

On the Way of Being a Penguin by Sophie Lee

It's been about three weeks since I came here, to Dominican as an exchange student. My life here is monotonous but interesting, demanding but refreshing, and solitary but too precious. Right now, I am still adjusting to my life. I want to keep this time in my life everlasting by writing it in my laptop. I believe what I am writing will bring me here, and now, whenever I read this. Then, let me start.

I wake up around 8a.m., but I never physically lift my body up from the bed. I check how many likes I got on myInstagram over last night, and read daily-updated comics on the phone. Then, I accept the fact that I have to wake up, but keep rolling in bed. Suddenly, the idea, 'Now you really have to wake up' springs in my mind. Then, I get up. In the battle between taking a shower vs. eating breakfast, breakfast always wins. I head out to Caleruega. Sitting alone as always, I justify my solo meal by looking at those who also eat alone, and thinking '*Eating breakfast is originally a lonely thing*'.

It's about 10a.m. After I finish preparing, I have around an hour and a half before the first class starts. Here, one of my biggest concerns appears: how to use this time "efficiently". Deciding to prepare for today's class, I sit up, open the textbook, and read it. And I can find myself sleeping in the bed. This moment is like experiencing teleporting through not only place but time. So, the long and short time passes, and my real exchange life starts.

Today's first class is a debate class. As I step into the room, I look around for where to sit. And here is where one of my weaknesses appears, timidity. "Can I sit here?" I shyly ask. Then, silence keeps my mouth. Since I have no courage to talk to the next friend first, I just wait until the class starts. And my efforts to resist the awkward feeling coming to me start. I look around at others and overhear what they are talking about, even though I don't understand it. And for a moment, I seek a supernatural power. '*God, please help me to understand the lecture, and give me the courage to raise my hand and ask or answer any question. PLEASE*'.

While listening to the lecture, all my nerves go to my ears. A very interesting fact about listening is that I can listen to what I already know, but I cannot listen to what I don't know before. I have time to promise myself that I would never waste time again but study in advance for the next class. During the class, I can also study on the difference of students between the U.S. and the South Korea. Here in America, students are asking questions very actively. Eagerly, I mean. It seems as if the class is where a contest of raising hands takes place. So, it's almost impossible for me to get into that competitive contest. Yes, that is an obvious excuse.

My steps heading for the acapella class are much more cheerful. Because it's a singing class, of course! Without great attention on listening to the lecture, I can feel the melody. I can just let my body dance to the rhythm. And I basically like to sing. This time, however, I have to be prepared to say hello first to my friends. So, to charge enough courage to say hello first, I go through my own ritual, which is to remind myself of the goals for my exchange.

<Three GOALS for the Successful Exchange Period>

1. Overcome the fear of speaking in English
2. Make more than 20 foreign friends
3. Participate in many different school activities

Full of confidence, I say out loud. "Hello, friends!"

"O-wim-o-weh, o-wim-o-weh, o-wim-o-weh," "Wee- ee-ee-ee-ee," and "Sha! ahh, ahh, ah ah." Sitting around the piano, we sing altogether. Though we sing different parts for each part, we sing a song. The different sounds we make gather and become a harmony. Differences gather and become one, and I want to call it diversity under the unity. This is the most attractive part of America that I found since I came here.

The evening comes. This is the time with my roommate Silvia. She is from China. We are teachers to each other. I learn Chinese from her, and she learns Korean from me.

"Ga, na, da. This is like a, b, c in Korean," I say.

"Ga, na, da, ga, na, da, am I right?" she says.

While we learn each others' language, and get to learn about each other, the clock ticks toward midnight.

"Wan an." I speak good night in Chinese.

"Jal ja," she says in Korean.

This is a day of my life on exchange, which will repeat tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow. Someday, these days will end. And on that day, the last day of my exchange life, there will be an album waiting for me full of precious memories of every day at Dominican University of California.