

Chapter 5 Leaving Me Alone In This World

It was winter, during the holiday break.

I couldn't fathom why they chose to divorce during the winter break. After that day, countless times I found myself wishing they had chosen a regular school day to part ways, keeping me in the dark. That would have been so much better.

I still remember that morning. Our family was having breakfast, and my mom suddenly said, “Katie, you stay home and do your homework. Your dad and I are going out to take care of something.”

I replied, “Okay, should I cook lunch?”

My mom said, “No need, your dad and I will be back soon.” She ruffled my hair.

At the time, I didn't think much of it, nor did I notice that her eyes had reddened.

When it was time for lunch, I could already smell the food cooking next door, but my parents still hadn't returned.

We lived in an apartment building. Each family had two rooms: the larger inside room served as both bedroom and living room, while the smaller outer room was the kitchen and dining area. The toilets were communal, located at both ends of each floor.

I was hungry, so I went to the kitchen to prepare some pasta.

There were still leftovers from yesterday on the table. I planned to scoop the pasta into one of the plates with the dishes after it was done, and the food would be reheated in no time.

Meals like that, with oil, meat, and flavor—I loved them.

“Katie, why are you still at home?”

Hazel, the neighbor, happened to pass by our door. I can still remember the shock in her voice.

I was completely confused. “I'm at home doing homework!”

“What homework? Your parents are getting divorced! Shouldn't you be trying to stop them?!” Hazel sounded urgent. “They're in the courtyard right now!”

I froze for a moment, and then I burst out the door and ran as fast as I could.

At that age, I already knew what divorce meant.

Back then, divorce was rare. Children from divorced families got special attention from teachers but would get bullied by other kids. They would also become the topic of gossip for everyone.

I didn't think it was a bad thing. Before this, I'd fantasized countless times about my mom divorcing my dad.

In fact, once, after my mom and I were beaten black and blue by my dad again, I told her, “Mom, divorce Dad! I can't take it anymore!”

At that time, she just cried and shook her head.

We lived in a small town.

My dad worked at a grain elevator, and my mom didn't have a job. She took care of the household. In other words, we all relied on my dad's income.

Back then, I didn't understand why my mom wouldn't divorce him. It took me many years to realize that she didn't have a job, couldn't make money, and couldn't support herself.

At that time, she was too afraid to get divorced.

That day, as I ran outside, I should've been excited.

My parents were finally getting divorced. I was going to leave with my mom and escape this house. I wouldn't have to endure the beatings anymore.

I never dreamed that when I ran into the courtyard, I would see my mom getting into a car.

At that time, having a bicycle, a TV, or a single-tub washing machine was already considered pretty good. A car was a sign of wealth.

“Mom!” I yelled.

She was already sitting in the car—in the passenger seat—with one leg still outside.

She turned back to look at me, her face covered in tears. At that moment, I saw the man in the driver's seat say something to her. I didn't know what he said, but I saw her cover her mouth with one hand, tears streaming down, and then she pulled her other leg into the car and slammed the door shut.

“Mom!”

Fear gripped my heart. A huge sense of abandonment overwhelmed me, and I ran after them as hard as I could.

“Mom, Mom! Take me with you! Please, take me with you!”

I shouted, but my mom didn't get out of the car. The car started moving slowly, and I saw my mom looking at me through the window.

The glass quickly fogged up from her breath.

Katie, be good...

Whether she had actually uttered those words, I could no longer recall.

Maybe she did, but I couldn't hear it.

She kept her hand over her mouth, still crying, and between us was that glass window.

I couldn't hear anything. Not her words, not her sobs.

Maybe she never said a word at all. Maybe that sentence was just something I made up in the layers and layers of memories.