good food.

Well, I like delicious food too. I took another spoonful into my mouth.

Dinner was curry.

It was a dish I sometimes made on my own. When I was brimming with energy and wanted to use it up somewhere. Like a plane dumping fuel before returning to the runway. Though it was just instant curry.

But today, I was eating curry filled with various vegetables, meat, and sausages. It was bound to be delicious.

Si-eun, who had already emptied her bowl, got up from her seat.

"It's a bit late today, so I'll do the laundry tomorrow. Is that okay?"

"It's fine. There isn't much laundry anyway. I do my own laundry too."

"Really? Well, you don't wear the same clothes every day, at least."

She looked quite surprised. It seemed she had a deeply rooted prejudice about me.

I do my own laundry quite well. I wash socks and t-shirts all at once in the washing machine, even those meant for hand washing.

"Shall I clean the house tomorrow then?"

"I just moved in, so cleaning isn’t urgent. But if you see any particularly dirty spots, please clean them."

"If there are noticeably dirty spots just after moving in, that's a big problem, isn't it?"

"That's true."

I replied dispassionately, and then Si-eun turned around after placing the dishes at the sink. Her gaze felt sharp.

"Why?"

"Well, it's just..."

Si-eun combed her hair with her fingers, thinking.

"What does a housemaid... usually do?"

She asked a fundamental question.

"Preparing meals, cleaning, and laundry, right?"

"But you said cleaning and laundry aren't immediately necessary? Then I don’t have much to do."

"Hmm."

She had a point.

A house that hires a housemaid usually has several members. In my case, living alone, there were only chores that I could handle myself.

If I handed over such minor tasks to someone else, the work would run out quickly. There would be no need for her to stay here.

"Isn't that good?"

I replied while chewing an octopus-shaped sausage.

"Isn't it nice to get paid for not doing anything?"

"I don't like it. Relaxing like that doesn't suit me."

"Really?"

"I like earning what I work for. It makes me feel comfortable. There's a saying, 'If you don’t work, you shouldn’t eat.'"

But you were eating just fine a moment ago...

Si-eun seemed to ponder for a moment, then clapped her hands together.

"Should I be your conversation partner? I'm good at chatting about useless topics."

"No, thanks. You may not know, but talking to others drains a lot of my mental energy."

"Then how about taking a walk together?"

"I hired you because I didn’t want to go outside. I’m not going out."

"How about a study group for our major? I take notes on all the lectures, so it would be helpful."

"Surprisingly, my grades are pretty good. I don’t need it."

"What? If you refuse everything, what am I supposed to do?"

Well, if I don’t like any of it, what do you expect me to say?

But I appreciated her enthusiasm. I hoped she would just rest in her room when there was no work to do.

I put down my spoon and voiced my thoughts.

"Isn't that what a maid does? They stay at home and wait for the employer to give them tasks when there's no work."

But surprisingly, Si-eun looked puzzled.

"Maid?"

"Ah."

I misspoke. My friend had argued that housemaids and maids were the same, so in my mind, they had become synonyms.

"Ah, no. I misspoke."

Though I added that, Si-eun smirked as if she had caught a weak point.

“So, you’re into that kind of play?”

"I told you, I misspoke."

"Do you want me to wear a maid outfit? Is that why you hired me?"

"No..."

She had no intention of listening to my excuses.

Soon, Si-eun looked at me with a smile still lingering on her face.

I hadn’t realized it because we didn’t talk much, but was this her real personality?

Or do social people always tease and joke like this?

“Anyway.”

After getting up with the dishes, I continued.

“Usually, just cooking is fine. And then doing the dishes. After that, I don’t care whether you stay in your room or go out; just do whatever.”

"If you’re okay with it. Fine."

With that answer, Si-eun raised the corners of her mouth again.

“Following the master’s orders is a maid’s duty, after all.”

"Ugh."

How long would she keep teasing me about my slip of the tongue?

For a moment, a feeling surged in my chest.

I wasn’t angry. I knew Si-eun meant no harm.

But, I did want to get back at her a little. She kept teasing me, so I wanted to give her a taste of her own medicine.

So then.

I decided to present an idea that popped into my head.

"Yeah, you’re right. Following the master’s orders is indeed a maid’s duty.”

"Huh?"

When I threw her words back at her, Si-eun tilted her head in confusion.

I continued without hesitation.

"So, I’m giving you an order now."

"An order?"

Si-eun muttered, still not understanding.

With a victorious smile, I said to her,

"From next week, always wear a maid outfit at home."

"...What?"

Si-eun blinked, not understanding at first, then her face turned to one of shock.

She didn’t expect me to actually give such an order. I hadn’t planned on it either.

As I put the dishes in the sink, I added,

"I'll let you change at night so you can be comfortable."

"Wait a minute."

Si-eun interrupted, spreading her palms.

"You didn't mention anything like that in the job posting. I can refuse, can’t I?"

"Many part-time jobs require a uniform. Just consider it a kind of uniform."

"A uniform..."

Si-eun sighed, seemingly at a loss for words. Her eyes grew a bit fiercer, but she didn’t seem to have a good counterargument.

Si-eun, who had been teasing me, was now reluctantly accepting my words. I felt a strange sense of catharsis.

Suppressing the urge to smile, I cleared my throat and said,

"I’ll order the maid outfit today. Start wearing it when it arrives."

"Pervert."

"Why am I a pervert? You’ve been singing about maids since earlier. Didn’t you want to wear it? Maybe you’re the pervert?”

"Pervert...!"

She glared at me fiercely, as if she might grow horns.

I couldn’t withstand her gaze, so I quietly looked away and added,

"You shouldn’t look at your master like that."

"Ugh!"

In the end, Si-eun exploded.

But what could she do?

Following the master’s orders is a maid’s duty, after all.

Leaving Si-eun sputtering nonsensical sounds behind, I retreated to my room.

If it’s like this on the first day, it looks like I’m in for a tough time...

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# Chapter 5: Oversleeping

The next morning.

"Umm..."

When I woke up, it was brighter than usual.

For some reason, the curtain was slightly open.

I was sure I had closed it before going to bed. I didn't dislike sunlight, but I wanted to sleep well. An open curtain interfered with my sleep.

I turned my head and saw the door was slightly ajar too. I distinctly remembered closing it before sleeping.

Had Si-eun come to wake me up?

With blurry vision, I checked my phone. It was 11:45.

On weekends, I usually woke up around 2 or 3 PM.

But today, I woke up to the sound of something boiling, the noise of a knife and cutting board, and the smell of doenjang jjigae (soybean paste stew) stimulating my appetite.

I got out of bed and headed to the kitchen.

As expected, Si-eun was cooking in the kitchen.

She was wearing a floral dress. Although Si-eun usually had a sophisticated style, this simple outfit suited her well.

It seems that clothes do make the man, or in this case, the woman.

Sensing my presence, Si-eun glanced at me.

"You're finally up."

"I usually like to sleep in."

"That's because you stay up late."

Si-eun spoke without stopping her chopping. It seemed she wasn't lying about being skilled at cooking. If it were me, I would have cut off a few fingers by now.

But.

"Hmm?"

Something felt off. There was a point that seemed different from usual. I couldn’t pinpoint what it was.

After thinking for a while, I figured it out.

"Did you not sleep well?"

"What?"

Si-eun tilted her head while putting the chopped vegetables into the pot.

"You look tired."

It was just a feeling. She didn't have dark circles or unfocused eyes, but she somehow looked tired.

It was odd that she knew I stayed up late. If she had gone to bed early, she wouldn't know I was up late.

After hearing my words, Si-eun paused for a moment.

"You're only sensitive to things like this... or maybe you're always watching me.”

She gave an absurd reply.

“I don’t always watch you. I generally don't take an interest in others."

"Is that so?"

Si-eun asked back as if uninterested. It seemed she didn't care about me either.

I opened the fridge, took out a water bottle, and asked.

“So? Did you have trouble sleeping?”

"You're persistent. You said you don't care about others."

"I should be concerned about my employee’s welfare."

"You talk big."

Si-eun muttered sarcastically as she turned off the gas.

"I just couldn't get used to it. Sleeping in a room like this, unlike before."

“I’m sorry. I’ll order a bed quickly.”

"No, that's not what I meant. The room I used to live in was really small. Suddenly sleeping in such a nice room feels weird, that's all."

Was that what she meant?

I wondered how cramped her previous room was. She could have spent less on clothes or cosmetics and gotten a better room...

But for Si-eun, those were likely investments.

Si-eun chuckled.

"You noticed well."

"Well, somehow."

After saying that, I opened the water bottle and drank without touching my lips to it.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Si-eun turning towards me while serving the stew into bowls.

"Wait! That's water for both of us! You should drink from a cup!"

What?

I put the water bottle down and replied.

“It’s a hassle.”

“Even if it’s a hassle, you should use a cup. Isn't that basic courtesy when living together?"

"Yes..."

I shrank back immediately. The courage I had yesterday when I gave Si-eun a counterpunch had long disappeared.

However, she was right.

Si-eun just shared living space and did chores I found bothersome. But starting from yesterday, it hadn’t exactly been that simple.

Living together inevitably meant getting entangled. There was no way around it. It was natural that there would be areas where I needed to pay attention.

Si-eun sighed lightly.

"Honestly, I can't figure you out."

She said curtly, placing the stew on the table.

Is that so? Truthfully, I don’t understand myself either...

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Raei Translations

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After cleaning and doing the laundry during the day, Si-eun went into her room. Later, she prepared dinner and then retreated again.

Did she not go out much on weekends?

Well, she did say she needed to save money. Maybe she didn’t see the need to go out.

Without a TV or books, what did she do?

Then again, she was a computer science major like me. She probably had a laptop.

That night, while staring at my monitor and focusing on coding, I yawned.

The clock at the bottom right showed 3 AM.

Usually, I would stay up until dawn, but today I had woken up early. Naturally, I was feeling sleepy.

Should I wash up and go to bed?

With that thought, I opened my door and headed to the living room.

"Going to bed now?"

Si-eun was looking at me, resting her chin on the dining table.

"Yeah. I woke up earlier than usual today... But why aren't you asleep?"

"I woke up."

Si-eun answered, stretching.

She had said she hadn’t slept well because she couldn’t get used to the new place.

If this kept up, she’d be exhausted. She might even cut her fingers while chopping food.

Looking her straight in the eyes, I said,

"I ordered a bed, so please bear with it until it arrives."

I also ordered a maid outfit.

I roughly estimated her size based on her visible figure, leaving some margin. I didn’t know her exact measurements, and asking would likely earn me a slap.

But Si-eun shook her head.

"Even if you hadn’t. My old room didn’t have a bed either, so it’s not because of that."

"Really?"

Scratching my head, I asked again, and Si-eun averted her gaze before slowly speaking.

"Well... actually..."

"Yes?"

"I feel... tense."

Si-eun whispered, a faint blush coloring her cheeks.

I couldn’t understand her reaction. What was making her tense?

"Tense?"

When I asked, Si-eun frowned and looked up at me.

"Living in the same house with a guy."

She answered hesitantly.

"Didn't you say you were okay with it?"

"I thought I would be."

"And?"

"Living together, we inevitably run into each other. It’s unavoidable."

Ah, so that’s what she meant.

Apparently, Si-eun had the same thoughts I did at lunch. Indeed, living together meant getting entangled.

"As it kept happening, I realized I was really living with a guy."

"Don't worry. I have no intention of doing anything weird."

"I know. You don’t seem brave enough for that."

Is that so?

"I know that, but when I’m alone in my room or while you’re sleeping, I sometimes get anxious for some reason."

"Really?"

"Yeah. It sounds silly, even to me."

Si-eun said, lowering her gaze.

I couldn’t fully empathize with Si-eun’s feelings. But I could understand.

Living with someone of the opposite sex carries that kind of significance.

I wasn’t particularly nervous... But that was probably because I wasn’t normal. Most people would react like Si-eun.

Then, what I needed to do was clear.

"Hey."

I spoke with a serious face.

"Why?"

She looked at me, her face still flushed with red.

To Si-eun, I voiced the thought that had come to mind.

"Should I sing you a lullaby?"

"Are you crazy?"

"Sorry."

In 0.1 seconds, I was met with a sharp glare and dismissed.

But then, Si-eun's lips slowly curved up, and she started chuckling.

"You're really something."

"Is that a compliment?"

"If you want to nitpick, it's not an insult."

"Then I'll take it as a compliment."

"Suit yourself."

With a laugh that was somewhere between a scoff and a chuckle, Si-eun got up from her seat.

"I'm sleepy. I'm going to bed."

"Alright. And you know, you can sleep in if you want. There's no need to get up early."

"If I do that on weekends, my sleep schedule will be messed up, and it'll be hard on weekdays, won't it?"

"You can sleep during lectures."

"That's not something to be proud of."

Si-eun smiled again and said,

"Anyway, thanks."

With that, she returned to her room.

The next day, both of us slept in and ended up having a late lunch with toast, probably because of those words.

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# Chapter 6: Girlfriend

“You look in good shape today?”

Monday afternoon, the first lecture of the week.

As I took my usual spot in the farthest back corner, a friend approached and started talking.

“Not sure. You’ve never seen me in bad shape, have you?”

"Really?"

"I skip class if I’m even a little under the weather."

"Good job."

My friend gave a wry smile.

Well, it's probably better not to come at all than to mess around in the classroom. The professor wouldn’t appreciate that either.

"Still, you seem particularly good today."

As I answered while putting my laptop on the desk, my friend asked, "Right?"

"Is it because your housemaid is helping you?"

"Well, I guess."

I wasn't sure, but it seemed likely.

Thanks to Si-eun, who came as a housemaid, I started waking up relatively early and eating regular meals. Nothing else had changed, so if I looked better, it must be because of her.

But counting to Friday, it had only been four days since Si-eun arrived. How bad had my lifestyle been for it to show results so quickly?

My friend crossed his arms and nodded.

"Spending 500 a month is worth it. You finally look like a human being."

"I didn't look human before?"

"Well... More like someone people didn't want to talk to."

He laughed and made harsh remarks.

Even when I looked like that, he had talked to me.

What a nice guy.

Or maybe he was aiming for a Nobel Peace Prize in the distant future.

Soon, my friend put his hand on my shoulder and said.

"You originally looked okay, but now you look like a person. Since you're living with a housemaid, you won't be awkward talking to women."

After making random statements, he patted my back a few times.

"It's time you got a girlfriend."

"Not this girlfriend talk again..."

I keep saying, I need to make friends first.

It was as annoying as advice from relatives on holidays. Frowning and showing my irritation, my friend made a half-hearted apologetic gesture and left.

If he wanted to boast about having a girlfriend, I wished he'd do it to someone else. I had neither the intention nor the ability to get a girlfriend.

After letting out a light sigh, I checked the time. About five minutes until the lecture started. It was time to start goofing off.

I pressed the power button on my laptop and waited for it to boot up.

From my designated seat in the farthest back corner, my week began like usual...

"Are you slacking off again today?"

...Or so I thought.

A gentle voice came from beside me.

Could she be talking to me?

I turned my head to check and saw an unfamiliar woman looking at me from two seats over.

"Whoa."

I was so surprised that I let out a weird noise.

"Whoa?"

"Oh, no. I was just startled."

“Ahaha. Sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

The woman apologized with a friendly laugh.

She had semi-long hair with a brown tint and large eyes.

Judging by her sitting height, she seemed much smaller than me. She could almost pass for a middle or high school student.

With a bright smile, the woman scooted closer to me.

"Hey, you always sit in the back row, right?"

“Uh, yeah, that’s right.”

As I stammered out a reply, she clapped her hands together.

"Then we're back row buddies!"

"Back row buddies?"

"Ahaha. I always sit in the back too. I lie down and sleep if I don't feel like listening!"

“That doesn’t seem like something you should say so loudly…”

"What does it matter? Senior, you said something similar earlier, didn't you?"

Something similar? Did she mean when I told my friend, "I skip class if I’m even a little under the weather"?

Huh? Wait, did she just call me senior?

While I hesitated, the girl covered her mouth and made an "ah" sound.

“Now that I think about it, I haven’t introduced myself.”

She then bowed her head.

“I’m Han So-hye, a sophomore. You can speak casually with me!”

“Oh, then... I’m Lee Hwi-min, a junior.”

“Ahaha. Nice name.”

“Uh, really?”

“Of course.”

She laughed softly and said,

“Let’s get along as back row buddies. Even though the semester has already started.”

“Oh, sure.”

With another smile, she returned to her seat two spots away.

So-hye seemed to have been sitting in the back all this time.

Of course, I had no way of knowing, as I wasn't even interested in the professor at the front, let alone those sitting two seats away.

She was quite a lively person. The complete opposite of me, to the point where we could be described as polar opposites.

Just having a brief conversation with her drained all the mental energy I had saved up over the weekend.

I felt like my condition had rapidly deteriorated.

Should I skip class tomorrow...?

As I was lost in such thoughts, I felt a gaze from the front.

When I glanced ahead, Si-eun was looking at me. Her face was expressionless, devoid of any emotion.

What now…?

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Raei Translations

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“I didn't expect you to have another friend.”

“What?”

That evening.

As I was wrestling with today’s menu, grilled fish, Si-eun suddenly said this.

“I thought you only had one friend. But today, I saw you talking to someone else, and I was a bit surprised.”

“Oh.”

She must have been referring to the incident during the lecture.

She seemed surprised to find out I had not one but two friends. And the second one wasn’t even a friend, which made it even more pathetic.

As I remained silent, finding it bothersome to explain, Si-eun added another remark.

“Something suddenly occurred to me.”

“Yeah?”

“If you get a girlfriend, I’ll probably get kicked out, right?”

“...Did you eat something weird?”

“If I did, wouldn't you have eaten it too?”

“True.”

Since I wasn’t showing any symptoms, it was clear we hadn’t eaten anything strange.

So why was she saying such odd things out of the blue?

“Well, if I get a girlfriend? I’ve never thought about it.”

I replied vaguely while picking bones out of the fish.

For the record, I don't like grilled fish. Having to pick out the bones while eating is probably the most annoying thing in the world.

“Wouldn’t it be weird? Having a girlfriend while living with another woman. And you could ask your girlfriend to do small household chores.”

“That’s true.”

I agreed casually as I put the deboned piece of fish into my mouth.

Though picking out the bones was annoying, it tasted good. From my experience over the past few days, I learned that Si-eun's cooking skills could be trusted.

After swallowing all the food in my mouth and looking up, I saw Si-eun staring at me. What’s this? Was she angry because I answered too nonchalantly?

“What’s wrong?”

At my question, Si-eun quickly turned her head.

“Just, seeing you chatting with a girl today made me think of it.”

“Are you jealous?”

“...”

“Sorry.”

I immediately apologized as she bit her lip and glared at me.

“It’s not that. I believed that as long as I didn’t quit, I could receive 500 every month. But now I’m worried that I might get kicked out one day.”

It seemed like a serious concern.

“Well, it would be more helpful to worry about the world ending tomorrow than what would happen if I got a girlfriend.”

“Why?”

“Do you think I’d get a girlfriend when I don’t even have friends?”

“They say there are no absolutes in the world.”

Si-eun pointed her finger at me as if teaching a lesson.

“I don’t know for sure, but isn’t that girl the second closest person to you at school? Among girls, she’s probably the closest. Doesn’t that mean there’s a good chance?”

Just having one conversation made her second place? It seemed too easy to climb the ranks. Anyway, nothing would ever happen between me and that girl. There are absolutes in the world.

“No, but.”

When I began to speak, Si-eun tilted her head. Looking at her, I continued.

“If we’re ranking, aren’t you the second closest?”

“...Me?”

Si-eun asked back with a bewildered look. I nodded emphatically.

“Yeah.”

The girl I met today just started talking to me out of the blue. We were strangers and I didn’t even know her name.

But I knew quite a bit about Si-eun, and we had talked dozens of times, connected by her role as a housemaid. We were talking even now.

Si-eun blinked her large eyes and asked,

“What, do you like me?”

“No. I don’t like people.”

“You sound like some edgy teenager.”

She averted her gaze and spoke again.

“Well, there’s no way anything would ever happen between us.”

I agreed with that.

“I think so too.”

After I briefly agreed, Si-eun didn’t say anything more.

Her face looked just a little bit sulky, but that was probably my imagination.

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# Chapter 7: Maid's Outfit

"Huh?"

Friday evening. Si-eun, who had just returned from school, let out a surprised sound.

The reason was simple.

The furniture must have arrived.

While Si-eun was away, the ordered furniture had been delivered.

Since Si-eun had lectures until late in the afternoon, the installation was completed on her behalf. Of course, it wasn’t me who did it, but the man who came with the furniture.

"I realized I hadn't decided where to put it. So, I just installed it in a suitable place. Is it okay?"

"Yeah. It looks fine."

It seemed it wasn't too far off from what Si-eun had envisioned. It was a relief.

Si-eun then turned to me and spoke.

"And in the first place, I'm just borrowing it for a while. It's better to place it where the homeowner wants."

"Well, that's true."

Though I'm not sure if 'borrowing' is the right term, both the house and the furniture belong to me.

In principle, it would be correct for me to decide as I please.

While I was agreeing, Si-eun sat on the newly arrived bed.

Sitting there, she pressed her palms into the mattress.

"Wow, it's really soft."

She looked up at me with sparkling eyes and said.

Si-eun, who had initially insisted that she could sleep on the floor, eventually succumbed to comfort.

It's natural for people to prefer comfort, and Si-eun was no different.

"I thought it would be better to get something good if we were going to buy it anyway, so I picked a nice one."

"Hmm, really?"

Si-eun responded indifferently, but her reaction made me think it was a good choice.

For a while after that, Si-eun sat and lay down repeatedly on the bed, enjoying its softness.

The way she enjoyed it with a bounce made her look like a child playing on a trampoline.

Soon after, Si-eun touched the dressing table, the chair, and then the desk, before finally meeting my eyes.

Her usual confidence was missing from her gaze.

"Thank you."

In Si-eun's thankful eyes, there was a hint of guilt.

She was quick to anger and irritation, but seemed to be quite shy when receiving kindness.

Even when she brought up the topic of the furniture, she took a long time before finally thanking me.

Although we hadn't lived together long, it seemed this was Si-eun's actual personality.

She only wanted to receive as much as she gave and only expected to be compensated for her work. Not calculating, but someone who couldn't live with debts.

However, such an attitude made me uncomfortable. Scratching my head, which didn't itch, I said.

"I'm just lending it for a while. Don't worry too much."

"...Okay."

Si-eun tilted her head and smiled at my words. Her face still carried some guilt, but there was nothing to be done about that.

Hmm.

The atmosphere had softened, so it was time to bring out 'that.'

"Actually, 'that' arrived with the furniture."

When I said this, Si-eun asked, "That?" She looked puzzled. I almost imagined a question mark floating next to her head.

To such a Si-eun, I presented 'that.'

"Here."

At the same time, Si-eun's face turned to one of astonishment.

"This is..."

It was understandable. Because the item I presented was...

"A maid outfit?"

It was a maid outfit.

"Yeah."

"Is it really the time to say 'yeah' so calmly?"

"It's a maid outfit, so I answered that it's a maid outfit."

"No... that's not what I meant..."

Si-eun dragged out her words, sounding frustrated.

But this was payback for teasing me last week. I had no intention of relenting. Only by seeing Si-eun in a maid outfit and teasing her could my revenge be complete.

Si-eun's face was filled with complaints in an instant. The atmosphere from just before had vanished, replaced by a deeply furrowed brow and pouting lips.

"Do I really have to wear this?"

"Don't you want to?"

"Would I?"

"Maybe you would."

"I don't!"

However, life is not about doing only what you like. Silently, I handed the maid outfit to Si-eun, who looked like she was about to cry.

"Ugh, really."

"What's the big deal? I think it'll suit you."

"Shut up..."

Despite her grumbling, Si-eun finally accepted the maid outfit.

"I didn't think you'd tell me your size, so I just guessed. It's not like you're going out in it anyway. It doesn't need to fit perfectly."

"Okay..."

Her reply was resigned, almost lifeless. I wondered if she even heard me, as her eyes seemed half-dead already.

In that state, Si-eun took a few deep breaths and then spoke.

"I'll change, so please step out for a moment."

"Sure."

I obediently left Si-eun's room and closed the door. From inside, I heard a faint sigh.

I hadn't noticed before because I was always holed up in my room, but this house wasn’t soundproof. I should be more careful.

From the room came the sound of fabric rustling, zippers, and clothes dropping to the floor. Then, with a "Ugh...", the zipper sound came again.

"Come in."

Finally, Si-eun's voice called out.

"I'm coming in."

Responding to her, I entered the room.

There she was.

Wearing a long black dress, a light-colored apron with frills, and a white headband. Si-eun stood there with her face flushed red.

"Hmm."

"Don't make noises like 'hmm.'"

"Hmm."

"Don't 'hmm'..."

Her voice was almost inaudible. She must have been very embarrassed.

Surprisingly, the maid outfit suited Si-eun well. No, it wasn't surprising. As I had felt before, the clothes are only as good as the hanger. Anything would look good on Si-eun.

Fortunately, the outfit seemed to fit perfectly. The length of the dress was just right, so there was no worry of it dragging on the floor as she moved.

"It looks good on you."

I conveyed my admiration, which made Si-eun even more embarrassed. She let out an incomprehensible noise and turned her head away quickly.

Was she not used to compliments? Her unusual reaction was quite amusing.

"What the hell is this..."

Si-eun muttered with a bright red face. I noticed small tears forming in the corners of her eyes as she glared at me.

Maybe I had gone too far.

Hiring a housemaid and making her wear a maid outfit, then enjoying her reaction. By normal standards, I had already crossed the line.

"Ah, sorry."

"You pervert."

Even though I apologized, she returned with a reproach.

"I'm not a pervert. I don't have a thing for this kind of stuff."

"You were enjoying it just now."

"..."

I had no comeback for that. I decided to change the subject.

"So, how is it? Do you like the outfit?"

"Do you think I would?"

"Maybe you do."

"I like..."

She trailed off and glanced at the mirror attached to the dressing table.

"...I don't completely dislike it."

"What?"

"What's with that unexpected reaction when you're the one who asked?"

Si-eun snorted.

"To be precise, it's not that I like it, but it's not as bad as I thought. Just that much."

"No, even that much is unexpected."

"What did you think I'd do?"

"I thought there was a chance you'd tear it up and throw it away."

"And you still handed it over so shamelessly?"

Si-eun glared at me with disbelief and then sighed before continuing.

"I considered doing that."

Then she looked down at her maid outfit.

"Thinking of it as a kind of gift... I decided I couldn't just tear it up."

A gift.

That wasn’t my intention, but it seemed Si-eun perceived it that way.

She wanted to receive only as much as she gave and only expected to be compensated for her work. Her personality dictated that she should cherish what she received in return.

"So? Are you saying I should wear this around the house all the time?"

I shook my head at Si-eun's question.

"No. I was just kidding."

I bought the outfit to tease her once. I had no intention of forcing her to wear it and feel uncomfortable.

"I bought it out of spite because you kept teasing me."

"Such a bad personality."

"Maybe that's why I don't have any friends."

"Glad you understand."

Si-eun chuckled. Her cheeks were still slightly red, but she seemed more composed.

"I still think it suits you well."

When I gave her another honest opinion, Si-eun let out a small noise of discomfort. But soon, she puffed out her chest and stood proudly.

"I look good in anything."

"...Hmm."

This confident side of her was much more like Si-eun. I didn't bother hiding the wry smile on my lips.

In that state, Si-eun seemed deep in thought. I wondered what she was contemplating. As I waited quietly, Si-eun finally spoke up.

"Well, maybe I'll wear it once a week from now on."

"Really?"

"Yeah. It's not often you get to wear something like this. Not outside, and definitely not once I quit this job, right?"

Si-eun twirled around, holding the frills of the outfit. A moment ago, she was dying of embarrassment. But after calming down and thinking about it, she probably found the outfit quite pretty.

Then, Si-eun looked up at me with a soft smile.

"Besides."

"Besides?"

"You said it suited me well earlier."

"Huh?"

I did say that. But it was half a joke, meant to tease her. Why was Si-eun using it to tease me back?

For some reason, it felt like the situation had been reversed.

"No, I just meant..."

"You mean you want to keep seeing me in a maid outfit because it suits me so well, right?"

Without waiting for my reply, Si-eun walked past me and stood by the door.

As I stared blankly at her, Si-eun glanced back at me.

Then, with a mischievous smile on her face, she said,

"Be careful not to fall for me."

"What the..."

"I'm going to prepare dinner."

Si-eun left the room before I could offer any excuses.

She really seemed to live as she pleased. She wasn't the type to just take things lying down.

But what could I do? I was the one who hired her.

With no other choice, I followed Si-eun out of the room, sighing.

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# Chapter 8: Snack

"Here."

One leisurely weekend afternoon, Si-eun entered my room without knocking and handed me something.

I looked closely to see what it was. Si-eun was holding a plate of beautifully sliced apples.

"What’s this?"

"What do you think? It's a snack."

Her tone was as if it were obvious. Well, of course. She wouldn’t bring it in just to throw it away.

But that wasn't what I was curious about.

"Why the sudden snack?"

"People say fruits are full of vitamins and good for your health."

Si-eun answered while placing the plate on my desk.

"You always just eat meals, drink coffee, don't exercise, and stare at the monitor all day. Living like that is bad for your health, so I thought I should at least give you something like this."

"So, you bought the fruit thinking about my health?"

"Yeah."

Si-eun nodded without hesitation.

She had taken care of me without being asked. It was endearing. I even felt a warm sensation in my chest.

As I was about to thank her, Si-eun added in a serious tone.

"If you die, I won’t be able to earn 500 a month."

I took back my thanks.

She could have just left me with the misunderstanding.

"Come on. Do you think I'll really die?"

"You might. There’s no order to these things."

"There are plenty of people who would go before me. Besides, I feel healthier these days since you've been cooking for me."

"Maybe that's your body's last struggle?"

"No, it's not."

Why did my friend and Si-eun both seem so eager to talk about my death?

Soon after, Si-eun leaned close to the monitor. Her long hair brushed past my face, leaving a fresh scent.

I followed her gaze to the screen. It was filled with various graphs, formulas, and source code. It wouldn’t be interesting to her.

Si-eun turned her face towards me and asked,

"Do you make money with this?"

"Something like that."

"I don’t know what it is, but it looks impressive."

"It's not a big deal."

"How can it not be a big deal when you make so much money?"

Si-eun chuckled and moved away from the monitor.

I thought she might leave now, but instead, she sat gently on my bed.

What?

"Do you have something to say?"

"No."

"Then why are you staying in my room?"

"Is that not allowed?"

Her tone of confusion left me speechless.

Is it okay to enter someone else's room and sit on their bed? I had no idea. I had never visited a friend's house because I had no friends.

"It's not that it's not allowed."

There was no reason to kick her out, so I decided to continue what I was doing. If she wasn’t a distraction, her presence made no difference.

But that thought didn’t last long. Shortly after, I heard a bored voice from behind.

"You stay home all weekend, huh? You did the same last week."

It seemed she had no intention of just sitting quietly.

She had mentioned it before. She said she had a knack for pointless chatter and offered to keep me company. This might be part of that. Regardless of my opinion.

I typed on the keyboard and spoke.

"I don’t have anyone to meet if I go out. If there’s no one to meet, it's better to stay home."

"Really?"

Her response sounded disinterested. Why did she even ask?

"What about you?"

"Me?"

"Yeah. You stayed home last week and this week. Do you also hate going out?"

"No. I like going out and hanging out with my friends. Staying home all the time is boring."

"Well, I can't relate."

"It's because you don’t have friends."

You’re absolutely right.

Si-eun had a personality quite different from mine. She preferred being with others over being alone, and she liked being outside more than staying home. Besides, she had many friends. Staying in her room must have made her restless.

"Why don’t you go out and have fun? I’ll contact you if I need anything."

Despite my generous offer, Si-eun flatly refused with a "No."

"Having fun costs money. I need to save every penny, so I can't afford that."

"Hmm... I see."

I turned my head slightly at her response.

Si-eun was sitting with her knees up, resting her chin on them. Her posture clearly showed how bored she was.

In the end, since going out costs money, she decided to stay and chat with me instead. She had said she would keep me company, but it turned out she wanted me to keep her company.

"Aren’t you bored just working on the computer all the time?"

"Aren’t you a computer science major? You shouldn’t say things like that."

"Well, you’re right."

Si-eun laughed happily, finding something amusing.

"But I don’t really understand."

"Understand what?"

"I just came here because it matched my grades and offered the most scholarships. Honestly, I don’t know if I find computers or programming interesting."

"Ah."

I hadn’t known that.

From what I had seen of her class behavior and the rumors about her grades, I hadn’t noticed it at all.

But looking deeper, it made sense.

From a young age, she had been taking care of household chores, becoming proficient in cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Even if she wanted to have fun, she held back to save money. She had entered a field she didn’t even like just to secure a scholarship.

This was the life Si-eun had been living.

"Don’t take it too seriously. It's just how things are."

Si-eun brushed it off as if it were no big deal.

With nothing to say in return, I simply responded,

"Okay."

And with that, I fell silent.

The room was filled with only the sounds of my typing, the occasional creak of the bed, and even the whirring of the computer's fan.

I was just relieved the distraction was gone and focused on coding again.

As I was getting into the zone, I heard a soft thud from behind.

I turned to see Si-eun lying on my bed.

"...What are you doing?"

"Lying down."

"I can see that."

"Then why did you ask?"

"That’s not what I meant."

"Then what?"

"I was asking why you’re lying on my bed."

"Don’t you like it?"

Si-eun tilted her head while lying down and asked.

Did I dislike it? No, it wasn’t that. It was more like...

"It feels like you're being too careless."

"Huh?"

For a moment, Si-eun looked confused.

"Oh, is that what you meant?"

Realizing my point, she gave me a sly smile.

"You said you wouldn’t do anything weird, right?"

"True, nothing would happen. But have you ever considered that you might be wrong in your judgment?"

Life is unpredictable.

What if, while crossing at a green light, a truck suddenly comes speeding towards you? It would be entirely the driver’s fault, but I, an innocent person, could die.

So, it seemed wise to at least entertain the possibility that I could have bad intentions.

But Si-eun smirked arrogantly.

"I’ve never thought about it."

She said this with a challenging expression, almost as if daring me to prove her wrong.

Hadn’t she mentioned feeling nervous about living in a man’s house not too long ago? How much reassurance had my demeanor and actions given her?

Seeing her like that, I couldn’t hold back any longer.

I immediately got up and approached the bed.

"W-what are you doing?"

Si-eun flinched at my movement and tried to sit up. But for some reason, she couldn’t muster the strength and remained motionless.

"Wa-wait...!"

As I approached, Si-eun's face grew more pale.

Ignoring her expression, I continued to stride toward her.

And finally, when I reached her...

"This could happen at any time."

I sat down right next to her and said this.

I wondered if she had come to her senses. But when I looked at Si-eun, who had been scared just moments ago, her frightened expression was already gone. Instead, her face was filled with annoyance.

"You scared me!"

"Well, that was the point."

I intended to teach her a lesson, but she seemed more angry than anything. It was clear that trying to be nice was pointless. I should have just ignored her and continued coding.

Si-eun sighed, stood up, and glared at me sharply.

"Still."

After a moment, she relaxed her expression and began speaking.

"I understand what you were trying to say."

"It doesn't look like you do."

"I was scared, so it doesn't matter."

"Hmm, sorry..."

With no other choice, I apologized, and Si-eun turned away and walked to the door with a displeased look on her face.

She really does whatever she wants. As I was thinking this, for some reason, Si-eun turned back to face me.

"And... my boredom is gone."

"Glad to hear that."

Finding enjoyment in talking with me, huh? She's quite unique.

Si-eun's lips moved again, as if she had more to say.

"Do you have any favorite snacks?"

"I don't usually eat snacks. I only eat fruit if it's available."

"Really?"

Hearing my answer, Si-eun smiled.

"I'll visit you sometimes when I'm bored."

"What?"

With that sudden declaration, she left the room.

From that day on, Si-eun occasionally came to my room with fruit.

It seems she didn't understand what I said at all...

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# Chapter 9: Group Assignment

"Did you hear about it, senior?"

As I was putting my laptop into my bag after the lecture, the girl sitting next to me spoke. It was that sophomore who had called me her seatmate before.

Her name was... Han So-hye, if I remembered correctly.

Were we on speaking terms? I wondered but couldn’t ignore her.

"What are you talking about?"

"What? You really haven't heard?"

"I’m asking what."

"The group project."

"Group project?"

I had no memory of it. There was no need to remember.

Any important announcements during the lecture would be posted on the course website anyway.

But So-hye wagged her finger at me like she was scolding me.

"Senior, you can't do that. As a university student, even when you’re napping in class, you should be listening to the professor."

"Well, you shouldn't be napping in the first place..."

I was no better, as I was often distracted on my laptop.

"So, why are you telling me this?"

Why was she telling me about this?

We weren’t particularly close. We weren’t even acquaintances, just two people who had exchanged a few words once.

In response to my question, So-hye blinked and answered.

"The professor said we need to form groups of two to three people. He also mentioned that working alone is prohibited and that we should learn collaboration and version control for code."

A troublesome professor.

I had a similar experience in my second year. Back then, I ignored the warning to form a group and completed the assignment alone.

The professor then scolded me for not joining a group, and I had to endure the humiliation of saying, "I don't have any friends..." with my head hung low.

Ugh, my head...

"So?"

Clearing my mind of the traumatic memories, I asked. So-hye placed her hand on her chin and tilted her head slightly.

"So what?"

"Huh?"

"Isn't it obvious? I'm asking you to do the project with me."

So-hye covered her mouth and chuckled.

"You and me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

I asked in confusion, and So-hye let out a bitter laugh.

"My friends and I take other classes together, but I don't have any friends in this class."

Is that so? I had one friend, but he had plenty of people to partner with, so there was no room for me, leaving me in the same situation.

No, now there were two of us.

I glanced at the spot where Si-eun usually sat. She had already left, probably for her next lecture.

"So, I was worried about what to do if a group project came up. Then I looked next to me and saw someone in the same boat."

"That someone is me?"

"Yes!"

She answered so cheerfully. In other words, she thought I looked like I had no friends. It was even more painful because it was true.

"Hmm..."

I pondered for a moment.

I didn’t want to relive the trauma of last year. So I had to join some group.

But unlike in gym class in middle and high school, the professor wouldn't partner with me. Ideally, I should join a group with a friend, but I had none.

That meant I had to team up with a stranger.

If that was the case, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to team up with someone in the same situation.

"Okay."

I nodded in agreement, and So-hye clapped her hands.

"Wow! Thank you!"

Her face lit up with a bright smile.

Was she that happy? She might have been worried about how to form a group in a place full of seniors.

"Then, senior."

"Yeah."

When I replied briefly, So-hye, holding her phone, asked,

"Can you give me your KakaoTalk ID?"

"Oh, uh, sure."

Of course, we needed a way to contact each other if we were going to be in the same group. We needed at least one communication channel.

As I called out my ID letter by letter, So-hye carefully tapped it into her phone. Though she was already small, her actions seemed even more childlike.

After giving her the last letter, she tilted her head in curiosity.

"Senior, you don't have a profile picture?"

"I just didn't set one. No one contacts me anyway. Besides, I don’t like taking photos."

"Oh, you shouldn't do that."

"Why not?"

So-hye smiled mischievously, lifting one corner of her mouth.

"You have a handsome face; you should show it off."

"...I don’t think so."

"Oh, senior, are you embarrassed?"

It's your fault.

Before I could retort, So-hye quickly said, "See you next time!" and hurried away with quick steps.

This is why I hate talking to social butterflies...

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Raei Translations

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"Did you hear about it?"

That evening, Si-eun came into my room, saying she wanted to put away the laundry she had finished.

She asked quietly.

"Hear about what?"

I stopped typing and looked to the side.

Si-eun was sitting on the bed, looking at me. Next to her were neatly folded clothes, stacked in an orderly fashion. When I did it, I would just fold them roughly and toss them aside.

Si-eun, noticing my gaze, turned her eyes to the clothes next to her and spoke.

"The talk during the lecture."

"During the lecture?"

There was only one course Si-eun and I attended together. It must have been something mentioned there.

Now that I thought about it, I did recall hearing something similar after that lecture.

"The group project?"

When I asked, Si-eun looked somewhat surprised.

"So, you actually listen in class?"

"Saying it like that makes me feel like trash."

The truth was, I wouldn't have known if So-hye hadn't told me. Yeah, I guess I am trash.

"What are you going to do?"

Si-eun fidgeted with her hands on the bed as she asked.

"Don’t you have any friends to work with?"

"Well, I don’t have any 'friends' to work with."

There was a junior who wasn’t exactly a friend, but I was unsure how to explain this. Just then, Si-eun spoke up.

"Want to work with me?"

"...?"

"Were you just imagining something weird?"

"No, I wasn't."

Weird imagination, my foot. I was just momentarily puzzled.

"Why do you suddenly want to work with me?"

I asked bluntly, and Si-eun brushed her hair back with one hand.

"Just because. You don’t seem to have anyone to work with anyway. Plus, it’s convenient since we live in the same house, so we don’t need to arrange meetings."

"True."

She had a point.

The hardest part about group projects is getting the members to meet. Often, the most desperate person ends up doing all the work.

But Si-eun and I lived in the same house. Unless one of us decided to run away, we’d inevitably see each other.

"So, what do you think?"

Si-eun asked softly.

"I appreciate the offer, but..."

Si-eun had good grades. Her coding skills might not match mine, but she was meticulous. We wouldn’t have to worry about losing points if we worked together.

"But?"

"The truth is, I already agreed to work with someone else."

Si-eun looked surprised and turned her gaze to me.

"If you're talking about your only friend, he already has a group."

"I know. It’s not him."

"Then who?"

"I agreed to work with the girl who talked to me the other day."

For a moment, Si-eun’s expression changed. It felt like an electric shock passed through the air. Her face even frowned slightly.

"Are you close with her?"

"No."

"Then why are you working with her?"

"She asked me. She said she didn’t have any friends in that class. So, I thought it wouldn’t be a bad idea."

I didn’t know why I was explaining all this to Si-eun.

It wasn’t a lie, and I had nothing to hide. Though I didn’t understand her expression, there was nothing to conceal.

After listening to my explanation, Si-eun crossed her arms. Because of this, her chest stood out more against the thin fabric. I had to look away naturally.

Si-eun seemed to contemplate for a moment before asking,

"Could you ask if I can join too?"

"You want to join us?"

"Yes."

"But if she's in, we can't work at home. Wouldn't that be inconvenient?"

"No."

I asked the obvious question, but Si-eun firmly denied it.

"Do you remember what I said before? That if you got a girlfriend, I'd have to leave?"

"Yeah, I remember."

The logic was that if I got a girlfriend, she couldn't stay with another girl in the same house. Moreover, simple tasks could be handled by the girlfriend.

Why was she bringing this up? I frowned, prompting Si-eun to explain further, rubbing her chin.

"If a guy and a girl work on a group project together, who knows what might happen? At our age, feelings can develop, and if you get closer, I might get kicked out."

"There's no need to worry about that..."

"It's better to take the risk and work with you. I can’t find another part-time job that offers room and board plus 500 a month."

Her tone was resolute. It was clear she wouldn’t accept refusal or rebuttal. There was no reason to reject her request anyway. If she wanted to join, why not?

I nodded.

"Alright."

Then I picked up my phone from the desk.

"I’ll ask her now."

"Okay."

I opened KakaoTalk, and at the top of my friend list was "Han So-hye." I opened the chat and typed a message, letter by letter.

[Got something to ask you.]

This should suffice.

I pressed send, and within seconds, my phone buzzed.

[What is it, senior?!]

A loud message arrived with a sparkling eyes emoji.

I typed my request into the phone.

[Do you know Yoo Si-eun? She's a junior and the student council president of our department.]

Again, the reply came quickly.

[I know her! She’s such a pretty senior! I’m so jealous!]

There was a crying emoji attached. I didn’t care if she was jealous; it was just good that she knew her. I continued typing.

[She wants to join our group project. Is that okay with you?]

I pressed send.

I expected an immediate response again, but there was silence for a while. Wondering if she disliked the idea, I was about to type [Never mind if you don't want to], but then a message came through.

[That’s fine!]

A short answer with no emoji. Maybe she couldn’t find the right one? I wasn’t sure, but since she said it was okay, there shouldn’t be a problem.

As I thought this, my phone buzzed again. Another message? I checked the screen.

And there it was.

[But senior,

what’s your relationship with Si-eun?

Are you guys dating?]

The message came with a large question mark emoji next to a curious face.

...What?