



“Parasite” written and directed by Joon-ho Bong (“Snow Piercer,” “Okja”) is by far one of the best films I have seen, not just in the last decade, but in my life time. Coming from South Korea at a time when the zeitgeist of economic class upheaval is prevalent in just about every country in the world, the title raises a question in every alarming moment in this film. Does it refer to the working class getting a free ride off the wealthy? Or is it just the other way around? As Joon-ho Bong says in creating this character driven satire. “Even I was surprised as I was writing.”

Opening with a shot of socks hanging in front of a basement window in the slums of a South Korean city, a poor family of four struggles to win a pizza box folding contest. They leave their window open to take advantage of a street fumigation that brands their clothing with a horrific smell. As they lose the contest, the son, Kim Ki-woo (Woo-sik Choi), talks the Pizza manager into hiring him to replace an empty position. Fortunately enough for him, a friend Min (Seo-joon Park) steps in to present his family with a box containing a rock that carries charms of wealth, a metaphor that hangs over the rest of the story. Min pleads with Kim Ki-woo to take his position as a tutor for the daughter of a wealthy family, something Joon-ho Bong himself did as a college student. Min is in love with his student and can’t stand the thought of anyone else “slavering” over her.

And so the scam begins. Kim Ki-woo changes his name to “Kevin,” presents himself to the beautiful gullible matron of the rich family, Park Yeon-kyo (Yeo-jeong Jo) and lessons begin with love-smitten Park-da-hye (Ji-s Jung). Recognizing the adorable out of control spoiled child, Park Da-song (Hyun-jun Jung), Kevin convinces Park Yeon-kyo to hire an art teacher to nourish his amazing artistic talent. Enter his sister Kim Ki-Jung “Jessica” (So-dam Park) as art teacher. She’s the kind of free spirit that when a monsoon rain floods their basement quarters, as the waters rise in Titanic style, she digs in the ceiling above the toilet for a hidden pack of cigarettes for a last smoke. Yet she is able to train the spoiled child to march around like a polite little buddha. She scams in a family chauffeur replacement, her father Kim Ki-taek (Kang-ho Song) who always has a plan, but soon realizes that the best plan is to have no plan at all; instead he depends on the unpredictable survival techniques of his children. It’s all about family love. He asks the wealthy father Dong-ik Park (Sun-Kyun Lee) about his wife, “But You love her?” And Dong-ik answers with a long pause, followed by a telling giggle. It’s not about love.

Jessica discovers the current housekeeper is allergic to peaches, sets her up to appear that she has TB, and scams in her mother Moon-qwang (Jeong-eun Lee) who is swift to adjust to her new position. While preparing a meal in one hand she kicks the old housekeeper Kim Chung-sook (Hye-jin Jang) down the hidden basement stairs with one blow. Chung-sook came unexpectedly to rescue her husband who has been hiding in the basement for many years with the job of turning on and off the lights as a human light sensor as the wealthy patrons wander around above obliviously.

Brilliantly filmed by cinematographer Hong Gyeong-Pyo and artistic direction by Lee Ha Jun, this is satire at its best, where tragedy is played at high speed in a plot that has so many unpredictable and surprising twists and turns you find yourself on a roller coaster ride in a house of mirrors. Do you dare to stop and self-reflect? Boon dares you to do so before pulling the carpet out from under you with a laugh as you tumble toward the next scary awakening. I not only encourage you to partake in this feast of a satire. I dare you.