

# How to Make a Peanut Butter (and Jelly) Sandwich

FLASH FICTION

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**Korean Cookbook >> Authentic Recipes >>  
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(1) First, *don't* take out the bread. You've made enough sandwiches to know that—you even have permanent scars to remind you. Instead, prepare everything—the peanut butter, the strawberry jam, the iron armor—so that this tribulation runs smoothly. Hold your breath when you whisk past her stiffened frame to access the spreads, bracing for the sigh of displeasure that liquefies your armor and sears your skin. Luckily, she doesn't.

(2) After gathering the spreads, locate the bread. Wonder's the best kind with the spongy center (excellent for soaking up the tears you hide from her), but any brand will do. Take out two slices. Two more to appease her.

(3) Unscrew the lid of the peanut butter jar. Wince as the clatter strains the silence, shrinking from the palpable rage she is attempting to suppress behind tight lips. Dip a knife into the peanut butter and dislodge a generous hunk of it. As a foreboding sigh escapes her lips, tighten your hold of the metal knife, the coldness seeping into your sweaty palm. Sense an imminent fight—and then hear, loud and clear through a foghorn:

“어머나, 지나는 또 상 받았네. 이제 어떡할거야? 넌 제대로 하는게 없니.” (Jina won another award. Now how are you gonna beat her? You can't do anything well.)

(4) Smear the peanut butter onto the bread, ignoring your mother's comment. Concentrating on the methodic movement of your hands, make sure to slather every bit of the white surface, her verbal attacks fruitless against your smooth, crunchy parries.

“수영 그만둘까? 이렇게 느려서 어디에 써먹겠어.” (Should we just quit swim? You're too slow.)

(5) Dollop more peanut butter onto the bread, spreading it penny-thick. Her strikes are ever more muffled with each liberal application.

“엄마가 널 위해 얼마나 애쓰는지 알아? 근데 넌 이것 밖에 안돼.” (I sacrifice so much for you. This is how you repay me?)

(6) Grab the strawberry jelly next and cautiously smooth the gelatinous substance over the bumpy one as best you can—

“정말 실망이야.” (You're a disappointment.)

big mistake.

(7) Grip the counter and get a hold of yourself. Recall her preference for simplicity—though perhaps not in your accomplishments—and scrape off the jelly. Offer your obscure tears instead.

(8) Repeat steps 4 to 5 on the second slice of bread, this time with more moderation. Remember her dislike of excessive peanut butter, and how its high viscosity closes up her throat (which now voices the shocking extremity of your stupidity). Gulp a spoonful, relishing the sludge that coats your esophagus and immobilizes your suppressed screams within your rigid throat.

Please

(9) Cut off

just

(9) Cut off

*stop.*

(9) Cut off the crusts and slice the sandwich diagonally. Delicately place it on a porcelain plate and slide it towards your mother. Clean up the aftermath.

“냉장고에 망고 좀 있어. 많이 먹어.” (There are some cut-up mangoes in the fridge. Eat as much as you want.)

After a moment's hesitation, silently leave behind the jar of strawberry jelly. Just in case. ■