

ACCIDENTALLY BECOME A FATHER

Chapter 1: "Papa." I don't have a child.

"Papa."

I don't have a child.

The voice came clearly from the other side of my apartment door.

A little girl's voice.

There was no hesitation.

As if she hadn't gotten the wrong address.

Her tone sounded like someone who already knew exactly who lived inside.

I walked over to the entryway.

Stared at the door for three seconds.

Then I opened it.

The apartment hallway was narrow, as usual.

The cream-colored paint was starting to yellow at the corners.

The long fluorescent light on the ceiling flickered slowly.

The smell of detergent from next door mixed with the scent of cheap fried food from downstairs.

This was what my apartment was like.

Standing in front of me was a little girl.

Straight black hair reaching her shoulders.

Thin bangs.

A small sky-blue backpack.

Pristine white shoes.

She looked up at me with eyes that were far too calm for a child her age.

"Papa."

"...?!"

I looked down the left side of the hallway.

Then to the right.

The unit number on the door.

203.

I looked back down at her.

"Wrong person."

I closed the door.

Click.

Two seconds of silence.

Then.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

A louder knock.

I opened the door again.

She hadn't moved a single step.

"Papa, it's me, your daughter."

The sentence was spoken with clean articulation.

Practiced.

"...?!"

I stared at her face.

There was no resemblance.

At least, not instantly.

Because we were the same.

Both human.

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"Because I know every single thing I've done up to this day."

She didn't answer.

Just blinked once.

I was about to close the door again when the sound of scraping sandals came from the apartment next door.

Door 204 opened slightly.

A middle-aged woman peeked through the gap.

Her eyes were sharp.

Her gaze shifted from my face to the little girl in front of me.

Then back to my face.

I could practically hear her mind working.

A twenty-one-year-old man.

That's me.

A nine-year-old child.

This girl.

Claiming I was her papa.

Troublesome.

I let out a short sigh.

"Come in," I said.

The girl stepped inside immediately without hesitation.

As if that was her goal from the very beginning.

As if my home was her home.

I closed the door slowly.

The sound of a key turning echoed from outside—door 204 had closed too.

My apartment was small.

1K.

One main room with a cramped kitchen to the side, and a sliding-door bathroom at the end.

A minimalist shoe rack.

A small table.

A neatly rolled futon in the corner.

No decorations.

No photos.

No signs of life beyond the bare necessities.

Not neat.

But not messy, either.

The girl stood in the middle of the room.

Looking around calmly.

"Your apartment is quite small, huh, Papa."

This girl's words were slightly sarcastic.

I hadn't expected that.

I kept my hand on the doorknob for a few seconds before finally turning around.

"Don't call me Papa."

"If not Papa, then what should I call you?"

"Just my name."

"What is Papa's name?"

I stared at her.

She knew.

Her gaze was far too prepared.

I walked past her and sat on the floor near the low table.

"You have the wrong address," I said again.

She finally took off her backpack.

Unzipping it slowly.

"I'm not wrong."

She reached her hand into the bag.

I watched her.

Wondering what exactly she was preparing.

She pulled out a clear plastic folder.

And held it out to me.

"I have proof."

I didn't take it immediately.

Suddenly.

The room felt smaller than usual.

A certain tension arose.

One that appeared without me even realizing it.

The girl was still holding the folder out in the air.

Waiting.

I stared at the folder.

"I have proof," she repeated quietly.

I finally reached out my hand.

And took it.
