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석사학위논문

Have You Ever Seen Him?

(그 사람을 본 적이 있나요?)

제주대학교 통역번역대학원

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양진원

2021년 2월

Have You Ever Seen Him?

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Have You Ever Seen Him?

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Story Listening Class

A child who listens well, can talk well!

Looking for a few students on a first come, first served basis!

Free one-month trial lesson!

- Story listening class of children's story writer Oh Joy -

Seven years ago, BAM! I started my literary career as a children's book writer. At that time, there was nothing to be afraid of. I thought all I had to do was to write and readers just had to read. However, however! How come it is so hard to find anybody who claims to read my book unless they are hiding somewhere and reading it secretly. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack!

"I guess a writer is not that great a job."

"Is your book even being sold in bookstores?"

"Writing is good. But can't you write while you have a job?"

The longer the obscure writer's suffering lasts, the more the naggings from my family. Even when I'm cooped up in my room, fiercely trying to come up with a story, they think I'm just goofing around in there. I was upset. How come they don't look at me when I try to write a story, but they do when I surf the net. I was feeling lonely because it seemed like my family, as well as my readers were drifting away from me. What had happened to my guts that made me feel I could write anything just like that? I couldn't even find peace of mind to enjoy solitude while drinking coffee on my balcony.

“I didn’t start to write stories to become famous! The true writer is supposed to be solitary.”

Whenever I said something like this, my sister-in-law, who likes to nag at me, made a comment.

“Hey, the great writer Oh! You are enjoying the odd indulgence with insignificant solitude!”

Odd indulgence? Hmm...

Yes, when I think about it, it was not solitude. It was an excuse for loneliness. What’s more, I still live with my mother even though I’m a full-grown adult. It’s embarrassing to face my family. One year, I had zero income, so they cornered me as a weird careerist who has a job as a writer but has no income. However, however! I wanted to write. Whether people recognized me or not, and whether there was a publisher who wanted to publish my book or not, I wanted to write. But I had to work and make money since I was getting silent pressure from my family. But the work shouldn’t take too much of my time. In that sense, ‘story listening class’, which came to my mind suddenly, was perfect.

“I do work now!”

I came back home after posting flyers for ‘story listening class’ that I made myself on the entrances of neighborhood apartment buildings. I started it in a fit of anger but it was not a joke at all. Whether they listen well because they have good understanding or whether they get better understanding because of their good listening, anyhow, in order to speak well, they need good listening training first. “Talking a lot and talking well is definitely different!”, I said proudly about my ‘story listening class’. But, what I really thought in my mind was like this:

‘If they don’t want to read it, I’ll read it to them. Do they have to read a book? Can’t they just listen to it? I’ll read to them.’

After talking big and posting flyers, all I had to do was show my family that I work. I didn't know why but I was all nervous and anxious. If no child shows up, my family could get me wrong and think that I am goofing around just because I don't want to work.

'What if no one shows up? Should I have gone with a free trial for three months? But what if I have a bunch of children swarming in? I hope just five children show up. Haha,' I thought by myself.

Worries, expectations, and excitement came at once, making my heart pound.

"Will people send their children to a class where they only hear the story?", my mother asked, sitting next to me.

"It's a time when you have to speak well, and there are so many kids who don't know what they're talking about and of course, people who listen to them also don't have any idea what the kids are saying. It's all because they don't learn how to listen to others properly. Kids should listen carefully and talk, but they can't communicate because they're just talking about themselves. Just let them come, I'll make them to be in the top one percent of well-listening students in Korea," I said.

My groundless big-talk could be in line for a bestseller, maybe a steady bestseller.

"This is so like you. I don't know what you are up to," my mother said as she picked up the flyer I made, with a suspicious look.

Contrary to my mother's worries, the phone began to ring the next day.

"Is that an oratory class? I'm worried because my child stammers," a woman asked.

"This is a story listening class," I replied.

"Is that an essay tutoring class?", another caller asked.

"This is a story listening class."

"What's a story listening class?", a third caller asked.

"It's a class where you listen to stories."

"What is that place for?", a fourth caller asked.

"This place is for listening to stories." I replied, a little annoyed.

"Is that……"

"This is……."

Why not call the chicken restaurant and ask, "What's that place doing with chicken?" Of course, I'm glad that people are calling and asking questions, but it felt very weird. And then I thought, 'Oops!' It's because I thoughtlessly put up the flyers without deciding what stories to tell them. I quickly went through the bookshelf. This work was different from meeting readers in writing. It's a story told in a voice. I had to tell them stories, ones that tickled the children's minds and hearts and ones that made their mouths twitch.

What is it? What is it? Why? Why? A story where children can wonder and have fun talking about them.

I looked through fairy tales, self-improvement books, classics, novels, and even Korean dictionaries.

'Oh no. What story should I tell them?', I wondered by myself.

The first story to open a "story listening class", should have been to open the children's hearts wide. However, I couldn't find such stories.

Then, something hit me like lightning.

'Open your heart? Yeah, that's it!'

Have I been a writer who's opened one's heart to readers...? Have I been a writer who would have kept a hidden story deep down in my heart, and only talked about stories after I racked my brains?

If a writer who hasn't opened her heart to her readers, the readers may have already known that, even before she started. Why did I just realize that now? If I treat even the new children with that kind of heart... No way. The whole heart! To open the hearts of listeners, the storyteller must open her heart first. Close your heart and talk only with your mouth? You shouldn't.

I put back the books I had taken out of the bookshelf. There is a story that has not been told to readers yet and is hidden in my heart. I want to hide it because it's embarrassing and shabby, but I shouldn't hide even the man who shared his warm love... I haven't given the children warm love as he has, yet. However, I am confident that I can convey his love well. Because I'm a story writer.

I will now convey his love to the coming children. I'm going to blow up the balloon of bravado of a virtuous writer and approach them as a genuine writer, even if I'm not very good at it. I'm so glad that the sudden tension has made me look back. Haha!

'I have a story that I really want to tell you!', I was thinking by myself.

I finally met the three children.

Jongwon, Sowon, and Nagyung. Jongwon and Sowon are siblings; Jongwon is in the fifth grade and Sowon is in the first grade. Nagyung is a fifth grader in the same school as Jongwon, but she was in a different class. Jongwon's parents sent him because he was so impatient that they thought it would be better if he knew how to listen to others, and it was clear that his parents sent Sowon along the way with her brother, since the flyer says there's no age limit and it's free for a month. But Nagyung

came on her own. Her dream is to be a children's book writer, and she came just because she saw "Children's book writer, Oh Joy." on the flyer. Good. Fewer than expected, but not bad for the first start. Furthermore, I could even say, "Now, I'm working!" so I can be free from the look of my family that says I have to do some work.

"It's our first day, so think of it as an ice breaking session. Ask if you have any questions." I said to them.

I smiled as brightly as I could. First impression, this is very important.

"I searched 'The Writer, Oh Joy' on the Internet and couldn't find a hit. Are you really a children's book writer? What book did you write? Isn't that from some lame publishing company?", Jongwon asked.

This kid Jongwon, his face was filled with doubts. Did I just hear "really" and "lame"? At that moment, my fist almost popped out, but I managed to hold it in.

The fairy tale "A camel lives in my heart," which came from a huge publishing company called "Village Outside the Door," was written by me", I said.

"Where is that place? And the title is weird, too. Camels should live in the desert."

"It's an award-winning book!", I exclaimed.

"I've never heard of it. I guess it's not a famous award, right? That's so lame." Feeling that my ears are hot, my face must have turned red. Both the award and I were in such a miserable situation since only a few people recognize us. But for children, the problem must have been me, who wasn't famous, not the prize. At least it should have been a writer people had heard of her name, no matter what she wrote. "Out of a million people, only nine hundred ninety-nine thousand and nine hundred ninety-nine people don't know this award, but there are many writers who still want it!", I said.

I gave a lot of strength to the word "award," and shouted loudly since I was upset when I heard the word 'lame'. Being famous doesn't mean you're good at writing like a genius, and just because you're not famous doesn't mean you're worse than a famous writer.

"Your ears are very red. Even your eyes are so round that you look like a red-eared rabbit."

Said Sowon, with her eyes wide open like a rabbit.

Because unlike my mouth, which starts with a loud voice, my tactless ears were getting redder and redder.

"I'll tell you many stories in the future, and I'll make sure to tell you stories about rabbits with short ears," I said.

Whether she pointed me out as a red-eared rabbit or not, Sowon was lovely anyway. A child should be full of innocent imagination like her. To be with such a child, is pleasant and refreshing. But, but! There was a presence that poured cold water on my refreshing heart, and it was Sowon's brother Jongwon.

"Bunny story is so childish," he said.

"How do you know if it's childish or not without hearing it? Whether it's a rabbit or a turtle, the question is what kind of story it contains. Isn't it?", I asked him.

At my words, Jongwon turned his head slightly and looked sulky.

"You're supposed to go to an English school if you don't come here? No homework, no report card, isn't this a perfect tutoring for you? If you don't like it, you can take the English class", I said to him.

"Is it true that all we have to do is listen to your stories?", he asked.

"Of course, we'll have a brief discussion later. But if you feel sleepy while you're listening, you can sleep. I won't force you to listen. It'll be fun to talk about why you dozed off", I told him.

I winked slightly at Jongwon and looked around the children.

Jongwon was still sullen at something, and Nagyung seemed to think it's not bad. Only little Sowon looked inside the house, wondering what was going on here. She didn't seem to know whether she came to study or just to play. She seemed like she didn't know why she was there.

Still, the story class has begun.

And that's how the story began.

First Story: Dear Mr. Crosswalk

"You can think of the first story as a simple test. I get to know you, you get to know me, something like that. I'm going to ask you a few questions when the story is over. Of course, I'll also take questions", I said to them.

I said it while I was making eye contact with one by one.

"You said that there aren't going to be exams!", Jongwon said, immediately vented his dissatisfaction.

"Simple tests and exams are different. There won't be any report cards. You like it?

"Not really..."

Unlike the sour Jongwon, Nagyung opened her notebook on her lap.

"What kind of questions are you going to ask?"

"I'm not going to ask traditional questions like subject matter, subject or a character's personality. I'm just trying to find out how good you are in the sense of listening. Um..... Maybe just to guess if it was a real story or someone made it up? What's certain, is that it's a story that hasn't been introduced into any book", I answered.

"Maybe it could be a real story?", Nagyung asked again.

Nagyung, who asked questions with a tight grip on the mechanical pencil, looked unusually aggressive. I was almost entangled by her quick and sharp question. What a strange war of nerves from the very beginning.

"Let's talk about it again when the story is over", I said. "Depending on the progress of the story, it could last several days. So, you have to pay attention and listen carefully. If you miss even one day, it'll cause a huge vacuum in the story, so don't be late or absent. Okay, then. Let's start."

"Yes!", Nagyung exclaimed.

"Title: Dear, Mr. Crosswalk."

"No, no!"

Mr. Crosswalk grabbed the arms of the twin brothers who were about to cross the road.

"Wait a minute. Mr. Crosswalk, is that a person's name?", asked Nagyung, writing 'Mr. Crosswalk' in her notebook.

"You can't do this. We're in the middle of a test", I said to her. "Whether it's a person's name or not. If it's a person's name, you should find out why he got that name. You can ask the question when the story is over. Okay, Nagyung?"

"Yes."

"Then let's start again", I said.

How surprised the twin brothers who are now in the second grade must have been? Mr. Crosswalk, who suddenly appeared, was wearing a yellow safety helmet for the construction site. It was not just a safety helmet, but a helmet with a red circle on the front and back, and a green circle on both sides. It wasn't only the helmet, he was also carrying a carpet rolled like a pillar. It was ridiculous. It may sound funny, but if you look at him for yourself, It looked quite strange. I mean, he is an adult, for God sake.

"Are you telling us to believe that? Why is an adult wearing such a hat? I don't think we have to go through a test. I know the answer. This story is a fake, right?, Jongwon said.

"You get out, now, quick!", I snapped at him.

The back of Jongwon's head, which popped out exceptionally round, caught my eye. What a nice shape for a finger flick! If I hit it, it would probably make a nice pop sound. But I put on a smile, leaving behind the temptation of a flick. I don't want Jongwon to know what I'm thinking.

"You, Jongwon, can't change the answer later. Do you have any more questions?"

"No."

A student who is very impatient with a teacher who has a temper like me. Oh, my.

"When does this story take place? Is this a recent story?", Nagyung asked.

I flinched for a moment. Nagyung asked a surprise question during a brief pause in the conversation.

"Well, perhaps about 20 years ago?", I replied.

"What a lame old story.", Jongwon, leaning on the sofa, grunted.

The back of his head was bulging out like a small gourd... One day, I'll smack a finger flick on the back of his head.

"It's not that old story. It's just our story. A story of people's lives.", I said to him.

With patience, I spoke with a coaxing tone. I also didn't want to give up on Jongwon. What is this place? It's a story listening class. It is also my new job to make Jongwon focus on the story and listen to it until the end.

"Can I go on with the story now?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing?", the older one of the twin brothers asked Mr. Crosswalk, taking out his hand from Mr. Crosswalk's hand.

"It's dangerous, you should cross the street at a crosswalk.", Mr. Crosswalk said.

"But there's no crosswalk.", the older brother replied.

There was no crosswalk on the two-lane road in front of the back gate of Arirang Apartment. Whether it's left or right from the back gate, you had to walk a long way to get to a crosswalk. But not many kids went that far to cross at a crosswalk. When there was no car, they just rushed across. This is really dangerous behavior. So, the people of Arirang Apartment asked the ward office to set up a crosswalk, but there was still no crosswalk. They said they will set up one, but they were just saying it with excuses like road plans.

Anyway, Mr. Crosswalk put down his backpack on the floor which he was carrying on his back. Then he took the rolled carpet out of the

backpack.

"Wait and see.", he said to them

Mr. Crosswalk stood up with that carpet and looked at the road, and then he put it on the road quickly when no cars were coming. Oh, my God, it was a crosswalk! It was a carpet crosswalk with white stripes on black cloth. It was narrower than a real crosswalk, but still, you could tell it was a crosswalk. So, it was a mobile crosswalk. Mr. Crosswalk smiled at the twin brothers.

"There you go. It's a crosswalk.", he said.

Mr. Crosswalk quickly walked to the center of the road. Then he blew the whistle hanging around his neck. He was sending signals to the drivers.

FWEET! FWEET! FWEEEEEEET!

The sound of the whistle slowed the cars coming from afar. Although Mr. Crosswalk looked a bit funny, they must have thought he was a volunteer traffic controller. The driver stopped before the carpet crosswalk at Mr. Crosswalk's signal. Only then did Mr. Crosswalk signal the twin brothers to cross the road.

FWEET!

The twin brothers were amazed and crossed the carpet crosswalk. The drivers saw it up close and knew it wasn't a real crosswalk, but they just smiled. What else could they do? The children were crossing. When the twin brothers crossed the street, Mr. Crosswalk turned his helmet around and made the green circle come forward. Then he blew the whistle to let the cars pass.

FWEET! FWEET! FWEEEEEEET!

After the cars stopped, the twin brothers ran giggling forward. The soft crossing was fun, too. Mr. Crosswalk let another lady with a shopping basket cross the carpet crosswalk. Then he rolled up his carpet

crosswalk.

The back gate of Arirang Apartment is not a busy road. It was only a little crowded in the morning when the kids went to school and the adults went to work. Perhaps that's why the ward office didn't hurriedly set up a crosswalk. But Mr. Crosswalk thought differently. The fewer cars there are, the faster the drivers are. That's why an accident can be very serious when it happens.

It was the next morning. The back gate of Arirang Apartment was noisy. I'm talking about the same road that the twin brothers crossed yesterday. Until then, the security guard has helped children to cross the road, but today, tada! There was a crosswalk! With Mr. Crosswalk in a traffic light safety helmet.

"Is there some kind of event?"

"This is fun."

"Let's cross the road, the light is green."

Both adults and children enjoyed it. The crosswalk was just drawn on the carpet, but it felt much safer than just crossing the street without it. Amazing, huh? Anyway, thanks to the carpet crosswalk, the cars have reduced their speed from afar, and stopped before the crosswalk.

Standing at the center line, he used the green color of his safety helmet to be seen from both sides when people crossed the road, and when cars passed by, he quickly turned his hat so that the green color could be seen from the front and the back. It was a hand-operated traffic light. Haha.

He and the security guard worked well together. When Mr. Crosswalk stopped cars, the security guard let people cross the road, and when Mr. Crosswalk let the cars pass, the security guard stopped people from crossing the road. That's how the children's commute time was over

without knowing it.

"Where are you from?", the security guard asked Mr. Crosswalk.

"I was just passing by", he replied, smiling shyly.

"Are you from some volunteer group?", the security guard asked again.

"No."

"Then what's with the hat and the crosswalk? Did you make it yourself?", the security guard asked, a little confused.

"Yes."

"Interesting guy, Hahaha. Thanks to you, the children have crossed the road safely", the security guard said.

Mr. Crosswalk tied the rolled carpet crosswalk to his backpack tight.

"Leaving, now? See you again."

"Yes."

Mr. Crosswalk carried his backpack and walked along the street to the right where you could see the octagonal pavilion.

The next day and the next day, Mr. Crosswalk showed up every morning like clockwork. People didn't think strange of him anymore. He didn't say much and he was in a weird outfit, but people didn't feel repulsed because of his special carpet crosswalk. But some hot-tempered drivers were annoyed.

"Why is there a crosswalk one after another? I'm in a damn hurry.", one driver asked angrily.

"Don't just let the kids cross the street, let us go, too", another driver snapped.

But most drivers waited patiently. Mr. Crosswalk didn't stop the cars unduly. He was getting more and more familiar faces. A grandmother, who works out around the octagonal pavilion every morning, even waited for Mr. Crosswalk to finish his work, to give him peaches.

"You're having a hard time every morning. Try these peaches", she said to him.

"It's all right."

"Just want to thank you, take them", the grandmother insisted.

"Thank you."

Mr. Crosswalk took the bag from the grandmother. And he took out a peach. It was a juicy peach that peeled easily. It was really sweet and cool.

"Where do you live?", she asked him.

"I live behind that octagonal pavilion over there", he answered.

To the right of the back gate of Arirang Apartment, there was a mountain path that goes up to the octagonal pavilion. Mr. Crosswalk was living in a junk shop that was a little further down the back road of the octagonal pavilion.

"Behind the octagonal pavilion, where they built many multiplex housings recently?", she asked.

"No, there's a 'Anything-you-need junk shop' further from the multiplex housings, and I'm staying there.", he replied.

"I've heard there's a junk shop around here, and you live there.", she asked.

"Yes."

"You make a lot of money running a junk shop? Like the old days?", she asked.

"I don't run a junk shop, and I rent an empty room there.", he said.

"I see. You don't look like a local, how long have you lived here?"

"It's been a little less than a year", he said.

"It's good to live here. There's at least a low mountain, and that's rare in a city", Grandma said, dusting off Mr. Crosswalk's backpack.

"What do you two have so much fun talking about?", the security guard

asked.

"At least I should say hello, since he is working hard for us," Grandma said, while getting up from the flower bed.

"I was going to have lunch with him anyway, but you were quick on the move", he said.

"Is that right?"

Grandma smiled happily.

"Hey, let's have lunch together later", the guard asked Mr. Crosswalk.

"Thank you, but I have to go," Mr. Crosswalk replied as he put the peach seed in a bag and then put the bag in a backpack.

"Let's have it together sometime then. Oh, you'll bring that carpet again tomorrow anyway, Why don't you leave it at my security office? Why do you carry that heavy thing every day?", the guard asked.

"Maybe I might have to use it somewhere else. I'll just take it."

"That looks heavy. Okay then, I'll see you tomorrow.", the guard said.

Mr. Crosswalk said goodbye to Grandma and the security guard and went off hurriedly.

After that, she often went to Mr. Crosswalk with steamed corn or sweet potatoes. Then, Mr. Crosswalk ate one at the spot and packed the rest in his backpack. At first, he refused to accept it, but he always took them home in the end. Hahaha.

"Now, that's it for today's story!", I said as I clapped my hands twice as I finished the story.

"What do you think, it's really hard to just listen without saying anything?", I asked them.

"I think I'm dying", Jongwon, who has a pretty back of the head, said as

he stretched his arms.

Even if he doesn't mean it, would it kill him to just say that he enjoyed it? Jongwon disapproved of my story so quickly. After that, my enthusiasm died down a little.

"My mom told me to pay attention to your class, and what am I supposed to tell her? It's about kids crossing a crosswalk. Should I say something like this?", he asked.

"Jongwon, you listened to my story quite hard. That is the story I was telling you, today", I said.

"That's crazy...", he replied.

"How was the story, Nagyung?", I asked.

"Well, it was okay. It's also just sounded like a fairy tale", she replied.

"That's possible. The story was all about a pure heart", I told her.

"I don't like fairy tales full of nice people", Jongwon said with a disapproving look on his face.

"Someone who is nice and someone who is pure is different. What? Do you want me to tell you a story about a really bad person? I'll tell you a story like that someday soon. Do you think fairy tales are all about nice people?", I asked him.

Jongwon's shoulders flinched for a second. Just as many people get it wrong, Jongwon must have misunderstood fairy tales and fairy tale writers. Many people think fairy tales should have a good and loyal child in them, and they think fairy tale writers who write such stories must be innocent and naïve like a child. Some people even think of the writers as 'Sister Bbomi' from "Bbo Bbo Bbo Friends'.

"Bbo Bbo Bbo, fairy tale friends!"

Just to think about it makes me cringe.

Then I saw Sowon, who would have outgrown watching a children's TV show 'Bbo Bbo Bbo Friends'. She was more focused on the snacks on

the table than my story. I tried to tell the story easily so that Sowon, a first grader, could understand. I was wondering whether she liked the story.

"How did you like it, Sowon? Did you have fun?"

"I want to cross that crosswalk, too. But I don't like peaches."

My heart was pounding lightly. Sowon wasn't just eating snacks. She was listening to the story in her own way. Children only listen to what they want to hear. It was my homework to expand the scope of what Sowon wanted to hear.

"What was the title of today's story?", Jongwon asked.

"Dear, Mr. Crosswalk", I said. "You're very interested in the title, aren't you?"

"Because mom's going to ask. If I can't answer, I have to go to English school."

"You and your damn English school...", I said.

I rubbed the back of his head roughly.

"Miss. Oh, what is the genre of this story?"

With a bob hair cut which came down to her ears, Nagyung pressed down on the back of the mechanical pencil to check the lead. There was a hint of willingness to write the answer down right away. Nagyung Yu, who seemed more likely to be a reporter, not a fairy tale writer. I felt like I was being questioned by a reporter, not by a student.

"When we're done with this story, you should try and guess", I said.

"It sounds like a fairy tale about finding a missing person", Nagyung said.

"Finding a missing person fairy tale? Hahaha. Yes, it's that kind of fairy tale. You have a sharp sense!", I complimented her.

I laughed out loud, and hurried because I was afraid Nagyung would ask another question.

"It's late. Hurry back home. No class tomorrow but I'll see you on Wednesday. Bye!", I greeted them.

"Goodbye!"

Finally, the first class with a few students ended with no problem. It wasn't an excellent class, but it wasn't that bad either. I was so nervous that I couldn't even tell if I told the story properly, but it was clear that the distance between the children and I got a little closer. Three times a week, two hours a day. I'm already waiting for the next class, which seemed to be hopeless at first.

"The summer radish kimchi ripened well, so I've made some noodles with it", mother said as she put down the cool summer radish noodles on the table.

"I wanted to eat something cool. Mom, aren't you going to eat?"

"I'm alright, so go ahead and eat."

My mother looked vacantly at me eating noodles.

"It's nice to see you with kids, but you're not doing it against your will, are you?", she asked.

"You say something when I'm not working, and now you're saying something because I'm doing something? What do you want me to do, mom?"

"You know it's not like that", she said.

"I'm kidding. Being with the kids, it wasn't as bad as I thought."

"That's nice, and don't be too upset that your sister-in-law told you to work while writing."

"....."

My sister-in-law and I are in a better relationship than to be upset by such a saying. Does my mother still think I have a special pride in my job as a writer? Oh, if only I could go back to the day I got the call that

my fairy tale won the prize. If I could, I would have acted a little more modest and mature. Having won the contest at a young age, made me overconfident.

"I'm a writer, now!", almost shouted.

Even though I was a rookie writer, and I was acting like a 'Man Booker Prize' winning writer, it is true that my family, who was too proud of me, also contributed.

"I can't believe there's a writer in my family! That's great. 'Writer Oh'!", my brother exclaimed excitedly.

All of a sudden, my brother was calling me, 'Writer Oh'.

"You're a writer now. At least you should carry a bag like this", my sister-in-law said.

Even my nagging sister-in-law gave me a designer bag and said that I should keep the writer's dignity. Oh, my gosh. I've thought about it like hundreds of times, and It's clear that I was over-exaggerating. All of my family seemed like they were suffering from "My-daughter-is-the-best disease" and looked up to me as if I was a writer who was going to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

But! But! The absolute support of my family lasted only three years. They started to realize that I'm no different from other people. After failing to produce any special results after winning the first prize, my brother, who regarded me as a great writer, began to admonish me.

"What's a writer? Wake up!", he said.

What about my sister-in-law?

"I'm sure, one day, you'll write a book that'll shine for a long time. But until then, why don't you get a job and work?", she asked as she looked at the designer bag that she gave me, in away that I thought she'd take it back.

Hahaha. My sister-in-law. Every time we are together, we fight like a

cat and a dog, but my sister-in-law is a very special person to me. Maybe that's how I opened the 'Story listening class'. Because she always says the right thing and because I know how much my sister-in-law cares for me. And when I actually met the children, it was better than I thought. It was much better to be together even if it was harder than the ridiculous solitude. Now, I really wanted to be with the children. In the end, I felt as if my writings could gain strength again by doing so. I wonder if this is what my sister-in-law wanted.

"I know that your sister-in-law talks straight, but she's not one who bottles up her emotions", my mother said.

"It's better to bottle up and not say it right away. At least it doesn't hurt you", I replied.

"Do you really think so?"

"Hahaha, I'm just kidding. Kidding. I know her very well", I said.

"By the way, what you were talking about with the kids today... Never mind", my mother started and then suddenly stopped talking.

I gulped down the soup from the bowl of noodles.

Very Small House

The residents of Arirang Apartment were starting to notice Mr. Crosswalk. They wondered who he was and said he was the owner of the junk shop, he was just tending the shop, and some even said that he was a member of a volunteer group. Of course, the Peach Grandma and the security guard who often visited Mr. Crosswalk knew him well. Well, some people knew him well, some didn't. Neighbors have seen him every morning for over a month, now they started to become fond of him.

"Hey, Can I talk to you for a second?", the security guard called Mr.

Crosswalk who was about to go home after traffic control.

"You said you stay at 'Anything-you-need junk shop', didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Come to me later if you have time. I've collected a pile of scrap metal behind Building 105. They've been working on the generator room, and it's quite a lot. Every morning you work hard for the neighbors, so the women's association of the apartment community asked me to give it to you. So, you should take it", the guard said.

"Thank you. I'll be back in the evening."

"Come to the central security office", the guard said.

"Yes, I will."

Once he went back to his place in the morning, Mr. Crosswalk came back to Arirang Apartment again in the evening. But something came up and he arrived a little later than he thought. He hurried to the central security office, but there was only a sign that said they were making rounds and no one was there. Mr. Crosswalk thought maybe the security guard went behind Building 105, so he quickly went to Building 105.

To get behind Building 105, he had to pass the playground, but it was already dark, so the playground, surrounded by tall, leafy trees, looked depressing. There was a street lamp that lit up the playground, but the playground without children looked lonely and miserable. Anyway, if he would be going down the stairs to the bottom right of the playground, he would be behind Building 105. When Mr. Crosswalk was about to go down the stairs, he heard a strange sound from below.

"Hurry up and give up your money!", somebody said.

"I really don't have any. Please don't do this", another person replied.

Those were the voices of children. Mr. Crosswalk hurried down the stairs. Oh, God, it was the twin brothers! The twin brothers were caught by bullies on their way back from the after-school class.

"What are you guys doing?", Mr. Crosswalk asked the bullies.

It wasn't loud but Mr. Crosswalk said it with dignity.

"Mister!", the twin brothers shouted and then ran over and hid behind Mr. Crosswalk.

"You shouldn't do this to young children. Go home quickly.", Mr. Crosswalk said to the bullies.

There were four of them. Two middle school students and two elementary school students looked about 5th or 6th graders.

"Isn't that the jerk carrying a crosswalk?", one of the bullies asked.

An elementary school kid recognized Mr. Crosswalk, because he had already become a familiar face at the school. The kid has been intentionally walked through the back alley of the apartment to take some money away from the children living in the Arirang Apartment and saw Mr. Crosswalk several times.

"The jerk who makes a crosswalk out of a carpet every morning?", a middle school kid spit and said.

The children were not scared of Mr. Crosswalk at all. Is it just children? People are weird. Why do they think you don't have any guts when you just smile without a word? Why do they always get stuck-up in front of such people? Why would they think they're always on top of his head?

"Mr. Cheap Carpet Crosswalk, we didn't do anything!"

The children ignored the fact that he was an adult and made sarcastic remarks. They were kids who thought they weren't being scolded if someone talked to them nicely.

"No, they said they'd hit me if I wouldn't give them money", the younger twin, stuck to Mr. Crosswalk, said.

"When did we do that? Do you want to die?", one of the bullies threatened the twin.

A middle school kid kicked one of the twin brothers. The surprised Mr.

Crosswalk grabbed the child's foot and threw it away, and the kid fell to the ground. In a second, the children attacked Mr. Crosswalk, and the frightened twin brothers ran away quickly.

You have no idea how much Mr. Crosswalk got beaten up by the children.

The twin brothers ran home and called security guards, using intercom, as quickly as possible. But when the guards came running behind Building 105, Mr. Crosswalk was already beaten very badly.

"Hey, hey!", the security guard called as he approached Mr. Crosswalk, sitting on the ground helplessly.

"Where'd they go? Huh?", the security guard asked.

Not only the central security office, but also the other security guards from the other security offices shouted together.

But it was too late. The children had already run away.

"I think he's hurt very badly. Hey, guys, let's lay him down in the security office.", one of them said.

The guards took Mr. Crosswalk to the security office at the entrance to Building 105.

The Arirang Apartment has security offices at each entrance, but there were no guards. They used to have security guards, but they let them go to cut down on the maintenance costs because the residents' situation was getting worse. They left security guards at such places like the front and back gate, and the parking lot, but no guards at each building. Building 105 was located in the innermost part, so the guards also used the security room there as a lounge. They got together there and sometimes ate together.

The security guard, who controls traffic with Mr. Crosswalk every morning, laid Mr. Crosswalk on the cot.

"These days, kids are not like before. You can't fight them alone, man.

What should we do with this face? Poor you. The rest of your body, is it alright?", the guard asked.

Mr. Crosswalk just smiled with a swollen face instead of answering.

The security guard put some medicine on his injured face. And he looked at his arms and legs. Mr. Crosswalk must have hurt his shoulder a lot, so he couldn't raise his arm well. Fortunately, there was no terrible accident and nothing was broken anywhere. Oh, was that supposed to be good luck?

"I know that they are just children, but they shouldn't have done that! They should have shown their respects to the elderly!", I exclaimed.

Unknowingly, I was so furious that I stopped telling the story. The children stared at me blankly, because I was the one who stopped talking. When I looked at them, they seemed to be confused whether the story was cut off or continuing.

"I'm not saying that adults shouldn't hit children and that it's okay if children hit somebody. I'm saying no one should hit anyone recklessly. Who has the right to hit anybody?", I continued.

Impatient Jongwon, calm Nagyung, or Sowon who didn't seem to pay attention to my story, said nothing.

"You know what I mean? Violence is a no-no, no matter what. I mean, that's what I'm trying to say."

"You know, we can use a break", Nagyung said as she looked me in the face.

"Is this a true story? What kind of story is this? You were so carried away!", Jongwon asked with a curious look on his face! He wasn't just impatient.

"Sorry, sorry, let's take a break for a while, if you want to go to the bathroom, go ahead."

I went to the kitchen and drank a glass of iced water. After drinking cold water, I calmed down a little.

"I mean yesterday, I told mom that I heard a story about a crosswalk you can carry around, and my mom hit me on the back of my head, saying I heard it wrong because I was not paying attention. Should I go home today and tell mom I heard a story about an adult who got beaten up by kids?", Jongwon asked as he scratched his head.

Suddenly I found myself giggling.

'Thank you, Jongwon's Mother!', I said on my way to the living room where the children were.

"That's why you have to listen until the end of the story to find out what actually happened. By the way, Jongwon, it's a big problem if your mother continues to misunderstand like that. Tell her to call me if she wants. I'll tell her what really happened. I'll tell her that you listened very carefully and spoke calmly. Okay?", I said to him.

Jongwon leaned his back on the sofa with a face that looked like he couldn't trust me.

"It's important to listen carefully, but it's also important to know how to deliver. It would be better to say that Mr. Crosswalk saved the twin brothers, rather than an adult who was beaten by a child. Right? By the way, what is Nagyung writing down so enthusiastically?"

"It's what you said. I'll refer to it when I write a fairy tale later", she answered.

"It's a good idea, but in fact I'm not such a good writer", I said.

I was embarrassed, but I had no choice but to be honest.

"But you're still a writer", she said. "By the way, the book you mentioned before, I found it was sold out on the internet bookstore."

Since it's not popular, the publisher won't print it anymore?"

"Huh? No, they'll print it again soon. That's a very good book!", I replied quickly.

I wasn't honest this time. The hot energy came up to my ears.

'What a damn publisher!'

"It's because of the weird title. Why does a camel live there?", Jongwon asked.

Why are the children so straightforward...?

'Jongwon's mom, I'd like to ask you to hit him again today', I thought by myself.

"The end of the break time. The story begins!"

Sowon, who was looking around the balcony, ran and quickly sat on the sofa.

"Miss Oh, you've become a red-eared rabbit again."

Why do I keep thinking of earmuffs when it's so hot?

The security guards kept asking him to sleep over, so Mr. Crosswalk had to sleep over in the security office at Building 105 that day. But he couldn't sleep well because he was not feeling well and the place was unfamiliar. He must have been tossing and turning for a while. Then someone knocked on the door of the security office.

Knock, knock.

A man opened the door and came in after looking through the window.

"I'm the father of the twins."

Yes, he was the father of the twin brothers. He must've heard about the incident from the twin brothers. However, Mr. Crosswalk's face was so swollen. His cheeks got black and blue, bruised. He heard what had

happened to him, but he never imagined that the kids would beat an adult this much.

"Thank you for helping our children. I brought some medicine."

"It's okay. There's no serious injuries."

"I've always been nervous because my wife and I were unable to pick up our children from their after-school class, because we got off from work late. It's too bad this kind of thing actually happened", the man said.

"If someone is determined to attack you, you can't do anything.", Mr. Crosswalk said.

"My children are grateful. They asked me to bring you some medicine."

Mr. Crosswalk felt something warm in his heart even though he was hurt. What should I call it? Yeah, he suddenly felt happy. Then he said:

"I'm glad your kids are okay."

"Thank you.", the man said.

"I'm not hurt much, so please tell them not to worry."

"Yes, I know you need some rest, but I hope I didn't disturb you", the man sort of apologized.

"I'm going to bed now.", Mr. Crosswalk replied

"I guess I better get going."

The twin brothers' dad left the security office with a thankful and sorry heart.

It was the next morning. There was some warm porridge at Mr. Crosswalk's bedside. The twin's mother made red bean porridge and put it in a thermos bottle. Thanks to her, Mr. Crosswalk was able to eat hot red bean porridge for breakfast. But he went to control the traffic with that injured body again. He's really an unstoppable man. Because of his swollen face, it looked like the man who was controlling the traffic was in a car accident.

It must have been a couple of months since Mr. Crosswalk controlled the traffic at the back gate of Arirang Apartment. There was a neighborhood association meeting in Building 105. On that day, the ladies naturally talked about Mr. Crosswalk. Oh, the Peach Grandma was also living in Building 105.

"Honestly, I thought he was a little weird at first."

"I know! He looked a bit shabby."

"What a unique person he is. But thanks to him, the cars that run near the back gate have slowed themselves down."

"Now they know there's a crosswalk every morning."

At that time, the lady who was the president of the neighborhood association, who was listening quietly, jumped into the conversation.

"He doesn't look like just a wandering homeless man, does he?"

"What nonsense is that? President, you have something to say? Why don't you say it now?" Peach Grandma urged the President Lady.

"Do you have something to say to us?", the woman next to her asked the President Lady.

"I have some recommendations from the security guards, so I'd like to talk to you" the President lady said. "He's been controlling the traffic for a while. And you all know this, right? He saved the twin brothers before. He stayed in our building's security office for a few days after the incident. He was also watching around the playground until late at night. I haven't said this before, but you don't know that there were burglars in building 106 and 101 in those days, do you?"

"Oh my gosh, really?", some ladies who didn't know the fact, responded, surprised.

"I didn't want to let people know, it's not a very good thing, you know. But our building was fine. That's how important it is whether there are people at the entrance or not."

"That's right, that's right."

Since people agreed enthusiastically, President Lady slowly began to bring up what she really wanted to say.

"So how about if we let him stay in our building's security office?", she asked.

People are starting to focus on her words.

"I mean, Mr. Crosswalk, he seems like a nice person", she continued. "But things must be tough for him. You know, there's a junk shop behind the octagonal pavilion, and I heard he eats and sleeps there. The room's knocked together with a few partition walls. But our security office is empty. Well, ours is not the only empty one".

The ladies started to whisper between them.

"Are you suggesting we hire him as our own security guard?", one of the ladies asked.

"He doesn't want to do that. He said he can't stay that long."

"Why?"

"He doesn't say much, but the carpet crosswalk, he has some reasons why he's carrying that around. Why not set up a crosswalk in a dangerous place? Something like that. I guess that's why he's directing traffic at the back gate of our apartment", the President Lady said."

Did you do some background check on him? He's not a suspicious person, is he? A wanted man or...", one of the ladies asked.

The President Lady interrupted her:

"What kind of wanted man lays crosswalks on roads that stand out that much?"

"Well, that's true, too."

The President Lady really knew how to lead a discussion. Because she had to listen to many people's opinions, she knew how to cut off the remarks that didn't make any sense. That's what charisma is.

"So, let's let Mr. Crosswalk stay in our building's security office", she continued. "I heard that he collects recyclables. But if he collects only the ones from our building, it'll be similar to the amount he collects from other places. Even if the security office is cramped, it's better than a room with partition walls, and there's a bathroom, too. Wouldn't it be easier for Mr. Crosswalk if he didn't pay the rent?"

The ladies didn't know what to say, so they just looked at each other.

"Isn't it a hassle for everyone to take turns separating trash every Wednesday? If you miss your turn, you also have to pay a fine. Mr. Crosswalk can do it and stay. It's good for us, and it's also good for Mr. Crosswalk", she continued.

At that time, Arirang Apartment had no place to collect recyclables. If you put it at the entrance to the apartment on Tuesday evening, the residents on duty came out the next morning and separated it and put it in a sack. It was rather tiring.

"That's right, even if it's small, one person will be able to stay. But we're also spending our building's own recyclable materials on operating our apartments, so don't you think residents from other buildings might say something?", one of the ladies remarked.

"Don't the other children from other apartment buildings go to school? Aren't they using the back gate? And we can't say that the twins' incident is not only our building's problem. It's our whole apartment block buildings' problem. Can't we at least do that for someone we appreciate?", another lady asked.

Everyone was attracted to the idea that we don't have to separate trash ourselves and that it would be good for crime prevention.

Peach Grandma was annoyed because people seemed to think of their own interests first. But she didn't say anything since it's going to be cold soon, and she knew that the security office with the heater would be

better for Mr. Crosswalk than a cold junk shop. Actually, Peach Grandma and the security guard were the first ones to make suggestions. Even though the security office was small, Peach Grandma wanted Mr. Crosswalk to stay with people rather than in a humble junk shop.

"What does the women's association say, president? Are they going to let Mr. Crosswalk to have our recyclables?", asked Peach Grandma.

"I told them I'd talk again when we got our opinions together. We use income from recyclables for this and that. We throw parties for seniors, and we go on a picnic with residents...", the President Lady replied.

"And members from the women's association also go on a trip to enjoy autumn leaves", Peach Grandma said.

"How many times have we gone on a trip to say that.....", asked the President Lady.

"I know, the women's association has a lot of trouble. I also know you guys are doing a lot of good things. So, this time, let's also consider the situation for Mr. Crosswalk. He's looking after our neighborhood and we can't just ignore that", the President Lady said. "I have to talk to the management office, and it's not as easy as you think."

"If the women's association can't do anything about it, then our senior center has to do something about it. We also have a lot to say to the women's association", Peach Grandma said firmly to the President Lady

"I'm not saying that we can't do it, but only when opinions are gathered, can we go through with the process. Grandma, your temper is very hot. Hahaha", the President Lady said, but her charisma was useless in front of the older Peach Grandma.

"Then, we will decide today. Is there anyone who opposes the idea about Mr. Crosswalk?", Peach Grandma asked the ladies around her straight forward.

"I'm not against the idea, but if he's going to take care of the work

around the security office, wouldn't we have to pay him a salary?", asked the newlywed bride who lives on the second floor.

"Oh, newlywed bride. We're not asking him to do the security work. Was there any problem because the office was empty? I'm saying that we should provide a place for Mr. Crosswalk to stay in his difficult situation. Wouldn't it be much better for him than before if he could collect recyclables that are constantly coming out of our apartment building and some from the streets, like he does now from time to time?", the President Lady said with a straight face.

"I agree, then."

No one else really opposed it.

They finally decided to have Mr. Crosswalk come to the security office in Arirang Apartment Building 105. The Peach Grandma and the President Lady were very busy because of that. They put hanji on the windows of the security office so that the inside could not be seen from the outside. They hung blind curtains on the door. Otherwise, it would be inconvenient for Mr. Crosswalk to stay in the security office. If people can see everything from outside, there won't be any privacy at all. They've been cleaning up all the junk that the guards have brought inside the office. I even put a small areca palm plant in front of the window, and it was brought from Peach Grandma's house. The toilet shelf and the small cabinet were given by the twins' family.

Isn't it wonderful? Mr. Crosswalk loved the small security office, too. Oh, we shouldn't call it the security office anymore. We should call it Mr. Crosswalk's house. Mr. Crosswalk's very small house. Right? Mr. Crosswalk now got to live in the first floor of Arirang Apartment Building 105. The first house on the first floor is number 101, so does that make Mr. Crosswalk's house number 100? Hahaha.

"Welcome! Welcome!", the residents of Building 105 welcomed Mr. Crosswalk with all their heart.

"Thank you.", Mr. Crosswalk said gratefully.

Residents of Building 105 welcomed Mr. Crosswalk with all their heart.

"This is the end of today's story!", I said.

I clapped my hands twice.

"It's strangely suspicious. Our security offices are empty in every building", Jongwon said.

"Now I come to think of it, that's right", I remarked.

Jongwon was sharper than I thought.

"Is this story about our apartment buildings?", Nagyung asked.

Nagyung seemed like she was ready to write down my answer.

Perhaps, this girl is actually dreaming of becoming a reporter?

"Is our apartment that old? We don't have an octagonal pavilion in our neighborhood", Jongwon asked. "But the apartment up there, I heard it was originally a park."

Jongwon looked a bit slow at first, but he was quite sharp.

"Oh, was that a park?", I asked.

"I think it's about our apartment... The security office, that's the trap, right?", Jongwon replied

"Hahaha. Let's discuss where the trap was and why you think like that.", I said.

"I don't like debates...", Jongwon said as he shrugged.

"By the way, Miss Oh, when will you tell me about a rabbit with short ears?", Sowon asked.

Sowon didn't forget the rabbit story.

Oh, right, I'll tell you the rabbit story right after this story.”

" But I'm curious”, she said.

"Wait a minute, I'll give you the book first, instead”, I said to her.

I took a book out of the living room bookcase.

"It's a present for you, Sowon”, I said as I handed her the book.

It's a picture book called The Short-eared Rabbit.

"Wow, it's really a bunny book, exciting!", she exclaimed excitedly.

"Read it at home. If you hear it from me again after reading it, it sounds different even though it's the same story. I'm telling you."

"Miss Oh, I'd like to bring an empty milk bottle to Mr. Crosswalk, too”, said Sowon.

"Hahaha. Sowon is a good girl”, I said,

"Why only Sowon gets a gift?", Jongwon asked.

I couldn't really get this boy. Does he really want a book gift?

"Do you want one too? Do you want to read it by next time? What do you want? I think Jongwon will like a very profound book. Korean Culture Symbol Dictionary. How about this?”, I asked, pointing to a dictionary larger than a brick.

"No thanks”, he replied.

That's what I thought. Go home now. Don't go anywhere else, you have to go home straight."

"Okay”, Jongwon answered in a sulky manner and put on his shoes.

As the children returned home, my mother came out of the room. It seemed like she had something to say to me, but she didn't talk to me. So, I asked her first.

"Why?"

" Nothing”, she replied and walked into the kitchen.

A Person Who Gives Off Warm Energy

"You guys, you are so lucky today. My mother made a lot of rice balls before she went out. Have you ever had a tutor like this, listening to stories and eating snacks?", I asked them.

My mother always prepared some snacks for my class. She liked the way I was with the children, and It seemed like she wanted my students to remember me as a good teacher even if they stopped coming to my class.

"I've never seen a teacher who brags like you", Jongwon said.

Jongwon has no reason to come here except for the English school. He says openly that he comes here because it is better than English class, where he has to memorize twenty words a day and has to take tests on it every day.

Besides, he said it's a hassle to take his little sister Sowon around. It's obvious that he's coming here unwillingly, because his mom tells him to come for a month because it's free, but I also feel sorry for him for some reason.

"You can listen while eating rice balls. So, yummy in your tummy and all ears on me! All right?", I said to them.

" Yes...", all of them said simultaneously.

I felt like I'm the 'Sister Bbomi'. Oh, my God, not 'Sister Bbomi'...

Today, I'm going to talk about Mr. Crosswalk first. I'll tell you why he doesn't stay in one place and goes around the country. Then we have to go back to the old days, hmm! You know, Mr. Crosswalk used to work for a company that makes cars. He was married and had kids. Isn't it

amazing? This is why you shouldn't judge a person just by their appearance. Because at a glance, he might seem to be a man who has been idle away from work, and now lives on collecting recyclables.

Some people say Mr. Crosswalk had a hard time as a child, but there's no particular known story. It's just that he studied hard and got a job at a car company. They say that he did research on car engines. The thing is, Mr. Crosswalk was involved in a terrible car accident while he was doing research on cars.

Hmm... do you know why the accident was so terrible? It took away his last hope, his children. Why the last hope when he had a wife? His wife went to heaven while she was giving birth to twins. It must have been a very dangerous and difficult delivery. It's pathetic, right? There are even people who give birth to triplets! Why did Mrs. Crosswalk have to go to heaven, isn't that too much? Why does the person who gave birth to a new life have to die on the day of birth? May God have pity on her...

Mr. Crosswalk wanted to raise twins as well as anyone else and on behalf of his late wife. He had a hard time working and taking care of his children, but he was still happy. But one day when he couldn't take his twins to school, the twins jaywalked and got hit by a car.

He's been taking them to school every day, but on that day, he couldn't do it. It's so awful... That happened when the twins were in the second grade of elementary school. They went to heaven at that young age.

I can't believe what Mr. Crosswalk had to go through when he lost his loved ones. Does that make sense? How could such painful things keep on happening to Mr. Crosswalk? Who on earth did something wrong? Parents? Wife? Little twins? This is too much. This doesn't make sense at all! Is it Mr. Crosswalk's fate that all his family members passed away first? What kind of fate is that? So, I don't believe in fate or anything. Never!

Hmm! Sorry, I'm sorry. I don't know why I got so carried away...

Anyway! Mr. Crosswalk left the company after losing his twins. Then, he carried around a crosswalk that he made himself and suggested to people that they should set up a crosswalk on dangerous roads. That's how he traveled all over the country. Even if crosswalks seem like nothing, you don't know how many accidents the sign prevents. Drivers and pedestrians, they both are willing to stop when they see the sign. Willingness, that's important.

By the way, Mr. Crosswalk, who always missed his late twins, decided to stay at the security office not because the junk shop was uncomfortable, but just because he wanted to see the twin brothers of Arirang Apartment often. Well, the twin brothers also lived in Building 105. If this is a kind of fate, well... then you can believe in it. Haha. Oh, I guess this isn't fate, it's coincidence.

The number of small household goods were starting to increase in the security office of apartment Building 105. For instance, a portable gas stove, a rice cooker, or a comfy blanket, which Peach Grandma brought in. You don't know how hard it was for Mr. Crosswalk, because she brought a lot of other blankets, saying that she didn't need them. You can't fill the small security room only with blankets. He managed to send the rest back, except for one.

The Arirang apartment got cleaner, too. Mr. Crosswalk had swept around the apartment buildings when he finished controlling the traffic. It was already autumn, so tons of leaves were falling from trees. It has piled up beyond the control of the guards alone. Mr. Crosswalk personally made rounds on his own at night, and sometimes, he stayed at the Central Security Office instead of other security guards.

Every Wednesday, Mr. Crosswalk took recyclables from Building 105 with his handcart to the junk shop. So, that means he went out regularly

on Wednesdays. Yes, that's what the people of Arirang Apartment thought. They thought he was going to the junk shop. It's not entirely wrong. The funny thing is, I don't know where she got them from, but the President Lady brought him old television sets, broken washing machines, and so on.

"You take all this stuff at the junk shop, don't you? I think we'll have a few fans next week for you."

Bravo, President Lady! Hahaha.

When Mr. Crosswalk was sitting on any chair, grandpas and grandmas approached him with smiles. Peach Grandmother also often visited Mr. Crosswalk. Grandma must have been lonely living alone.

"My elder son won't be able to come home this Chuseok, either", Peach Grandma told Mr. Crosswalk.

"Is that right?"

"My younger son was handy since he was a kid, so he was good at handling things", she continued. "My elder one was a little slow. But he was strangely reliable. He was not much better at anything than my younger one, but he was a reliable kid when he was around."

"Is that so?"

"My younger one had never stayed at one place, so I raised him thinking he'd grow up to be like that. But now they are all grown up, no, my elder one can't settle down in one place and kept on moving here to there."

"Uh huh."

"How's the security office? It's a little too small, isn't it?"

"It's all right. I like it."

"You said your parents passed away, right? But you still have to make sure you have a place to go back to, and if you don't have anyone who's waiting for you, you should at least have a house to go back to. That

way, you'll feel secured wherever you go”, she said.

"Okay."

"I'm going to head back home."

Mr. Crosswalk has always been a comfortable companion for her.

This is what happened once. It was still dark in the early morning when the twins' dad knocked on the security office looking frustrated.

"What can I do for you?", Mr. Crosswalk asked as he opened the door with a surprised face.

"I tried to hold it in until I got to work, but I can't anymore...", the twin's dad said.

Mr. Crosswalk noticed that the twins' dad had some toilet paper in his hand. Mr. Crosswalk knew what was going on.

"It's all right. Come in."

The twins' dad quickly went into the bathroom. And he came out a long time later. Then he said:

"They pulled out the toilet because they were working on the floor of my bathroom. Thank you."

"No problem."

Is the security office at Building 105... No. Is Mr. Crosswalk's house an emergency toilet of Building 105 or what? Hahaha.

The President Lady also liked Mr. Crosswalk, because he was working very hard. She'd love him to be at the entrance. I mean, who knew he'd take care of the apartment so well? That's why she used to raise her voice and said to the guard:

"Mr. Crosswalk isn't here to work as a security guard. You can't order this and that."

Then the security guard says like this.

"It's no use telling him not to. By nature, he is a hard worker. By the way, it's getting cold, so why don't you get him an electric blanket for

his bed?"

"I didn't think of that. There's one I don't use at home. I'll give it to him."

There goes another household item into Mr. Crosswalk's little house.

Mr. Crosswalk liked the Arirang Apartment, too. If the twin brothers put a sausage in his pocket while they cross the crosswalk, he would smile all day long. But he didn't hang around the twin brothers like a stalker. It was nice just to look at them, so he was just happy to know that there were twin brothers living on the seventh floor. He didn't mean to be too friendly. If he did so, with the recent incident still fresh in the parents' minds, it would be too much of a burden for them. Maybe that's why he couldn't express it more outwardly.

It's strange, isn't it? He was not a nice-looking guy, he was not a big giver because he was rich, but people liked Mr. Crosswalk. Just because Mr. Crosswalk moved into the neighborhood, the atmosphere around Arirang Apartment has changed. Neighbors greeted each other more friendly and became gentler. That's what a good person is, someone who radiates good energy even if he doesn't do anything much. It's not a calculated kindness, or like a show-off kindness. If I do this, he'll do it too, right? But just a person who cares about others deeply, that was Mr. Crosswalk. The energy that such a person radiates makes a lot of people happy.

But It didn't mean that all the residents of Arirang Apartment were happy. It's where people live. It would be weird if there's no problem at all. But apartment number 1502 was a little serious. Mr. Crosswalk knew the problem of number 1502 five days after he arrived at the security office, so I'm done talking. The couple in the unit had too many fights every night. It was no use even when the security guards ran up there after being called on the intercom. They say the couple shouted loudly

even when the police went to them.

Then one day, Mr. Crosswalk left the security office for a night patrol, and a girl was crouching down at the stairs right in front of him. It was cold at night but she didn't even have a jacket on.

"Aren't you cold?"

The kid turned around. Turns out, she was a girl living in number 1502.

"Are you waiting for someone?"

"....."

The kid didn't say anything.

Mr. Crosswalk felt like he knew why the kid was sitting there. So, he didn't talk to her anymore and just went down the stairs.

"Hey, mister!" It was the kid, calling Mr. Crosswalk.

"Why?"

"Where are you going?", she asked.

"I'm going to go take a look at the emergency staircase."

"So, there won't be anyone here?" she asked, pointing to the security office. "Can I stay inside? I'll just do my homework and leave."

The kid showed him her notebook and pencil case.

"You have to keep the lights on and keep the door locked inside."

"Okay", she said.

"You can just leave the door open when you leave."

Mr. Crosswalk went back into the security office and turned on the lights. Then he went to the emergency staircase.

"....."

I stopped telling the story.

"Is today's class over already?", Jongwon asked.

"Yes, it's over."

I clapped my hands twice in a hurry, but I didn't feel good about it.

"You stop the story whenever you want because it's a one-month free trial?", Jongwon asked again.

Jongwon wants to hear more. I didn't expect that.

"It's because I'm a little tired today."

"It sounds like you're telling me to pay my tuition from next month", Jongwon said.

"Hahaha. Did it sound like that? But I think I'll have to pay next month's tuition for you."

"Why?", he asked.

"Because you all listen very well. 'Jongwon doesn't seem to be a short-tempered kid', but why did your mother say that?"

"I'm not short-tempered at any time. My mom doesn't know anything", he replied.

"Hahaha! So, my story must be interesting then?"

"A little. But am I listening to your story well?", he asked.

"It's really hard to sit still and listen. You're listening very well. Of course, Nagyung and Sowon, too. You're doing great, guys", I complimented them.

"I'm usually quiet in class."

Jongwon smiled. It was a pure smile and he blushed slightly.

"Nagyung, don't you have any questions today?"

"No", she said.

"See you next time, then."

My mother, who came back home, came to me and sat down.

"What things are you going to talk about with them?", she asked.

"Well..."

"Don't tell me you are going to talk about your in-laws, are you?", she asked, sounding a little worried. "You shouldn't do that just because your sister-in-law said something that you don't want to hear."

"....."

My mother misunderstood. I started this job because I couldn't face my family, but I'm not doing this to hurt someone because I hate them. My family is a group of people who have had a story that has been rambling on for a long time, so I wanted to organize it. And I wanted to take out the precious Mr. Crosswalk that was only in our hearts, and now I wanted to show it to the children.

"I've been wanting to tell this story for a long time. It didn't work out when I tried to write something else without bringing it up. Isn't the writer supposed to make up a story and write?", I said to my mother.

"No matter how many times I make up a story, I can't make up a sentence that comes out suddenly. Because the words are stuck in my head. Mr. Crosswalk is like that sentence to me. It's stuck too deep."

"Please don't tell them about anything else than him, OK? You know your sister-in-law is still having a hard time even if she doesn't show it. You have to think about your family", my mother said. "....."

Come to think of it, there's some resemblance between Mr. Crosswalk and my sister-in-law. They are not very friendly but I don't mind it, and they are always warm to other people even when they are in a tough situation. People who heal their wounds by doing good deeds to others who were hurt as much as they were hurt. The care for others, like these people, was hotter and heavier than anything else. If there was a difference between the two, well, my sister-in-law nagged at me a lot, but did she stay with me forever? My mother will know when my story is done. In fact, I'm not telling a story about my sister-in-law now, but our story.

A Child Who Hides in the Apartment Security Office

Mr. Crosswalk looked around the emergency staircase and returned to the security office. He looked through the window and he couldn't see the child. He thought she went home, and he tried to open the door but the handle wouldn't turn. Mr. Crosswalk thought the child had pressed the lock button on the door knob. So, he opened the door with the key he had. He took a step in, but he was surprised and came out again. She was probably the only one who saw Mr. Crosswalk react that quickly. The kid was hiding in the bathroom. Then she came out when she heard the key turn. But Mr. Crosswalk freaked out and ran out of the security office.

"Why are you so surprised?", she asked.

"I thought nobody was there."

"I hid in the bathroom and did my homework."

"Okay. Hurry and go home."

"Can I come here again?"

"You can't keep coming."

"Why not?"

"It's a little dangerous."

"What's dangerous?"

Mr. Crosswalk was a little frustrated. It didn't look very nice for a girl coming to the security office late at night.

'You don't come to a place where there's a man late at night'. He wanted to say this, but couldn't, because Mr. Crosswalk knew why she's out at night. She ran away from her mom and dad. He's seen the girl sit

on a playground chair where the twin brothers were taken away by bullies before. Even then, Mr. Crosswalk hid behind a tree and watched her. She was in danger alone. He only came back to the security office after he saw the girl get in the elevator. How could he tell her not to come? Besides, it was getting colder every night.

"Okay, I won't come", she told Mr. Crosswalk.

The kid left the security office and stood in front of the elevator with her head down. He felt sorry for her, and he regretted that he was being harsh. The child was exhausted because of her parents, her violent father and her mother who always got beaten by her husband. Someone had to take care of the child, but what could Mr. Crosswalk have done?

"My mom hits dad", Sowon said as she snapped a cookie stick.

I stopped talking in surprise.

"Hey! When did mom hit dad?", Jongwon interrupted.

"Mom slaps dad on his shoulder every day! She hits him for leaving his dirty socks everywhere, for not washing up, and you got hit yesterday, too", Sowon continued.

Jongwon glared at Sowon and said:

"That's different with what Miss Oh is saying, you idiot!"

I chuckled quietly.

"Wow, Sowon's mother is very scary."

"She never hit anyone else", Sowon quickly responded.

Sowon and Jongwon looked pretty. I liked Sowon's mom, though I only heard her voice, and her father whose voice I've never even heard. I wanted to live such an ordinary life from an early age. A family who argue about nothing, but they're always on the same side. I still envy

such a family.

"Then can I keep going on with the story?", I asked.

"Yes!"

That's what life living in an apartment is. It's like a big square, filled with little squares. Everyone living in it seems like they live the same way. But people have their own stories. If everybody is happy, it's good, but some aren't, like 1502. Oh, did I ever tell you her name? It's Dohee, Dohee Yoon. Right below Dohee's apartment is Peach Grandma's apartment, and the twin brothers lived on the seventh floor.

It's been exactly two weeks since Dohee came to the security office. It was after midnight.

Knock, knock. Dohee knocked on the door of the security office.

Mr. Crosswalk quickly opened the door.

"What's going on?", he asked, surprised.

"Can't I stay here for a while? It's so cold outside."

"Come in."

Mr. Crosswalk let Dohee sit on a warm electric pad. Her nose turned red. She was staying outside all the time because of what Mr. Crosswalk said last time.

"Did you eat?", he asked her.

"....."

"Do you want me to make you some ramen?"

"Yes, please."

Mr. Crosswalk poured water into the pot and put it on a small gas stove.

"When did you come out of your house?", he asked her.

"It's been a little while."

"By the way, do you know the grandma who lives in 1402?"

"Yes, I know her", she replied.

"The old lady lives alone. I think it would be better for you to visit the grandma in the case of an emergency, like this. If it's hard for you to talk to her, I can do it for you. It's dangerous to be outside at night."

Mr. Crosswalk put the ramen in the boiling water.

"The real dangerous people are in my house, though", the girl said.

Dohee said it as if she was talking about someone else.

"I can't go to the grandma's apartment", she continued. "Before you came, the grandmother told me to come to her home if anything happened, so I went. You don't know that the grandma had to go through with my dad? It was crazy. After that, grandma's son came to my house and fought with my dad."

Mr. Crosswalk put the ramen pot on a tray and put it in front of Dohee.

"That's what happened. Eat", Mr. Crosswalk said as he put the ramen pot on a tray and put it in front of Dohee.

"Thank you."

"It must be hard for you, right?"

"It's okay to go back home when it's a little quiet", she said.

"Where do you usually stay when you come out?"

"Stairs. My mom and dad still think I'm on the stairs. By the way, do you know how scary the apartment stairs are at night? I'd rather be outside."

"....."

After a short silence, she continued: "In fact, I used to come here before you".

Mr. Crosswalk looked at Dohee in surprise.

"It used to be empty here. Last year, I was on the stairs and came outside because I was in a hurry to go to the bathroom, then I saw the

security office. I pushed the door a little bit and it opened. So, I used the bathroom here. Since then, I've been in here when the door opened. I could at least write a diary, thanks to the street lights over there. But after you moved in here, it's all gone."

Oh, my God, it wasn't the first time when the twins' dad came over. Dohee had already been using the bathroom in the security office. The security office was really an emergency bathroom for the people in Building 105. Hahahaha.

"I see", Mr. Crosswalk said, a little shocked.

"So, I'm not scared being here at all."

"Is that notebook a diary?"

"Yes, I wrote down everything. Everything that has happened..."

Mr. Crosswalk gave Dohee a glass of water.

"It's too salty", he said.

It was then. Bam! The security office's door slammed open! Dohee's mom came to the security office with a big hairpin in her tangled hair.

"What are you doing here?", her mother asked angrily.

Surprised, Dohee quickly put down her chopsticks and said: "I ate ramen."

"So why are you eating ramen here, get out of here!", her mother shouted.

Dohee's mom gave Mr. Crosswalk a cold look.

"I boiled ramen for her because she looked cold. Sorry for the trouble. I'm sorry", he said.

Dohee's mom held Dohee's hand tightly. "You're not supposed to come here again. Okay?"

Dohee's mom must have been surprised. Could she even think Dohee was in the security office? By the way, the security office is like a guard

post. Wouldn't the security office be better than the dark, cold stairs?

Of course, Dohee's mom knew the fact that Mr. Crosswalk was a man who voluntarily patrols around Building 105 like other security guards, and he always watches strangers around the apartments. I mean, she knew that he's not a bad guy. It's not that she didn't know, but she was careful because she's a mother of a girl.

Slap!

Mr. Crosswalk was surprised. He quickly looked out the window towards the elevator, and Dohee was rubbing her shoulders without saying anything.

"Don't you dare go over there again!", Dohee's mom scolded her, the moment she got into the elevator.

"You shouldn't hit her...."

However, Dohee secretly came to the security office even after that, and when people passed by or when she heard the sound of the elevator, she would quickly hid in the bathroom. She talked with Mr. Crosswalk and wrote a diary while she was there. One day, while Dohee was hiding in the bathroom of the security office, Dohee's mom visited the security office again.

"Excuse me, have you seen my child?"

"No."

Mr. Crosswalk lied to her. His face must have turned white. It's so obvious. After confirming that Dohee's mother was going to the playground, he quickly sent Dohee out. That night his heart was pounding so hard, that he couldn't sleep. Hahaha

Yeah, that's how Mr. Crosswalk and Dohee met. And Dohee was able to meet other children, thanks to Mr. Crosswalk.

"Phew, this is the end of today's story!"

I wrapped up the story.

"It seems like the time of the storytelling is getting shorter and shorter. It's not fair that you finish the story whenever you want. What kind of tutor doesn't have any rules?"

Jongwon whined.

The children are getting more and more focused on my story. They are enjoying the story. Just as Mr. Crosswalk was happy to meet the twin brothers, I am happy to meet these students. I wish I could be with my readers like this. Unfortunately, I can't afford it now, but I have these students instead. These guys, they're making me feel moved...

"Let's wrap up and go home. And Jongwon, you know that we've had a class without a break today, right? It didn't really end very quickly."

"Pshaw", Jongwon sighed as he looked back at his seat and lifted the cushion for no reason.

"Goodbye!"

Jongwon and Sowon went out first. But Nagyung hesitated at the door, even though she already had her shoes on.

"Do you have anything to say?"

"It's nothing, but...", she started, but then stopped.

"Would you like to sit down and talk?"

"No, but, Miss Oh! This story, you said it wasn't published as a book, right?"

I nodded.

"Then this story, can I write it in fairy tales later?"

"What?" I was surprised.

"Can I write it as a fairy tale myself? I'm really going to be a fairy tale writer. Actually, I write it down in my notebook like this, and then I

write it in a fairy tale at home. You said it was never published as a book whether this story was real or made up."

"I did."

"I really want to write it."

Nagyung Yu, that's why she was so eager to write the story down...

"You can write more fantastic and more interesting stories", I said.

"I'm going to write a very interesting story, too. So please give this story to me."

She was bold, but I didn't hate it. She reminded me of my old self, who seemed to be able to write anything. I was worried, but I wanted to believe that Nagyung would manage to do well. I readily agreed.

"Okay. But there are a few conditions. You must write it nice. And don't pretend you don't know me even if you become a famous writer. Okay?"

"Okay! You'll see. I'm going to write a story that will surprise readers", she replied, looking excited.

"Hahaha. Yeah, a surprise would be nice. But if you look down upon readers and start as an arrogant writer, it will be over as soon as you start. Okay?" "Yes, I will keep that in mind!"

Nagyung should never make the mistake I made.

"Oh, and tell me in advance before you publish the book. Not after, like 'Miss Oh, I published the story.' Let's not do that, okay? There's something called courtesy."

"Of course!"

"It's late. Go home."

"Goodbye!"

"That's the first big bow from you. Goodbye."

Nagyung went out.

If it's a story I can't write, it would be better if someone else writes it for me. Fortunately, my student says she wants to write it for me. I

stared at the door where Nagyung went out for a while.

'Even you should remember Mr. Crosswalk, please.'

"It's a story that your sister-in-law wants to forget." It was my mother, who was behind me.

"I know, so I won't write it. Instead, my student will write it for me."

"....."

"It's our story", I continued. "No, it's about my sister-in-law and us. Mom, do you think my sister-in-law is not our family?"

"She's a family-in-law, I should be careful."

My mother seemed to care too much about my sister-in-law.

"Nagyung says she will write it as a fairy tale later. Even if my sister-in-law reads it, she'd say, 'Wow, there's a kid who's had the same experience as me'. Who knows if she'll be comforted by what Nagyung wrote? Hahaha."

"Do you think it's funny?", my mother asked.

"Let's live with a smile! Oh, maybe it's because I'm writing a very profound piece these days. I'm going into my room!"

I cleared my throat loudly and went into my room.

Now We Have a Real Crosswalk!

There were ginkgo trees planted along the street at the back gate of Arirang Apartment. Uh. It was the day the ripe ginkgo nuts fell off the ginkgo tree. There was a stinking smell everywhere, as if someone had taken all the delicious ginkgo nuts and put dog poop on the trees instead. So, it became a stinky street, but something good happened on that street.

Have you noticed it already? That's right. The crosswalk has finally been

set up! I can't say it's because of Mr. Crosswalk. But it's true that he contributed to having it set up earlier. A lot of people signed up on the letter of requirement, thanks to Mr. Crosswalk who's helped the neighbors cross the street safely every morning. Unfortunately, it was a crosswalk with no traffic light, but of course it was better than nothing. And now Mr. Crosswalk's carpet crosswalk was rolled up and put aside into a corner of the bathroom. A traffic light safety helmet? Of course, he wore it. Just because they now have a real crosswalk, doesn't mean he would stop controlling the traffic. Hahaha.

One Wednesday, when Mr. Crosswalk was putting the recyclables he had collected in his handcart, Dohee came to see him.

"Mister, you're going to the junk shop again today, aren't you? Can I go with you?"

"It must be tiring."

"It's all right."

"....."

"My mom and dad were called in by my grandfather today. My grandfather lives in a completely rural area. They might sleep over at grandfather's. I'd love them to sleep over, but at the earliest they'll be back late tonight."

"Why didn't you go?"

"Because of the school. By the way, you know today is the school anniversary, right? My mom and dad don't know about such things."

Of course, Mr. Crosswalk knew that. He controls the traffic every morning. How could he not know?

"I have nowhere to go. On a perfect day like this, I'm free", she said.

"Why don't you hang out with your friends?"

"I don't have any friends. I can't bring them home, so I don't make friends."

"I have to go somewhere else besides the junk shop", he said.

"Is it a place I shouldn't go?"

"Not necessarily."

"Maybe you don't want me to go with you..."

Dohee looked very disappointed.

"Do you want to come with me? I'm going to meet some children."

Mr. Crosswalk was such a soft-hearted man, not someone who could ignore people easily.

"What children are you talking about?", Dohee asked, looking at him.

"They're younger than you, and I'm not sure if you can come with me."

"I can baby-sit very well. I'm not kidding", Dohee, who doesn't even have younger siblings, said confidently.

That's how she convinced Mr. Crosswalk, and they left the apartment together.

Ding-dong, ding-dong.

The doorbell rang during the class.

My mother came out of the kitchen and quickly picked up the intercom.

"Who is it?", she asked.

"Mother, it's me!"

"Yes, Come on in."

Mother put down the intercom and looked at me.

"Your sister-in-law came."

"My sister-in-law?"

She came without a notice? Suddenly, my mind seemed to go blank.

"Guys, we have a visitor", I said to the students. "Let's have a class in my room today. It's all right, guys?"

"We don't care.", Nagyung said, looking around at Jongwon and Sowon.

Jongwon and Sowon also nodded their heads.

My sister-in-law came into the house. I looked at her and said:

"You came without saying you were coming..."

"I've got something that I had to fly in for. Oh, I guess you were having a class. I'm sorry!", she said.

"It's okay. I've decided to do it in my room. Guys, let's get those snacks and go in."

Sowon was the first to pick up a plate with snacks.

"Don't worry, I'll sit in your room, so just teach here."

My sister-in-law sounded as if she felt sorry because she had interrupted the class.

"It's all right."

By the way, by the way! Sowon, who was more passionate about snacks than stories, suddenly asked a question:

"Now that there's a crosswalk, he's going to leave to another place, isn't he?"

'Oh, Sowon, please...'

"He's leaving with that girl you talked about earlier, isn't he?"

Sowon, who pays attention to the most important part of the story and then completes the story with her own imagination for the rest. What should I do with this child? And with myself, who became a red-eared rabbit in an instant?

"Hahaha, the thing is, uh, will he leave?", I asked.

"Mr. Crosswalk? How do you know him?", my sister-in-law asked, looking at Sowon with her eyes wide open.

"Come on, sister. I was just telling them a fairy tale that personified the crosswalk!"

I've told my mother that it's a story about all of my family, and that's

why I am shivering! I wanted to escape this moment quickly.

"Sowon, the Crosswalk man and the traffic light girl loved each other so much, they left their lovely street and went to the high pedestrian overpass far, far away. Isn't it such a sad and beautiful story? I'll tell you the rest in my room. Let's get in there quickly!"

Nagyung and Jongwon put their heads down and giggled together. They've noticed that the visitor who just arrived had something to do with the story I was telling. The sudden love story of a crosswalk and traffic light! Even I couldn't help laughing.

"Since you have a guest here, can't we just finish today's class now?", Nagyung grinned and asked.

"Should we?", I asked. "I'll make it up for you next time instead. Even tomorrow's fine. Jongwon, what do you think?"

"We don't need to have any makeup class tomorrow. We'll be back next time", she said.

"Then we'll have an extra hour class next time. Tell your mother what happened, okay?"

"Yes."

Jongwon's back-head looked very pretty today. How many other people would like that kind of back-head! But, but! Then the boy who has that kind of back-head took off his shoes and turned around.

"Why?"

"I got the answer. I saw you in a dither."

"Hurry up and go!"

"It must be hard, but try to work it out. Hahaha!"

Again, Jongwon's back of the head was clearly the one calling for a finger flick.

'Jongwon's mom, please one more hit today....'

I glanced at my sister-in-law's face.

"Hey, are you telling the children about Mr. Crosswalk?", she asked.

"You're very quick-witted anyway. I've been missing Mr. Crosswalk more these days..."

What a relief. It didn't seem like my sister-in-law had noticed everything.

"I'm looking for someone! Have you seen him?' I was afraid you'd advertise it like that", my sister-in-law said.

Busted!

"We don't need to advertise like that", I replied.

"You can give it a try. By the way, while talking about Mr. Crosswalk, you're not talking about me, right?"

"Why would I talk about you?"

Busted! Busted!

"But why were you so frustrated earlier?", she asked.

"I was just embarrassed to have a class. Why is it so hot? Mom, do you have anything cold?"

Watching us at the table, my mother quickly went to the refrigerator. How can she move so fast and awkwardly...?

"What do you want? We have juice, and sikhye."

"Sikhye, please."

"That's strange... Mother!", my sister-in-law said and then called my mother.

"Hey, hey, hey, you don't have to tell. Want some sikhye, too?"

"How long has it been since I've known you and your daughter? She's even talking about me, isn't she? She always wanted to write about it."

Mother put the sikhye down on the table.

"Well, she was writing about some kind of traffic lights or crosswalks, wasn't she?", mother said.

'Mom... it's so awkward.'

My sister-in-law gulped some sikhye.

"Hey, have you ever had a police officer in your house because your mom and dad fought? I want to forget that I've lived like that now... but it's too bad my in-laws have known me since then."

I saw my mother without realizing it as she slipped out of her seat.

"I think I know how you feel. I also hate talking about back then. I don't know how I would have grown up without you and Mr. Crosswalk", my sister-in-law said as she smiled at me.

"You used to throw tantrums after tantrums. But you were a good girl."

"That's right, I used to do that a lot. Nevertheless, there were many things I couldn't say. I hated it and resented it, but I couldn't talk about it. If I had just said I hated it then, I wouldn't have been this stuffy until now..... Why did a seven-year-old had to know and put up with so much anger?"

"We all grew up like that, but you still had your brother and mother!", I said.

My sister-in-law patted me on my back as if to comfort me, and said brightly:

"You did have a mom and dad!"

I also spoke energetically:

"You know they were not just normal mom and dad, don't you?"

"You're so vigorous that I keep forgetting...", she replied.

I felt a little sorry after I said that.

"I wouldn't have been able to live without being vigorous. And I'm really vigorous, ha!"

Hahaha. I really like my sister-in-law.

"Anyway! Let's be precise, I'm talking about Mr. Crosswalk. The man who was standing in the middle of us like a pillar. Of course, I have to

talk about you to some extent. It's kind of weird if I just take you out when I'm talking about Mr. Crosswalk. Do you still want me to exclude you? Is that what you really want?”, I asked her.

“.....”

"People don't know why they think they're always at the center of the world. You're just in a big supporting role!"

"Oh! You make it pretty obvious that you're a writer. You were only a girl who's been following me around sucking on a dried filefish fillet!", I said jokingly.

I quickly dodged when my sister-in-law tried to hit me on my head.

"You're allowing it, aren't you?"

"If I don't allow it, you won't?"

"Hahaha, you've given me permission!"

I ran away from my sister-in-law and saw my mother standing in the kitchen. Mother's shoulders shook. She wiped away her tears with her sleeve. Even though my sister-in-law saw it, she seemed to pretend not to see it. My mother is crying. And yet this story has to be told. Maybe my sister-in-law let me tell her story because she knows how I feel.

'Mom, I'm sorry...'

I sat close to my step sister.

"Sister, wouldn't Mr. Crosswalk want to see us when I'm talking about him to the children? Telepathy. That's real", I said.

"Okay, that's fine, but just because I nagged you a little, you're not going to say that I was a very bad kid or something like that, are you? It's no fun taking such childish revenge", she said.

My sister-in-law glared at me.

"Hahaha. I guess you do know that you nag a lot?"

"I told you to do some work because you're supposed to be responsible for yourself, whether you're a writer or something. When you were a kid

and still now, you're just like a baby to me, so I said it because I'm worried about you", she said to me in a nice way.

"I know. I'm so glad I have a sister like you."

She's my brother's wife, but she's like a mother to me.

"Seeing that you like me, I think you're going to say a lot of bad things about me to those kids..."

"Hahahaha!"

"Oh, by the way, Mother!"

My sister-in-law jumped up from the sofa and ran to my mother.

"I came here so happy because I had some good news. But I said something else because of her", she said.

My mother looked at my sister-in-law with red eyes.

"I'm pregnant. I came here to say that but I'm sorry I made the mood so weird."

"Good job. Yeah, that's how you give birth and raise a child. Oh, good job. Congratulations", my mother said to her.

Tears eventually flowed from mother's red eyes. Tears of joy flowing from sad eyes. I wasn't confident in making eye contact with my mother. So, I quickly congratulated my sister-in-law.

"Congratulations, sister! I should give my nephew a nice present, but I'll have to work harder on my tutoring. Hmm! I need more students..."

"I thought there would be a lot of kids since you called it a class. What, you have only three? What kind of class is that? Why don't you just call it a story listening group?" my sister-in-law replied, laughing out loud.

Through my sister's laughter, my mother said quietly:

"Tae-hee, was it that hard to forget? Well, I've lived 60 years of my life, but still, it's hard to forget about it. Those two or three years of your life, it's a tough one to forget, right?"

The tears shed by an old lady are thick tears. Tears that have dried up

and only their essence has been left behind. Similar to that, I still remember tears that I shed when I was young. Those tears still make my heart feel stuffy.

'I should have cried then. It didn't get any better with my mom coming back. To my friends, I was a child abandoned by his mother and then changed to a child who was once abandoned by his mother. Nothing has really changed.'

It happened when I was seven. It was a fear that a seven-year-old child couldn't handle.

'My mother abandoned us. She might throw us away again!'

I went into the room.

My sister-in-law's chatter continued in the living room.

"Tae-seok will be here right after work", she said to my mother. "Please say something to him. I asked him to go to the hospital with me, but he said 'why do you need two people going to check your pregnancy?' Please scold him till he sheds tears."

"Yes, yes... You don't have morning sickness yet, do you?"

"No, but I just keep craving rice crackers."

"That's not very delicious...", my mother answered.

But at that time, I found the rice crackers so delicious.

The Delicious Smell of a Rice Cracker

"I'm sorry about the last time. And thank you for your quick wits."

"Hahahaha!", Jongwon and Nagyung laughed loudly at my words.

"You didn't go home straight that day, did you? You better tell me the truth", I said.

"We played at the playground. Just one hour."

"And then you went home and told your mom you were in my class, I guess."

"Isn't that obvious?", Jongwon said like nothing happened with a straight face.

"You guys think little of me because I'm a tutor, but if you keep doing that, I may call your moms."

"We may quit this class!", Jongwon exclaimed.

"No. I like Miss Oh", Sowon said, who messed up last time. She smiled and looked at me.

"I live because of Sowon", I said, looking at her.

Sowon is someone who can be nice and hateful, but she's usually more nice than hateful.

"From the time I guessed it's a twenty-year-old story, I lost interest in it. I wouldn't have come here if I didn't have to go to English class. But yesterday I just had a feeling! I think I know if this story really happened or you made it up. I came here today because I thought I'd know who the characters are in real life if I listened to them more. I'm kind of smart, you know. Haha", Jongwon said.

"Let me tell you this, Jongwon. You're not a kind of smart boy, you're a very smart boy", I said with my eyes wide open, exaggeratedly.

"Miss, what happened to the crosswalk man and the traffic light girl?", Sowon asked, sitting close to the table.

"Oh, the crosswalk man and the traffic light girl! Well...The crosswalk man and traffic light girl lived happily ever after, looking down at cars and people on the pedestrian overpass."

"Ah..."

Sowon accepted the story, which was created suddenly, by subtly mixing it with the original story.

"Hahaha!", Jongwon and Nagyung burst into laughter simultaneously.

"Jongwon and Nagyung, why are you laughing?" Sowon asked naively.

"After I heard that the crosswalk man and the traffic light girl lived happily ever after, should I cry? Hahahaha", Jongwon, who was sitting on the couch, replied and laughed.

"Stop it. Miss, now tell me about the real Mr. Crosswalk. I'm ready to take note!", Nagyung, who settled the bustling atmosphere at a breath, said.

Somehow, I could feel the President Lady's force from Nagyung...

"Okay. Now I'll start talking about the real Mr. Crosswalk."

"By the way, why isn't your mother here?", Sowon asked, looking around the house.

She must have been curious because she couldn't see my mother who was the first to greet her by opening the door.

"She has other plans."

I know why my mother left the house to avoid today's class. My mother must have been afraid to hear her own story from her daughter. But I can't stop telling the story now. After all, it's a story that all of us have to deal with.

"Anyone else have any questions? I'll start if you don't have one!"

I have to start talking bravely, but my mother, who left the house on purpose, weighed heavily on my mind. I had a glass of water first. The reason why we haven't talked about Mr. Crosswalk so far, was not because of my mother, sister-in-law, or brother. It was because of me, because I was scared of my story. A seven-year-old girl who chewed rice crackers. I was afraid to get rid of this child inside of me. I was hiding Mr. Crosswalk to hide myself... I shouldn't have done that. Thankfully, Nagyung will put this story in writing in the future.

'I must believe it!'

The story I told her will surely be Nagyung's own story, mixed with her

feelings and imagination, as she interpreted it. That will be fine. Because I'm sure Mr. Crosswalk, who should never be forgotten, will be the main character of her story. Other kids need to know that such an adult exists.

When children go to school, other kids go together with their friends, but Dohee always goes alone. She should go with her classmates at least once.

Do Dohee's parents know that their child is a loner because of them? What if they say that they fought only at home, so there's no way their child can't make friends outside! If they say so, I'd like to say a word. They also had their childhood, so they should know that being unable to bring a friend home is like being unable to make a friend. Rumors of having strange parents spread faster at school than in the neighborhood. Anyway, that's why Mr. Crosswalk decided to take Dohee with him, to those kids whom he visits every Wednesday.

"How old are they?", Dohee asked.

"11, 7", Mr. Crosswalk answered.

"They're so little. Are we going to an orphanage?"

"No, we're going to their home."

They had to walk a lot because they couldn't take the car because of the handcart. It was even more tiring since they had to stop by the market after going to the junk shop.

"Are we there yet?", Dohee asked, sounding a little tired.

"We're almost there."

After countless conversations like this, they finally arrived at a shabby two-story house on a residential street. The place that Mr. Crosswalk

went to was the shabbiest basement in the two-story house. There were two children living in the house. Tae-seok and Tae-hee. Tae-seok is in fourth grade, but he couldn't go to school because of his younger sister Tae-hee. No, it wasn't just Tae-hee...

Click!

I was appalled at the sound of the front door key turning.

It was my mother. My mother just came back.

"Did I interrupt your class?", she asked.

"No, you came earlier than I thought."

"I should listen to my daughter's story. Don't you think it's better for me to listen to your story?"

My mother sat down at the table without changing her clothes.

"Grandma, come here and listen together with us!", Sowon cried out for my mother.

"No, I've heard it from here from the start and I feel comfortable here at the table."

My breathing became heavy and my hands were numb as if I had a cramp. I couldn't get permission from my mother with a kind of tearful joke like I did with my sister-in-law. I just had to pretend to be calm and tell the story of my mother and me.

"Then, I'll start again."

Mr. Crosswalk went down the stairs to the basement first. Dohee followed him right down. I felt like I was going to somebody's storage,

not their home. It was the first time I've ever visited a house in such a completely dark basement. The landlord should be using it as a basement storage, but he rented it out. But it smelled like something delicious, a smell that didn't match the gloomy place.

"I can smell something delicious', Dohee said.

At Dohee's words, Mr. Crosswalk turned around and smiled slightly. Then I knocked on the front door of the house just ahead of the stairs.

"Mr. Crosswalk!"

Tae-hee came out as the door opened. The delicious smell got stronger, and the smell came from the house where she came from.

"How are you?", asked Mr. Crosswalk.

"Doing just fine!"

Tae-hee smiled brightly and saw Dohee standing behind Mr. Crosswalk.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Dohee. I live in the same apartment building as Mr. Crosswalk."

"Wow! Do you live in an apartment, Mr. Crosswalk?"

Mr. Crosswalk only patted Tae-hee on the head instead of answering.

"Come in, Dohee. Tae-seok, we have a guest!"

When Dohee went inside, Tae-seok was standing with a surprised face.

"Hi, I'm Dohee. I'm in sixth grade, and I followed Mr..."

Dohee hesitated. I'm sure Tae-seok was also embarrassed. The house was messy, and his clothes were messy. No, it was not messy, it was more like shabby. But a stranger came all of a sudden, so he was embarrassed, for sure. Tae-hee didn't seem to care much, but he didn't even make eye contact with Dohee. There was something very brave about Dohee, because suddenly, in a bright voice and on purpose, she said:

"It smells delicious, what's this smell?"

Tae-seok didn't answer.

"It's the smell of my brother's rice crackers", Tae-hee answered.

"You can make that kind of stuff at home? That's awesome!", Dohee said excitedly.

"It's just stir-fried raw rice, and that's what Tae-hee calls it", Tae-seok said bluntly.

To tell you more about the rice crackers, actually, Tae-seok's family received rice from the community center because they were on welfare. It's not glossy rice sold at the market. It's not very good. If you're not really good at cooking, you should give up on making delicious steamed rice with it. Even if you put just a little too much water in it, it becomes watery like porridge. Tae-seok didn't really mind it, but Tae-hee had a problem when eating it. She often threw up because of the rice or some side dishes.

So Tae-seok stir-fried the raw rice in his own way, and Tae-hee liked it very much. But she kept on throwing up, so Mr. Crosswalk told Tae-seok to stir-fry raw rice and make porridge for her. But he stir-fried it too long. Tae-hee ate it and she thought it was really delicious. Tae-seok also liked the stir-fried raw rice that was similar to scorched rice and crackers. But he had to save rice, so he stir-fried it little by little and gave it to Tae-hee only. Even on that day, Tae-hee kept asking him to stir-fry the raw rice, so he was making it for her. Tae-hee grabbed a handful of the stir-fried raw rice and gave it to Dohee.

"Try this, Dohee. This is good."

Dohee took it, but she hesitated for a second because it was her first time seeing it.

"Who's gonna eat that kind of thing?", Tae-seok asked a little annoyingly.

Dohee, who felt awkward, quickly ate it. And she thought it was much

more delicious than crunchy scorched rice.

"It's delicious! I'm going to make it at home, too", she said.

"It doesn't taste that good..."

"This is good. Can I have some more?"

"Yes", Tae-seok answered roughly and went to Mr. Crosswalk.

Mr. Crosswalk was unpacking some of the ramen and other foods he bought.

"You're almost out of things to eat, aren't you?", Mr. Crosswalk asked.

"It's okay", Tae-seok replied.

"You have to eat well."

"....."

"I want to eat dried filefish fillet", Tae-hee said while eating the rice crackers.

"Tae-hee!", Tae-seok exclaimed and glared at her.

Mr. Crosswalk quickly took out the dried filefish fillet from the bag and gave it to Tae-hee.

"Thank you."

Tae-hee liked savoury dried filefish fillet. She tore it very thinly, sucked it repeatedly piece by piece, and chewed it little by little until it melted in her saliva. She ate it so slowly so she could enjoy a dried filefish fillet all day long.

"Did you eat anything?", Mr. Crosswalk asked Tae-seok.

"I did, but Tae-hee continues not eating."

"I'm going to eat ramen Mr. Crosswalk brought. Dohee, let's eat together!", Tae-hee said.

"I am actually very hungry, too. Where's the pot?", Dohee asked.

Tae-hee opened the cabinet and took out the pot.

"Anyone else wants to have some?"

No one answered.

"Tae-hee, let's just eat together. Let the men starve", Dohee said.

Tae-hee smiled at Dohee. She couldn't answer because she was sucking up the delicious dried filefish fillet.

You must be curious about how Tae-seok and Tae-hee met Mr. Crosswalk. It's because of Tae-seok's dad. He met him when Mr. Crosswalk just moved into town. Tae-seok's dad collected scrap metal or recyclables and sold it to a junk shop. One day, he got closer with Mr. Crosswalk and he introduced him to the junk shop. Tae-seok's dad thought Mr. Crosswalk was just a bummer without a decent job. When Mr. Crosswalk was about to stay in town for a while, he rented a small room of the junk shop he was introduced to, and stayed there until he moved to the security office of Arirang Apartment. But after Mr. Crosswalk came, Tae-seok's father passed away the following spring. He must have had a bad stomach. He had to get treatment, but he couldn't afford it, so he only took painkillers and unfortunately died.

Tae-seok's mom... Ahem!

Tae-hee's mom... Hem! Hem!

I'm sorry. Wrong pipe.

Tae-seok's mom left home two years ago. She told Tae-seok that she would make a lot of money, and Tae-hee that she would buy a lot of dried filefish fillet when she comes back. It was just another afternoon. One day, which was no different from other days, with a big suitcase, she left. Oh, it was an exceptionally sunny day. It was very hot.

Mom left, dad left, and for about six months after that, Mr. Crosswalk took care of the two children instead of their mom and dad. But you know, being taken care of by someone and living together with your own mom and dad, are different. Even if you have someone taking care of you, it's not like parents who make you feel safe just by being there with

you.

You guys have that kind of experience, right? Let's say you are watching a scary movie with your pillow tightly clenched, and your mom comes and sits next to you saying, "What are you watching?", and then, you realize the movie is not as scary as you thought. And sometimes you know how scary it is when you're home alone late at night. But as soon as mom and dad ring the bell, the fear goes away. See, that's what parents are. But those parents disappeared for Tae-seok and Tae-hee. How scary it must have been for them every day.

People say a basement is cooler than outside, on the ground, but their house was insanely hot. In the summer, the heat rash appeared all over their body like hives. But Tae-seok and Tae-hee couldn't open the window. They were so scared of the feet that 'looked through the window'. The tramping sound, screech! The sound of a motorcycle stopping... The sounds from outside the window were the scariest thing in the world, more than their dad's death, more than when their mom left home.

Oh! I said they made ramen earlier. Yes, Dohee made ramen and ate it with Tae-hee.

"You're just like my sister. You have the same name as me, Tae-hee, Do-hee", said Tae-hee.

They both had the same last letter in their names because of some kind of fate.

"You should say it is similar, not the same", said Dohee.

"No, it's the same. Tae-hee, Do-hee."

"Yes, it's the same."

Dohee just laughed.

"Dohee, I'm going to school next year", Tae-hee said.

"Congratulations! I'll give you a pretty pencil."

"That's great! But who are you, actually?"

It was a bit funny to see her eating ramen after knowing her for such a short time, but it felt as if they've known her for a long time.

"I live in the same apartment building as Mr. Crosswalk", Dohee said.

"Why did you come to my house?"

"Because I didn't want to be at home. You don't like it that I'm here?"

"No, I like it. Did your mom leave home, too?"

"Hey!", Tae-seok, who was checking the boiler with Mr. Crosswalk, yelled. He pretended he wasn't listening, but he was listening to them. Mr. Crosswalk seemed pretty surprised, too.

"My brother is usually very nice, but he gets angry whenever I talk about mom", Tae-hee said quietly. But of course, it was loud enough for Tae-seok to hear.

"Yes, he seems nice", Dohee said.

"Why don't you want to stay home? It's an apartment. An apartment is for the rich", Tae-hee said.

"Living in an apartment doesn't make everyone rich", Dohee replied to Tae-hee.

"No, rich. Rich moms don't leave home, do they?"

Tae-seok suddenly stood up. It seemed like he was going to hit Tae-hee.

"Not rich, they say my family's in debt. My mom didn't leave home. But seeing her fight with my dad, I think she's going to leave soon. I hope she does that. But she has to take me with her", Dohee said, looking straight into Tae-seok's eyes, not Tae-hee's.

"My mom didn't take us", Tae-hee said, stirring the pot with chopsticks.

At that time, Tae-seok walked over and threw the pot into the sink. He threw it so hard that it made a very loud sound. Of course, that the soup splashed here and there. Tae-seok must have been very angry, because

he did it in front of Mr. Crosswalk.

"How do you think I'd feel if you throw a pot like that? Is it because of me?", Dohee asked.

"You are done eating. And it wasn't because of you", Tae-seok replied.

"You're angry, anyway. Even if you're angry, you should not throw things like that, though."

"....."

Dohee quickly changed her voice to a bright voice when Tae-seok didn't say anything.

"I walked a lot today, but if I take the bus, I'll be here much quicker", she said. Then she smiled and asked: "Can I come to visit you guys again?"

Tae-seok was very nervous and he thought he would hear more things, but Dohee said something completely different and he was speechless. He didn't know what to do.

"....."

"I like it!"

Tae-hee really liked it.

"Can I come over again?", Dohee asked again.

"Whatever", Tae-seok answered shortly and went back to Mr. Crosswalk. He hasn't had a friend ever who had offered to come over. It was a little bit awkward, but he didn't really hate it.

Mr. Crosswalk must have been done with the boiler, so he took off his work gloves.

"I need to go and buy some kerosene. It's already cold", he said.

It was really cold in the morning and at night, but the kids couldn't afford the kerosene. Actually, the monthly rent of the house was paid by Mr. Crosswalk. Tae-hee didn't know that, but Tae-seok did. So how could they ask for kerosene?

"Tae-seok, let's go out together", said Mr. Crosswalk.

"Where are you going?"

"It's warm if you put styrofoam on the floor. Let's go get some kerosene, too", Mr. Crosswalk replied.

"Yes...."

Tae-seok looked at Tae-hee. No matter where he went, he always took her with him.

"I'll stay home with Tae-hee. Why don't you go with Mr. Crosswalk?"

I'm telling you, Dohee was a really quick-witted child. Tae-hee must have liked Dohee, and she wanted to stay home with her. So only the two of them left. Tae-seok, however, felt at ease even though he left Tae-hee behind. He was always worried about Tae-hee, so he even woke up in the middle of the night and checked if she was alright. But he felt at ease because Dohee said she'll be with Tae-hee. While he was going up the stairs, he kept looking down at the house because of a weird feeling that he had never felt before.

The two of them came back later than expected. They came back with a lot of styrofoam on the handcart. They even brought the carpet crosswalk that Mr. Crosswalk washed. They brought all of that from the Arirang Apartment.

"I didn't know there are so much styrofoam in our apartment building!", Dohee said while carrying some styrofoam.

"I've kept them aside whenever I had the chance", Mr. Crosswalk said

Mr. Crosswalk cut the Styrofoam in order to fit the room. Tae-seok helped him, too, and they worked together really well. When Mr. Crosswalk cut the styrofoam and pressed it down, Tae-seok put packing tape on it. After the styrofoam was done, they properly laid the carpet crosswalk on top of it.

The carpet crosswalk now was a real carpet. Everyone sat on the carpet after they had finished, and it was much warmer than sitting on the bare floor. The longer they sat down, the warmer they felt.

Dohee was amazed when she touched the floor. "It's soft and warm!", she said excitedly.

"Wow, there's a crosswalk in our room!", Tae-hee said. She also was very excited.

I think everyone was in a good mood that day. If Mr. Crosswalk hadn't suggested to Dohee to go home, she would have even forgotten to go home.

"Come over again, Dohee", said Tae-hee.

"I'll come often. Tae-seok said I could come."

Dohee wasn't just quick-witted, she was also sly.

"I told you my brother was very nice."

That's how Dohee and Mr. Crosswalk left the children's house. Not a bad memory for each other.

Dohee went to Tae-seok's house very often. She usually went on Saturdays or Sundays because of school. She liked his house more than her house with mom and dad, who might fight any time. For about a week she lived with the thought of going to Tae-seok's house on the weekend. The children got along like brothers and sisters. They did the laundry, cleaned the house, and ate together. Tae-seok, who was tough, followed Dohee just like his own sister. Maybe he liked Dohee because she was open-minded from the beginning.

"Tae-seok, when Tae-hee starts going to school, you should go back to school", said Dohee.

"....."

"I'm not sure what's good about school either, but I think it'll be harder

later if I don't go now. Some people go back to school even after they have become old. Let's not do that. You can pick up the recyclables after school", Dohee continued.

Some say you can't make much money by collecting recyclables, but it was something Tae-seok could do, and, although it was a small thing, it was a big incentive that kept Tae-hee and him together from day to day.

"Do you think I can go back to school now?"

"You're smart, so you'll catch up soon. If there's anything difficult, I'll teach you."

"I guess you do really well in school?"

"I'm in middle school next year, and do you think I won't be able to teach elementary school students?"

"Oh, gee."

If it wasn't for Dohee then, Tae-seok might never have gone to school. That shows how well Tae-seok took Dohee's advice. It was also a time when Tae-seok smiled and laughed a lot. Dohee understood Tae-seok and Tae-hee very well. Come to think of it, I think Dohee herself did to Tae-hee what she wanted from her mom and dad. I feel bad for Dohee, but I think her heart was healed by sharing and loving.

Crack!

Someone threw a stone at the window when Dohee, Tae-seok and Tae-hee were watching TV. They looked at the window, surprised.

Crack! Crack!

"Hey! Kim Tae-seok! The king of beggars!", someone called Tae-seok from outside.

"Who is it!?"

Dohee ran out screaming. The two children standing outside flinched when Dohee came out, not Tae-seok.

"Who are you to throw stones at someone else's house!?", Dohee yelled

at them.

To the fourth-graders, Dohee in the sixth grade looked pretty big. Actually, Dohee grew as tall as a middle school student. The children were always fooling around in the neighborhood and bullied Tae-seok when they were bored.

Tae-seok ran out right away to fight with the boys.

"You guys threw stones at my house again?!", he yelled furiously.

"We didn't throw it, beggar!"

"What? Beggar!? You come over here!"

Dohee, furious at the boys' words, held the two boys' wrists tightly.

"Do you see that crack on the window over there that's taped up? Actually, the landlord asked me to get you boys, and I got you now. Come here!", Dohee screamed.

"Why would you care?!"

The boys tried to pull out their hands from Dohee's grip.

"I'm Tae-seok's cousin. My dad comes here every Wednesday. Don't you know? You guys pay for that window today. Understand? Landlady!", Dohee shouted as she looked up at the second floor.

"I'm sorry...."

The boys were afraid of being told to pay for the windows, so they quickly apologized.

The landlady didn't come out, but Dohee let go of the boys.

"Kim Tae-seok, you beggar!", the boys shouted as they ran away.

"You wanna die!", Tae-seok shouted and started to chase the boys.

But Dohee caught Tae-seok and held him back.

"If you mess with Tae-seok again, I'll go to your house with the police!", Dohee shouted at them.

The kids ran away like someone was chasing after them. Hahaha.

"Dohee....", Tae-seok said as he looked at her with his fists clenched.

"Next time when they come, you fight. If you don't fight with those bastards, who do you fight with? If anything happens, Mr. Crosswalk and I will run straight to you, so don't worry!"

Dohee tapped Tae-seok on his shoulder. She hated her mom and dad fighting, but she told Tae-seok to fight. Her dad always fights with her mom, who stays at home every day, asking her where she's been. And her mom fights with her dad, who has a lot of debt, asking him why he's fooling around at home all the time. It was terrible. But Tae-seok's fight was different from that of grown-ups. It's bullying of weaker children who have nobody to rely on and no place to hide. Dohee thought that Tae-seok didn't have to put up with the cunning kids who bullied only those who are weaker than themselves.

Dohee was worried that they might bother Tae-seok again, but she thought it was a good thing to call herself as his cousin. If his cousin lives nearby, the boys will bother him less than before. So she came back home satisfied.

As soon as Dohee entered the entrance to the apartment, the President Lady approached her. Mr. Crosswalk was out there, too.

"Where have you been?", the President Lady asked her. "You're very late today."

Mr. Crosswalk must have known where Dohee has been.

"Oh, my God, Dohee. The police took your dad to the station. Your mother was screaming for help, so someone must have called the police. What should we do about this?"

"Hmm..."

"Hurry and go up to your apartment. Your mom's hurt a lot. An ambulance will be here soon."

Dohee hurried into the elevator which just opened its doors.

How terrible it was for her to scream for help? Dohee held back her

tears with clenched teeth. She came home in a good mood, but her mood changed instantly, wondering what the hell happened?

It was during the winter vacation that year. Dohee's family decided to move into her grandpa's house. Her grandfather told her family to move into his house. Dohee's family had nowhere to go, since her father had to sell his apartment because he was in debt with his business. Her mom must have had a head injury. She often stammered and was frequently seen sitting absent-mindedly. Where would you send someone like that? Dohee's grandparents had to take care of her mother.

"Go and live well, Dohee's mom. Looks like Dohee's dad was under his father's thumb. You'll feel better there. But you still have to keep my phone number. Okay? Call me if he ever hit you there, again. I'll call the police and have them check you out", the President Lady said while she held Dohee's mom's hand tightly.

Turns out, most of the police's visits have been reported by the President Lady. Whenever she thought they were fighting seriously, she went straight to the police. There was a time the police thought she was making a big deal out of nothing. Saying it's a lover's quarrel. Then the President Lady got upset.

"It's not an ordinary lover's quarrel", she told the police. "And if someone dies, will the police be held responsible? I didn't call the police just to help someone's wife. It's much more serious! I think somebody is going to die here! I definitely called the police for help. It's all on record, right?"

Wonderful, President Lady!

The President Lady also wrote down her number and gave it to Dohee.

"Dohee, if your mom can't make the call somehow, you should call me at least. Okay? When you go to a new school, you should make a lot of

friends. Okay?"

"Yes, thank you."

Mr. Crosswalk said goodbye to Dohee, too.

"I haven't been a safe crosswalk for you. I'm sorry", he said to her.

"No, it was great to know you. I won't forget you."

So that's how Dohee's family moved to her grandfather's house.

Tae-hee cried a lot. She cried so hard that she almost threw up. Tae-seok's yelling couldn't stop her crying. Dohee was different from the kids who called him a beggar and teased him about picking up empty bottles. She wasn't like the kids who walked around him even though he didn't do anything.

"Beggar, beggar. A rat crossing a ditch. Give me a penny!"

Yes, Tae-seok and Tae-hee never begged, but the kids sang like that. The kids knew that Tae-seok had no parents who could come running and scold them when they were teasing him. Tae-seok and Tae-hee also knew about it. They're always the only ones who get into trouble even if they fight with other children. Even though he fought only because the children teased and bullied him cruelly, and even though his face was also scratched and swollen, other parents only scolded Tae-seok. They were calling Tae-seok a local gangster. That was not a scolding. That was a grown-up's version of bullying. So Tae-seok waited for his mom. At first, he waited for his mom because he missed her so much, but from some point onwards, he waited for his mom to fight for him. He wanted to live in the home where grown-ups confront other grown-ups when they come to yell at him. A family with parents who are always on the side of their children, no matter what.

Of course, Dohee came forward and fought for him. But she couldn't be his mother. She's only two years older than Tae-seok. Still, he liked Dohee who often nagged him to clean up his place and told him to wash

up. He was grateful to Dohee for being with him even though she complained that his room was too cold. That's why Tae-seok didn't want Dohee to leave either. Dohee wrote down his grandfather's phone number for him, but he didn't call her for a while. He must have been upset. However, Mr. Crosswalk came by his house every Wednesday. He was such a consistent person.

You know, people get attached each other when they keep on meeting. They get to feel closer and become like friends. Even though Mr. Crosswalk didn't say much and was shy, the residents of Arirang Apartment loved him. You know how he always greeted neighbors with a smile at the entrance. Some even suggested hiring him as a full-time security guard. It was not a bad idea for Mr. Crosswalk either. Sleeping in a cot was uncomfortable, but it was okay for him because he used to sleep well in his sleeping bag while traveling. But Mr. Crosswalk refused the job.

"I can't stay here long", he told them.

He was always ready to leave. He wanted to look for places where people really needed a crosswalk. He wanted to warn people by saying 'This road is dangerous!'. Mr. Crosswalk must have thought it was his job to do that. So what's the use of anyone asking him to stay longer?

Words Too Late

After Dohee left Arirang Apartment, the cold winter really started. Winter, for Tae-seok and Tae-hee, was very hard. They brushed their teeth and washed their faces with cold, ice water, and did the dishes in cold water. The water was so cold that they thought their fingers would

fall off. If their hands were too cold, they would dip their hands in boiled water for a while. They never pressed the hot water boiler switch, though they had thought of doing it. Mr. Crosswalk already filled it with some kerosene, but that wasn't enough. And late winter was approaching. One day Mr. Crosswalk brought a big pumpkin. And as soon as he got there, he peeled the pumpkin and made some porridge with it. Pumpkin porridge, which was as sweet as honey, was the best. Tae-hee, who didn't eat a lot, already had two bowls. It must have been a warm and satisfying day for her.

"I'm going to eat only pumpkin porridge every day", she said.

"You didn't really like it before, but now you seem to enjoy it a lot", her brother said.

"No, brother! Pumpkin porridge is my favorite now."

"You might not need dried filefish fillet anymore, since you are going to eat only pumpkin porridge."

"Dried filefish fillet is different, it's not much of a meal!", Tae-hee replied.

"Oh, then, is porridge a meal?"

After having a pleasant and sweet winter night, Mr. Crosswalk walked out to go home. Tae-seok and Tae-hee also went out to say goodbye. Right then, as soon as the three of them walked out of the gate, someone rushed into the alley, and Tae-seok saw it. He knew who it was. He could tell right away, just by looking at the back of the person. Because it was his mom. Even though it was his mom, he couldn't call her. When his long-awaited mother eventually came, his heart was pounding and he got angry. Tae-seok pretended that he didn't see his mom.

"Thank you, Mr. Crosswalk! Goodbye! Tae-hee, let's go in!", he said it out loud as if he wanted his mom to hear.

Mr. Crosswalk thought Tae-seok was acting a little strange. He said goodbye loudly, but he didn't look happy at all. So Mr. Crosswalk glanced at the end of the alley. It was dark, but he saw a woman with a big suitcase ran that way.

"Hurry up and get in the house, it's cold", said Mr. Crosswalk.

Then in the alley, the woman, Tae-seok's mom, came forward. She thought it was Tae-seok's dad, but actually it was a man she didn't know who was talking to the children.

"Tae-seok...", Tae-seok's mom said.

Tae-seok glared at his mom. Even in the dark, one could tell how angry he was and how much he was blaming his mother.

"Mommy!", Tae-hee recognized her mom, too, although she was only five years old when her mother left home.

"Tae-hee!", her mom exclaimed excitedly as she ran towards her and hugged her.

"Mom, did you bring home the dried filefish fillet?"

"Yes, I brought a lot of them. Where is your dad?"

"Daddy's dead".

"....."

Her mom was so surprised that she held Tae-hee's arms tight.

"He died in the spring", Tae-seok said. He spoke in a low voice.

Mr. Crosswalk nodded. The children's mom was back.

"Guys, I'm off now", he said.

Only then, Tae-seok's mom asked Mr. Crosswalk:

"I'm sorry, but who are you?"

"....."

Mr. Crosswalk couldn't say anything. He didn't know what to say.

"He is Mr. Crosswalk. He feeds us and puts some kerosene in the boiler. He even buys us dried filefish fillet," Tae-hee answered quickly.

"I guess I'd better go", said Mr. Crosswalk.

"But, excuse me...."

Mr. Crosswalk didn't give Tae-seok's mom a chance to say something, and he hurried out of the alley.

Tae-seok's mom got up holding Tae-hee's hand. But the strange thing was, Tae-hee pulled her hand out of her mom's. Why did she do that? Her mom came back home, and it's her mom's hand that she's been waiting for so long. But why did she take her hand out of her mom's...?

The three of them didn't say anything. Two years ago, no, the new year already started, so that makes it three years ago. Anyway, until a few years ago, they stayed together in the same house, and why was it so awkward and uncomfortable...?

"Did this man take care of you after your father's death?", their mom asked.

"Yes", Tae-seok answered.

"I haven't seen him before, who is he?"

"Mr. Crosswalk."

"What?"

"That's how we call him."

"He is such a nice man. I'm afraid I didn't even thank him", their mom said.

"....."

"Oh! I should give Tae-hee her dried filefish fillet."

Their mom took out a dried filefish fillet from her bag and gave it to Tae-hee.

Tae-hee ripped the dried filefish fillet into very thin pieces with her teeth as soon as she received it.

"I bought a lot, so take your time and eat it."

"Yes. But, mom, why did you leave us?", Tae-hee asked while sucking the dried filefish fillet.

Their mom's hands shook a little while holding the rest of the dried filefish fillet.

"I went to make a lot of money because we were so poor. I didn't abandon you, Tae-hee."

"Brother and I were really having a hard time. We were hungry all the time. I threw up every day."

Tears fell from their mother's eyes, who lowered her head.

"This is our crosswalk...", Tae-hee said, sounding a little irritated.

She wiped away her mother's tears from the carpet crosswalk.

"Tae-hee, your mom is here. Didn't you miss your mom?", mom asked.

Her mom was crying, but Tae-hee only worried about the carpet crosswalk.

"You left us here alone."

Tae-hee got up and stood next to Tae-seok.

"Tae-seok, I really didn't know your dad was dead. You know what we went through back then. That's why I had to leave home and make money", their mom said as she looked at Tae-seok. She almost said it in a way as if she begged him.

"You could've gone to work from home", Tae-seok said.

"You know, your dad didn't want me to work at all."

"Mom, you knew he was sick, right? We didn't know dad was that sick."

"Yes, I knew. But I didn't know it was that bad. You know we couldn't afford to go to any hospital? Your dad said it was going to be okay if he just took medicine. And I believed it. And I had no choice but to leave home and make money."

"Then what about us, we...", Tae-seok started.

"Let me be honest with you. I left home for you, not for dad. Dad, he

was an adult, and I thought he could take care of himself. I wanted to get you out of this tiny, sunless basement. That's why I went out."

"You could have told us."

"I told you. I would make money and come back."

Tae-seok turned his head, not looking at his mother. Yeah, she did say that when she left home, saying she'll make money and come back home. But It would have been nice if she told Tae-seok where she worked. Then he would have run straight to his mother when his dad died. They wouldn't have been like abandoned kids. It's very different from knowing she's there somewhere than not knowing at all.

"I thought if I moved out and worked all day, I'd get a small room for rent in no time. But it didn't work out as I expected. I couldn't save enough money and I couldn't be there when your dad died."

Trying to hold back her tears, his mom pursed her lips several times as if she was chewing on her words.

"When dad died, I was so scared because you weren't here...", Tae-seok said.

"I'm sorry, to your dad and you guys..."

Tae-seok's mom hugged him and said weakly:

"Your dad must have known that he was dying. Maybe that's why he didn't want me to work. If he dies, he knew that I'll be the only one to work anyway. Does it make him feel at ease if he let me relax for just a few years? Your dad was such a foolish man. He only took painkillers for such a serious disease."

Their mom laughed softly, then said:

"I wish your father doesn't hate me in heaven."

Tae-seok didn't say anything. I don't think she wanted an answer either. Tae-seok had a lot on his mind. He thought he knew what she was saying, and he understood what she was trying to say, but he kept

getting angry. So he just stood still.

His mom looked at him and opened the bag she brought. Then she took out the stuff in her bag like she was angry, and said:

"I'm your mother, whether I abandoned you or not. Even if you don't like me or even hate me, I'm your mom, okay? It's late, so get ready to go to bed", she said, speaking clearly, shedding some tears.

"You are not going to leave us again?", Tae-seok asked.

"I'm not going to leave you, no, I can't. Go to bed now."

"We don't sleep this early", Tae-hee said curtly.

Their mom was more afraid of Tae-hee than Tae-seok, because she spoke without any feelings, while Tae-seok was full of resentment. Little daughter's body language was rejecting her mother by itself.

"Did you brush your teeth, Tae-hee?"

"I did a while ago."

"Good girl, Tae-hee."

"By the way, why did you leave us?"

Mom didn't even raise her head.

"I didn't leave you! So go to sleep!", she said, a little annoyed.

Tae-seok gave Tae-hee a pillow. She lay close to Tae-seok. Their mom, who put all her clothes in the closet, lay down next to Tae-hee.

Mom, Tae-seok and Tae-hee lay down on the carpet crosswalk. Their mom, who left on a very hot day, had two more hot summers, and came back on a very cold day. In the meantime, their dad went to heaven in the late spring when the spring flowers were all gone.

"I got a notice or something saying that Tae-hee has to go to school", Tae-seok said.

"Tae-hee is already going to school. I will take care of it", mom said.

"Now, can I go back to school, too?" asked Tae-seok.

"Of course, you should."

"Thank you."

It was a conversation between Tae-seok and his mom on a dark night.

I stopped telling the story for a second, because I noticed Jongwon kept looking at something behind me.

Clink.

I heard my mother putting the cup on the table. I didn't look back. I kind of knew she was having a hard time listening to the story I was telling.

"Actually, today's the last day for this story listening class. But I missed a class last time and there's a little more to the story. What should we do? Should I continue now or maybe next time?"

"Tell us all of the story today", Nagyung said.

"What about Jongwon and Sowon?"

They also wanted me to continue.

"Finish it all today. I told my mom that we have a make-up class today", Jongwon said.

"Okay, then."

'Mom, I'm sorry...'

Then I started telling the end of the story that my mother and I both knew.

It was Wednesday and it's been a week since Tae-seok's mom came back. It was the day Mr. Crosswalk usually came to visit them. Tae-seok's mom prepared a lunch with all her heart to thank Mr. Crosswalk. Tae-seok and Tae-hee also liked it. But Mr. Crosswalk didn't

come that day. Mr. Crosswalk, who always visits them on a Wednesday, didn't show up.

Mom took Tae-seok and Tae-hee and went to the Arirang Apartment. But there was no sight of Mr. Crosswalk in the security office of Building 105.

"I heard he lives here", their mom said to the guard.

"He left a few days ago."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"No. You know he doesn't like to settle down in one place. My neighbors really liked him. He is sincere and a hard worker, you know. It's not easy to live in this world for a nice man like him these days. I hope he's doing well", the guard said.

The previous Wednesday night, when they cooked pumpkin porridge and had a sweet dinner, was the last time they saw him.

Mr. Crosswalk gave a lot to people around him even though he'd lost his loved ones. One might say, "Where in the world do you find such a person?" But there's someone like that for sure. Mr. Crosswalk is the one.

On the way back home, Tae-seok didn't even make eye contact with his mom. He knew it wasn't because of his mom, but he still resented her. Of course, his mom was the one who had to come back. He had waited for her so long. But on that day, he hated his mom like the day she left home. It was sad and upsetting that Mr. Crosswalk had left. But he just wanted to put all the blame back on his mom. Mr. Crosswalk, who came to us as if by magic, also disappeared as if by magic.

Tae-seok didn't go straight home, but ran down the alley. There was a pay phone on the main road, and he just ran without knowing Tae-hee was following him. All he could think of was to make a phone call. He went to the phone booth and made a call right away. That's when he

dialed the number Dohee gave him when she moved out.

"Dohee, this is Tae-seok."

"You're so mean! Finally! Why you took so long to call me!?"

"Mom's here."

"Wow! That's great!"

"But Mr. Crosswalk left."

"Mr. Crosswalk? Really? Why? To where?"

"I don't know...."

Tae-seok burst into tears. He cried with the phone in his hand.

You don't know how sad Tae-seok has been while taking care of Tae-hee without his mom and dad. But he didn't cry. He didn't cry when the kids called him a beggar. He thought dad was so sick that he went to heaven, and he believed his mom would be back soon. When he was having such a hard time, he was so glad to have Mr. Crosswalk by his side. You know, how you feel relieved when there's a crosswalk on the road for some reason. Because it's a minimal safeguard on the road and you feel safer when crossing the road.

Mr. Crosswalk was like a crosswalk to Tae-seok and Tae-hee who had no one to rely on. An adult who comforts you so that you can cross the road safely like a crosswalk, without any sound or any flashing traffic lights indicating that you can cross the road. If there was no Mr. Crosswalk.... Tae-seok didn't even want to think about it.

Tae-seok really wanted to repay Mr. Crosswalk for his kindness. But Mr. Crosswalk has left without giving him a chance to do it. And that happened because his mom came back home.

"Dohee, why are all the people that I like leaving?"

"Hahaha. You kind of liked me, didn't you? Don't worry. I'll be back for sure. You don't lose my number. Okay?"

Dohee said it briskly because Tae-seok was crying.

"I won't lose it. I'll make sure to keep it with me."

"And when I have grown up, I'll make sure to find Mr. Crosswalk",
Dohee said.

"I really hope so", Tae-seok said.

"Of course. You know I was very close to him, not like other people."

"Yes, I know. Please find him."

Only then, Tae-seok was able to laugh.

"Tae-seok, you are talking to Dohee, right?", Tae-hee asked from behind
him.

Surprised, Tae-seok looked back and saw Tae-hee.

"It's Dohee, right? Me too, me too! I want to talk to her, too!"

Tae-seok quickly handed the phone to Tae-hee.

"Dohee!"

"Tae-hee!"

"When will you come?", Tae-hee asked.

"I'll be there soon."

"Hurry up!"

Toot... toot... toot... toot... toot...

The phone was cut off. Tae-seok couldn't put more coins in because he
didn't have any.

"Huh? Wah~"

Tae-seok tried everything he could to make Tae-hee stop crying. People
on the street even asked him what was going on. Tae-hee cried so loud,
it sounded as if the phone booth was going to spit them out.

And so, many years have passed. In the meantime, the children couldn't
meet Mr. Crosswalk, let alone finding him. But Tae-seok, Tae-hee, and
Dohee have never forgotten about Mr. Crosswalk. They believed they'd
meet him again someday. That way, they'll be able to say 'thank you' to

him.

Huh? You want to know if the kids met each other later? Of course, they did. How? That, I'll tell you when I get a chance next time. My 'story listening class' has just started!

Twins? Oh, the twin brothers. They're not the ones Mr. Crosswalk couldn't do anything about. He could just look at them now and think, 'they are growing up so well'. Of course, whenever Mr. Crosswalk thinks of his lost twins, he might always think of the twin brothers. Not only the twin brothers of Arirang Apartment, but he would feel the same way when he sees all the other twins he meets. He would think they are all pretty and at the same time he would miss his own twins.

What, you want a sneak preview? Oh, my God. Okay. Dohee, who became a high school student, went to an art high school not far from Tae-seok's house and moved into the dormitory. She said she went there to study art, so I guess that's the reason. This is enough for a preview, right? What kind of art? I guess Dohee went there to be a writer or something. Now, I guess she's writing the best household account book ever. Stop asking. I don't know. LaLaLaLaLa I can't hear you!

Anyway, have you ever seen a man carrying around a rolled-up carpet with a crosswalk drawn onto it with white and black paint? I hope you will let me know if you ever see a person similar to this man. Please.

Clap clap clap clap.

"The great story ends here!", I said, clapping my hands.

I was exhausted, but I clapped for a long time.

"Oh, my shoulder. It's really over now, right?", Jongwon asked.

"Yes, it's over. Next time, we will have a snack party with a simple test,

so be sure to attend! Today's class is over!"

"I don't think the test is going to be that difficult", Jongwon said and smiled, but looked serious.

"No, there are definitely a few traps in the story. I need to think it over", Nagyung said, thumbing through her notebook while talking about traps.

"Now you're going to tell us the story about a rabbit with short ears, aren't you?", Sowon asked with a smile.

"It's a short story, so I'll tell you next time."

"Oh, it's so childish, a rabbit? Seriously?", Jongwon asked, stretching himself.

"Wait, you'll soon be listening to some story which is not childish, but very profound. Then, you will understand why you have to listen better. You know they say walls have ears, right? Even walls can listen so well, but sometimes there are people who listen to something and tell totally different things to others. We don't want to be like that kind of people, right?"

"Oh, yes, great writer, Oh Joy!", Jongwon exclaimed.

"Hey, stop messing with me and go home!"

"Okay, I'm leaving now!", Jongwon replied and ran quickly and put on his shoes.

"In our next class, I'm going to tell a story about the rabbit right after the test. Jongwon, you are going to come to class, right?"

"I'll come and see how childish it is. Goodbye!", Jongwon said and left the house.

I don't know, but sometimes he can be so cute. After Sowon followed her brother, Nagyung asked quietly:

"Can I really write this story?"

"In your story, you should portray Tae-hee as a very pretty and very

smart kid”, I said.

"Maybe there are a few parts that I'll write differently. I'd like to change a few parts."

"That's what all the writers do, actually. The moment you write it, it's your story. Don't worry about it, just write it any way you want. I mean, write it very excitingly. A fairy tale is not someone's autobiography, right?"

"I can really write any way I want, right?"

"I told you so!", I replied, putting on a false, angry look.

"Thank you."

"Oh, by the way. Do you, by any chance, want to be a reporter?", I asked.

"No. But why?"

"Oh, it's nothing. The kids are waiting. Go ahead, see you next time."

"Goodbye!"

'Oh, Nagyung...'

I stood still, looking at the door the children went out from, for a while. I couldn't bear to look back, because my mother was standing behind me.

"I guess it had been a little over two years. Was it that hard to forget?", Mom asked.

Only then did I turn around.

"I'm sorry, it's been in my heart forever. But now it's okay."

"Tae-hee, I really did not abandon you", Mom said.

"I know. I hated you back then, but I missed you so much. I was really happy when you came back. I really wanted to say this. I'm serious. But it is too late, right? I'm sorry, Mom."

"It's all right. It's not too late..."

Mother patted me on my shoulder.

"It must have been very painful, but how did you come up with the pen-name 'Joy'?"

"It's good to be joyful. At first, I wanted it to be 'Wow Joy!' But I thought it's too long. So I changed it to 'Oh Joy'. Isn't it nice? Hahaha! Mom, do we have a pumpkin?"

"There should be one on the balcony."

"Should I make some pumpkin porridge and ask my brother and sister-in-law to come over?"

I went out onto the balcony with a big smile.

"I think your brother is going to be late since he is going to the three-way rotary to do the traffic control after work. I don't understand why there are so many children's after school classes."

"So people might think he is Mr. Crosswalk. Hahaha."

My brother who is now Mr. Crosswalk, may not be able to give a generous helping hand, but he will be a minimal safeguard for some children. Both my sister-in-law and me wanted to be such an adult. We grew up knowing how secure that minimal safeguard feels for kids on the brink.

"I'll take some to brother's house later", I said.

"While you're on your way, take some to the grandma at Building 105, as well."

"Yes, and the old lady is so hale and hearty."

"But you always have to keep an eye on her. You don't know what might happen to the elderly," mom said.

"Wouldn't Mr. Crosswalk come just to see her? He might miss her. Wow, pumpkins are great!"

Mother came onto the balcony. Her eyes turned red.

"Just leave it there, I'll do it. You might hurt your hand", she said.

"Yes, ma'am."

I put the pumpkin down right away and ran to the room.

"Seems like you were waiting for me to say that", mom said, smiling.

"Hahahaha. I'm writing a very, very wonderful and great piece of work these days!"

I didn't want my mother to see the tears in my eyes. I don't know why the word 'mother' is so special, it kept making tears.

I turned on my laptop and wrote words I couldn't say.

Words I haven't said to my parents, my brother, my sister-in-law, and my students yet:

'I love you'.

Words I really want to say to Mr. Crosswalk who's out there somewhere:

'Thank you. I miss you'.

Words I want to say to myself:

'I don't care if I'm a famous writer or not. No matter what anyone says, I'm a writer who enjoys writing!'

Words that I want to say completely honest:

'Vanish! You famous writers!'

And, words I want to ask my readers:

'Have you ever seen him?'

Author's comments

When I was very young, there were many streams, big and small. This is where there were more stepping stones than nice bridges. I fell into the water while playing on the stepping stones from time to time, but I didn't mind. There was a friend who would hold out his hand to me when I hesitated because of the distance between the stones that were a little too far.

"It's okay if you're careful, you just have to look around carefully and cross."

I had a friend like that.

As I grew up, those streams disappeared and roads were built. And instead of stepping stones, there was a crosswalk. I'm already an adult and now I'm standing in front of a real-life crossing. And now I have to reach out my hand saying: 'It's okay if you're careful', 'You just have to look around carefully and cross'. I want to be that kind of grown-up.

Sometimes we're tired and want to sit down. We want a perfect person to hug us and move us where we want to, but it's not easy to meet someone like that. We can still be small crosswalks for each other so that we can cross difficult times more easily with less pain and less fear. It can be a friend or a neighbor. You can reach out your hand first, or you can hold someone's hand first. I hope we live like that.

It has already been published as a fairy tale book, but I'd like to say hello again after wearing a new dress called 'Hardcover'. I would like to thank Lee Kang-hoon for portraying my writing with illustrations. And the Publisher, Munhak-Dongnae's staff, who are sweating late at night in the office and the storage room with piles of books. And lastly, Mr. Crosswalk, who is in my heart, who connects me with the reader. Now

I'm going to run to my readers through the crosswalks he laid. And on the day we meet, the first thing I want to say to them is: 'I really wanted to meet you. I love you'.

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Kim Ryeo-ryeong