

Eun Ha's POV:

"Are you alright, mom? You look flushed." Jae-il took a step closer, his brow furrowed with concern.

"I'm fine, just a headache." She waved a dismissive hand, trying to appear casual. She was glad for the dim lighting of her room, hoping it hid the blush that felt like it was burning her skin. "What was it you wanted to give me?"

He held up a small, flat box, wrapped in simple brown paper. "Just a little something." He moved towards her bed, and Eun Ha instinctively shrank back, pulling the covers higher.

She was acutely aware of the lingering scent of her own arousal, the dampness between her legs, and the shameful residue on the fingers she now had hidden under the blanket.

"You remember my trip to Thailand? I *did* promise I'd get you something, didn't I?" He sat on the edge of the mattress, his weight making it dip slightly. The proximity was overwhelming. She could smell the rain on him, mixed with his own clean, masculine scent. "I saw this and thought of you." He said, his voice a low, gentle rumble.

He handed her the box, but Eun Ha was scared of taking it, scared he'd see the glistening of her fingers. She was also scared of her own reaction, the thought of his gift, the fact he'd actually taken a moment to think about her and buy her something from overseas, making her feel all gooey and wrong inside.

"Don't be shy." Jae-il chuckled softly, his eyes crinkling at the corners. He placed the box on the nightstand instead. "You can open it later."

"Thank you, Jae-il." Her voice was a mere whisper. She cleared her throat, trying to sound more like a mother and less like... whatever she was right now. "T-That's very thoughtful. You should get back to the camp before they realize you're gone."

"I will. In a bit." Jae-il crossed one leg over the other. "I still have to give my Su Ah and Mia Noona their own presents."

"I-I see..."

Eun Ha, under a less inconvenient situation, would've found a thousand different things to talk about. Instead, her mind was a chaotic mess. Her fingers were still sticky. Her pussy was still throbbing. The ghost of her own touch was still lingering, and now her son was sitting on her bed, completely unaware. It was a special kind of torture.

"So, how have you been feeling lately?" He said, his voice dropping to a more intimate, concerned tone. His purple eyes, so much like hers, beheld her with an intensity that made her feel... seen. Too seen. As if he could somehow see past the blankets, past the nightgown, and into the very heart of the shame that was currently consuming her.

That was not the case, it was simply the way Jae-il always looked at things, always giving his full, unblinking attention. But in that moment, with her body still tingling with the fading wisps of pleasure, his gaze felt like a physical touch.

"Oh, I've been... fine." She managed, the word feeling thick and clumsy in her mouth. She tried to shift away subtly, creating a sliver of space between them, but the bed was just so big, and she didn't want to make it too obvious either. "Just... the usual. The house is so quiet without you."

"Oh, I've been... fine." She managed, the word feeling thick and clumsy in her mouth. She tried to shift away subtly, creating a sliver of space between them, but the bed was just so big, and she didn't want to make it too obvious either. "Just... the usual. The house is so quiet without you."

Jae-il nodded slowly. "I can imagine. Are you sleeping well? Are you eating properly?"

"Now, who's supposed to be the child and who's supposed to be the mother here?" Eun Ha attempted a light-hearted chuckle. It came out as a strangled gasp. She cleared her throat. "Yes, Jae-il. I'm a grown woman. I can take care of myself."

"I know, I know. That doesn't mean I can't worry." A beat of silence. Then, he tilted his head, leaning an inch closer. "What about father?"

And just like that, the tender mood shattered. The question, so simple, so innocent, landed like a stone in the pit of her stomach.

"W-What about him?"

A sigh escaped her son's lips. "Nothing, really. Thought you'd open up a bit more than that." He leaned back on his hands, the simple movement causing his biceps to flex and strain against the fabric of his shirt. Eun Ha's gaze caught on the movement, a flicker of heat sparking in her lower belly again. A dangerous, unwanted heat. "Ever since we had that conversation, you know? Well, I keep noticing little things when you're together. And I'm coming to fear the worst."

Her throat tightened. He had noticed. Of course, he had noticed. He was Jae-il. He noticed everything. A part of her was relieved, the thought of confiding in someone, in her son, was a tempting one.

But a larger, louder part of her was mortified. Terrified. Talking it out. *Confessing*. It would forever shatter the fragile illusion of a happy family.

What would he think of her? What would he think of his father?

"He's been busy." She deflected, her voice brittle. "With work."

"Is that what we're calling it?"

"Jae-il, please. Don't." Her voice was a strained whisper. "Not now."

He fell silent, his gaze still fixed on her. The silence stretched.

Eun Ha gulped.

He looked away, towards the window where the rain streaked down the glass. Then he stood up, the sudden shift in weight making the bed bounce slightly. "Fine. We won't talk about it."

She sighed in relief.

"But we will, eventually." He added, his voice firm.

She closed her eyes, digesting his words, the surreality of the situation. And when she cracked them back open, she flinched, blinking in surprise. Jae-il was way *too* close.

He reached out, gently putting his own hand over hers, where it lay on the covers, over where her own shameful hand rested underneath. He squeezed it gently. "Just know that you're not alone, and I'll always help you, whatever it is you're dealing with. Confide in me more. I'm mature beyond my years, remember?" He winked, but there was a seriousness in his eyes that belied the playful gesture.

Before she could respond, he had already turned and was walking towards the door. His hand rested on the handle.

"Get some rest, mom. And try to feel better." His eyes lingered on her face, then, they flickered down. To the blankets, to her hands, which she had clasped together over the covers. He couldn't have known. He *couldn't* have. The thought was absurd. Yet, Eun Ha felt a surge of panic, as if he could somehow smell the evidence of her self-indulgence. "And open the gift. I think you'll like it."

And then he was gone.

The door clicked shut, and Eun Ha was left alone once again. She laid there for a few minutes, still and unmoving.

Just breathing.

Then, finally, when she'd calmed her mind and the fire was once again extinguished, her hand slowly trailed towards the little box. She sat up, adjusting her nightgown and patting her hair into a semblance of decency. She studied the gift, tracing the edges with her thumb. It was beautifully wrapped. Simple.

Jae-il had the utmost care, thoughtfulness and... grace for small details. It was one of the things she was most proud of, having given birth to someone who wasn't afraid to be genuine. Someone who thought deeply and cared even deeper.

She shook off the paper, revealing a thin, blue cardboard box. The flaps parted easily, and inside was a small wooden frame. Its border was decorated with intricate carved symbols, swirls and curlicues. She blinked down at it, tracing the ridges with her thumb, awed by the detailed, delicate work.

"So beautiful..."

Then, she tilted the frame, and a tiny folded slip of paper dropped into her lap. Curiously, she took it between her fingers. Unfolded it and smoothed it across the palm of her hand.

There, in Jae-il's surprisingly neat and angular handwriting, were a few words.

I saw this and thought of you. The wood is from a Tamarind tree; in some parts of Thailand people associate it with love, long life, and respect. The symbols represent protection and good fortune. I asked the old man who carved it what they meant. He smiled and told me to give it to someone precious. I thought of you immediately.

The frame is empty, so you can fill it with a memory of your own choosing.

Eun Ha stared at the note.

Then at the empty frame.

Then at the note again.

"....."

The paper trembled in her hands.

She read it again. And again. And again. Until her vision blurred and went slightly out of focus. This was too much. It was all too much. And here she was, grabbing the heartfelt note with the very same fingers she had just been using to frig her own clit to the thought of... the thought of someone with purple eyes.

Bile rose in her throat.

She shot up from the bed, her body trembling. She rushed to the small wastebasket near her desk, her stomach churning. She bent over it, heaving, but nothing came up.

She was empty. Just like her marriage. Just like her house. Just like her life.

'What's wrong with me?'

She straightened up, a hand pressed to her mouth, her eyes wide with a new wave of self-loathing. She glanced at her reflection in the darkened window, and saw a stranger.

A pathetic, lonely, depraved woman.

'Is this me?'

Is that what Jae-il had just seen?

Eun Ha sighed and walked back to her bed. She sat on the edge. The same spot Jae-il had just occupied.

Her hand hovered over the frame and note. She moved the note aside, staring at the frame, at the tiny empty space where a photo was supposed to go. An empty space.

She could fill it with a memory of her own choosing.

But all she could see now was the face of her son, his purple eyes full of concern.

And all she could feel was the slippery residue of her own shame on her fingers. A cold, heavy feeling settled in her stomach. She felt dirty. She felt sick. She felt like a failure.

What kind of mother would even remotely engage in self-pleasure while thinking of—

Eun Ha snapped her eyes shut.

She needed to wash. She needed to scrub herself clean.

She'd think more clearly once she was clean.