

Naked

By Sarah Katin



“It’s not that I don’t like being naked,” I explained. “And I’m a big fan of bathing, personal hygiene is one of my all time favorite hygienes. It’s just that spending the afternoon showering with my eight-year-old student and her mother makes me a bit uncomfortable, if you know what I mean.”

“Of course. I understand completely.” Ji Young, my Korean co-teacher, said nodding earnestly.

On Saturday afternoon Mrs. Kim is standing at my door holding a shiny gift bag bursting with fluffy tissue paper.

“Thank you.” I say taking the bag. “Should I open this now?”

“Yes, yes,” she says with a bright smile.

I rustle through the papery cocoon and retrieve a bottle of jasmine shampoo, a bright pink pouf and a bit of confusion on my part.

“It for shower.” Mrs. Kim says in her broken and faltering English, “You need today.”

Panic ripples through me. Why would I need jasmine smelling shampoo and a bright pink pouf today? I thought this whole business regarding a trip to the public bath was cleared up when I explained to Ji Young that a more suitable activity might involve visiting a Buddhist temple or a nice walk in the woods, Koreans love their mountains.

“Um, I thought Ji Young talked to you about...”

“Yes.”

I wait for her to say more but she only continues to grin. Maybe she just means that I’ll need to take a hot shower tonight after my long day of hiking and mingling with mountain monks.

“Ji Young say you ashamed body. But okay. In Korea no problem.”

First of all, I never said I was ashamed of my body, I thought, silently cursing Ji Young and her love of misusing dictionary words. I don’t know how many times I’ve had to tell her that you can’t always translate things directly. Secondly, it *is* a big problem. In my country taking baths with elementary school students would be frowned upon and most likely result in jail time. I’d never make it in the slammer, my cell mates would beat me up for being a pervert. I’ve heard criminals can be honorable like that.

“We go to sauna. Si Eun wait car. Very happy. Because you come.”

“But...um... the thing is...” My stuttered response isn’t really helping my case nor is it doing anything to diminish Mrs. Kim’s now Joker-esque grin. So with great reluctance but feigned enthusiasm, I pack up my pouf and follow Mrs. Kim to her car.

I’ve been standing at my open locker for about ten minutes and the only thing I’ve taken off are my socks.

“Sarah!” Mrs. Kim calls out, and I see her completely naked body rapidly approaching. She walks without an ounce of insecurity. Her steps are singing a song of normalcy, as if taking a shower with your daughter’s English teacher is as commonplace as shopping for melons or hailing a cab. I just have to do it. I have to take my clothes off. Ironically, that fact that I am still fully clothed is what is making the situation awkward at the moment. I take a deep breath and before I can think about what I’m doing I start stripping with mad ferocity. I pause just briefly when I’m clad in only my underwear. This is the point of no return. The underwear is the last barrier between pretending I’m merely vacationing on a topless beach in Europe to actually *being* naked. . . .

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