

The House with a Vine Tree

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Thanks to My Parents

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A Place for Me

The house with a vine on the walls gave nutrients all year round. The leaves served as a screen to play games under the tree in the summer season. The tree gave sweet and juicy green grapes in autumn. Even though the branches were weak and scanty, the tree could withstand a little boy and three little girls climbing the walls. My family is six, my parents, my older sister Jin, me, Pil, and younger brother Bin. He was born in the year when the house was built. My mother often said if my younger sister, Pil, were a boy, Bin would not have been given birth. If I were a boy, would not Pil have been born? As if my older sister, Jin, were a boy? Anyway, we grew up with the vine tree in God's blessing.

My Name

Everyone has a name. I have one, Sunhee, which means a good woman with hospitality. I was named by a fortuneteller. No appreciation did I hold my name, I realize how perfect it is upon searching for my inherent fortune. When called by my name, I feel the surging of self-worth in my heart. Also, I like the way it sounds just like Sunny! How easy it is to memorize! The only drawback is my first name, Ihn, which is quite a rare one. The numbers of those with the same last name is only about 22,000 in my homeland. When a new year began, a new class I entered. And I heard from the new teachers and classmates over and over, “I’ve never heard your family name before! Ihn, is it?” Yes. My family name is Ihn, and there are five of six in my family. We are all Ihns.

Three Ugly Baby Dolls

The three cute and chubby baby dolls on the shelf were called ugly baby dolls. They had unique masks such as crying, angry, and smiling. My mom said they resembled my sisters and me, and we often fought to own the smiling one. We all shouted, "This is mine, and those are yours!" One day, my mom got called from my school because I had ruined my desk by carving my name on it. After coming back home, she got angry and scolded me. At night, being alone, the dolls seemed to say to me, "Don't cry. You are not alone." Then I asked the dolls, "Why are you crying? Why are you angry?" They answered, "You don't like me" "Sorry, how can I make you happy?" "Just play with me." Since that day, I've never fought with my sisters about the dolls.

Do we resemble them?



Extreme Job, Mother

My mom gave birth to her four children. Despite her eagerness to get a job, never did she. Instead of that, she works for her family as a mother, the only job she has. Being a child, I deemed adults never got sick because my mom didn't. I remember she was bleeding with her thumb almost cut in half when cooking, and the cure she did was only putting on a Band-Aid. Serving for us, she could have no time to be sick. One day, my dad, who had been working for NIS (National Intelligence Service of Korea), lost his job. Unjust, unfair happened to him. My mom cried and cried and cried every day and everywhere, as though the sky collapsed on her. I felt like I had to growing up quickly and get a job since my dad no longer had one. My mom desired for her daughters to work and not to give birth too many as she did. As she wished it, I am working, and so is she. She is working as a mother and grandmother of her four children and six grandchildren.

Drumstick

My family loves eating chicken. Needing additional nutrients, we usually eat Korean chicken soup, Samgyetang, especially in the summer. We also eat fried chicken on weekends or for late-night snacks. Yes! It is the go-to menu for my family. The problem was all of us liked drumsticks. We were six but had only two drumsticks. My mom always gave them to my dad and my brother. I sometimes crumbled and cried, I like it too!” Then she gave me the wing or breast, saying, “It has better taste and is healthier.” Why did she give the privilege to the men in my family, although she was a woman herself? I am sure she was subjected to the same discrimination when she was a child, too. She told me the reason why she disliked eating barley. Her mother gave white, smooth-tasting steamed rice to her brothers while she did steamed barley to her and her sisters because rice was more noble and valuable than barley. When served a fish dish, she ate the head instead of the body where the meat was, saying, “The tastiest piece of a fish is the head.” I knew she secretly preferred the meaty body now that I understand she sacrificed herself for her family. Nowadays, I can grab drumsticks as much as I want in the markets. How lucky I am! However, the neck is my go-to piece.

A Snail Brooch

Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way! It's the season of Christmas and the coming New Year. The song rang out all over the streets crowded with people and fascinating sculptures. What a fantastic world it was! Despite feeling cramped and worrying about losing my dad in the crowds, I couldn't be happier. It was the day in a year when my dad took my siblings and me to a department store, which was rare and thus special, to buy stationery goods for new school year. He never gave us gifts on our birthdays except that day. That's why I waited for the day for around a year. Notebooks, pencils, pencil cases, erasers, rulers, and anything else needed for school were given to me as gifts. Everything was sparkling, new and neat. When heading back home, a tiny twinkling object on the shelf captivated my attention. A pink snail brooch spiked with cubics. When my friends see me wearing it, they will surely die of jealousy. What a deliciously tempting imagination it was!

I asked my dad, "Daddy, I want to get this."

He answered, "No, it is jewelry for women, not little girls."

I almost cried, begging, "I can keep it hiding until I become a woman. Please buy it for me! Please, please!"

"No," my dad stood his ground.

"I will be a nice daughter." I was hopeful he'd relent.

"No!" He still persisted.

"I don't want anything else but this!" I challenged him

"No!" He was firm.

"I promise I will be the top of the class!"

That night, I fell asleep holding the brooch in my hands and became a beautiful woman decked with it in my dream.