

Real Man 7

Chapter 7

The bus ran for three hours and finally stopped at Yoo-hyun's hometown.

"This is it."

The apartment complex that had been filled with buildings behind the river was not yet built, and the old town that had been redeveloped still looked the same as before.

He found the address that his mother had given him and saw a cluster of single-story farmhouses at the end of the mountain slope.

It was a house that he vaguely remembered.

After his mother passed away, his father moved to another region and he had no reason to visit this place.

"Here it is."

Yoo-hyun stopped in front of the house and looked at the blue roof with peeling paint, recalling the two-story mansion he had lived in when he was young.

It was not far from here, and it had many memories left in it.

There was a swing in the well-kept spacious garden, and a small hut that had been Yoo-hyun's hideout.

Memories tend to be beautified, but they were happy memories.

He still remembered them vividly, but how did he feel when he faced the house?

It seemed like the miserable feelings from that time were still lingering like the dregs at the bottom of a coffee cup.

'I will definitely restore it.'

Wasn't that the reason why Yoo-hyun pursued success with such determination?

He shook off the old thoughts that suddenly came to his mind and stepped into the empty entrance.

Then he met eyes with his mother who was washing lettuce in the small yard.

"Oh? Hyun-ah."

"Mother..."

His heart fluttered as he faced his young mother who had no wrinkles.

He vividly remembered his childhood with her.

She always smiled at him in front of him.

She was like that even at the last moment.

He couldn't contact her or take good care of her.

But even when she was dying, she tried to reassure her worthless son with a strained smile.

As he remembered that, his defenses collapsed.

He felt regret piercing through his body from head to toe.

Yoo-hyun couldn't take another step forward.

Then his mother wiped her hands on a towel and came over to pat his back.

"Oh dear, are you tired from coming here?"

"No..."

Pat pat.

"It's okay. It's okay. You did well. You haven't eaten yet, right?"

Yoo-hyun nodded his head as he leaned on his mother's small embrace, suppressing the emotions that welled up in him.

"Yes."

"Okay. Let's eat then. Just wait a minute."

How did it feel to face his young mother who was alive 20 years ago?

'I'm really glad I came back.'

He was grateful for the miraculous change in his life, putting everything else aside.

Nothing else mattered in front of him, not money, success, or any wealth or glory.

A little later.

“Here, let’s eat.”

Various side dishes and meat that his mother cooked were placed on the small table.

His mother sat down and watched Yoo-hyun eat with a pleased expression.

“Mother, you eat too.”

“I already ate. And I can’t eat more here. I’ll gain weight.”

“Where did I gain weight? You’re still so pretty.”

“Ho ho, oh my. Where did you learn to say such nice things? Huh?”

His mother’s lips curled up at his awkward compliment.

She looked exactly like he remembered her from his childhood.

She was relaxed and cheerful, unlike Yoo-hyun who had been frustrated by his fallen life.

When Yoo-hyun finished eating, his mother opened her mouth.

“Hyun-ah, I think I’m going to take over the side dish shop this time.”

“What?”

“The owner is opening another store and he wants me to run the original one. He likes my cooking skills.”

He looked at his mother who spoke cautiously after hesitating for a while.

He guessed why she did that.

She must have sensed that Yoo-hyun had reacted negatively to her work before.

And she must have tried to bear all the burden by herself.

Without understanding anything about her life.

At least not now.

Yoo-hyun smiled reassuringly at his mother and asked back.

“Are you not tired?”

“It’s hard. But how happy do you think I am when people enjoy my side dishes?”

“Really?”

“Of course. I don’t know why I lived like a fool without doing anything before.”

Was it to reassure Yoo-hyun?

Mother’s gestures became more frequent.

Yoo-hyun knew it.

It was hard enough to sit in the office and face the computer.

But it was impossible to not feel the hardship of making a living by selling side dishes.

He could have pretended to agree and move on, but he was curious about mother's sincerity.

"It must be hard. You're working so hard."

"Yoo-hyun."

"Yes, mother."

"Are you trying to make me feel better on purpose?"

Mother asked him, and Yoo-hyun hurriedly replied.

"Is that so?"

"Your father is also working hard and doing well. We thought everything was over, but we're recovering. I'm much happier now."

"..."

It was a very positive answer.

Her eyes were steady, her voice and breathing were calm.

Her hand on the table naturally told him that she was not lying.

Yoo-hyun was far away, but mother was the one who witnessed the collapse of the house.

The house became smaller, and the clothes they wore were not as good as before.

She used to never get a drop of water on her hands, but now she ran a side dish shop.

How could she be so optimistic?

As if she read Yoo-hyun's curiosity, mother continued.

"We don't need money. Really. If you're worried, I'll make a lot of money and take care of you. Don't worry too much and live comfortably."

"Haha, we don't need money. Use it to travel or something."

"That's what you should earn and send me."

"Hahaha, yes. Yes. Mother, when I make money, let's travel together and eat delicious food."

Yoo-hyun laughed loudly and added some cheerful words.

It was quite different from his usual self.

He felt unfamiliar and his lips kept curling up.

There were tears in his eyes.

He saw mother off as she returned to the side dish shop.

She said she was fine, but he couldn't help noticing her clothes.

A gray round cotton T-shirt and jeans.

There were stains from the side dishes on them.

"Sigh."

He let out a breath full of cheeks and went to his small room.

There were photo albums from his childhood and records from his school days.

There were also quite a few awards, most of them related to art.

He liked art.

He remembered the memories he had forgotten long ago.

It felt like he was in a museum.

The records of his young memories that he faced for the first time in 20 years made Yoo-hyun's heart flutter.

"Haha, what is this?"

He laughed at the picture of him making a funny face with his friends at the valley.

He looked so happy without any pretense.

There were also nostalgic sticker photos and friendship notes with awkward limbs.

What about Yoo-hyun in the photo?

He was bright and cheerful, with no worries at all.

It was something he could never see in himself now.

He smiled at the flower-decorated box and opened it.

There were letters piled up inside.

They were handwritten letters from girls in middle and high school.

He was so embarrassed by them when he was young that he deliberately avoided the girls who confessed to him.

“Wow, Han Yoo-hyun lived a fun life.”

The past Han Yoo-hyun was bright and cheerful.

He had many friends and was quite popular.

He seemed to enjoy living every day.

But how did he end up like this?

He changed when he saw the house falling down, but in fact he embraced all the worries and anxieties by himself.

He moved forward with the power of resentment against his parents and the world, but looking back, it was all an excuse.

Victim mentality, greed, obsession.

The negative emotions that once rolled up grew like snowballs and eroded Yoo-hyun's inner self.

He lived a lonely life without any room for himself, as if he would collapse if he didn't push himself hard enough.

Couldn't he have changed if he had listened to mother's words a little bit?

Why couldn't he care about the closest people when he followed his boss's words so well?

The answer was right in front of him, but he only chased after an invisible mirage.

Regret and self-blame always brought back memories.

Mother came back around sunset.

She said it would take some time and went to the hair salon.

Yoo-hyun thought of mother's smiling face and decided to be more cheerful.

"Mother, your new perm looks good, doesn't it?"

"Oh? How did you know? Is it okay?"

“Yes, the curls look good on you. You have young-looking skin, so it’s better to tie up your side hair. It makes you look more lively and suits you well.”

“Yoo-hyun, actually, when I got this perm...”

The conversation flowed more naturally as Yoo-hyun matched his mother’s interests.

His mother raised her voice excitedly, and Yoo-hyun laughed.

He had treated his mother the same way he had tried to win over the people at the company.

But his mother’s reaction was much better than he expected.

She talked to him like a close friend, sharing her inner thoughts.

His mother was also a person.

She liked it when he showed interest, and she opened up when he empathized with her.

Why couldn’t he do this simple thing before?

‘I’ll do better.’

Yoo-hyun silently thanked her and looked into her eyes.

They chatted for a long time, until his father came in.

“Father.”

“Oh, you’re here.”

“Yes. How have you been?”

Yoo-hyun greeted his father more warmly than his usual cold expression.

“Yeah.”

His father turned his head and answered awkwardly.

Only then did Yoo-hyun see his father’s face clearly.

The furrowed brow, the slumped shoulders, and the feet pointing outward more than the heels showed that he had a hard time in his daily life.

His father glanced at him as if wondering why he was acting like this, and changed his posture.

This was the time to be more friendly with him.

But the words didn’t come out easily.

“Father, dinner...”

“Honey, I’m done.”

“Yes. Rest well.”

Thud.

In the end, his father went into his room without listening to Yoo-hyun's words.

It felt awkward.

They didn't look like they had a good relationship.

His mother quietly looked at Yoo-hyun's face.

"He's having a hard time these days."

"Yes. I see."

"Your father is trying hard too. Just watch him a little longer. He'll surely make it."

"Yes..."

Yoo-hyun nodded, but he wasn't comfortable.

-What has dad done? Wasn't it dad who ruined our family? I'll never live like dad!

He remembered the shameful old memory as he watched his father's back going into the room.

He remembered the day when his father's factory went bankrupt and they moved here.

He had confronted his father that day, and it was still vivid in his memory.

Maybe that was when their relationship became distant.

His mother saw Yoo-hyun's slightly wrinkled forehead and asked carefully.

"Yoo-hyun, are you okay?"

"Of course."

He smiled in front of his worried mother.

The next day, Yoo-hyun walked around his hometown.

It was a distance that he could move by bus, but he deliberately walked.

The breeze seemed to invite him to walk.

He felt the soft soil touching his feet pleasantly.

He smiled at the strong scent of flowers.

Someone said that?

If you walk slowly, you can see things.

He started to see things that he couldn't see when he ran ahead.

He saw his family, friends, and surroundings.

The things that he had taken for granted and ignored before now came to him with great meaning.

He was grateful and thankful.

