

Accidentally become a father

Chapter 111: Answer

I felt a touch.

Light.

Small.

On my arm.

I woke up.

Slowly.

The hand was still there.

Shaking me gently.

"Papa... wake up..."

I opened my eyes slightly.

Morning light filtered through the window.

Faint.

A little blinding.

"What is it..."

My voice was still heavy.

"Didn't you say yesterday..."

"That we were going to Grandpa's house."

I looked at her.

Yuna was already sitting beside me.

Neat.

Too neat for this early in the morning.

...

"What time is it..."

Yuna turned toward the clock.

Then looked back at me.

"It's already seven."

"Oh..."

I rolled over.

Closed my eyes again.

"Don't go back to sleep..."

Her tone changed slightly.

"You were the one who said it..."

"Yeah..."

I pulled the blanket up a bit.

"...I remember."

"But not this early."

"But..."

Yuna pouted slightly.

"We need to get ready..."

"...I even made fried eggs for you."

I opened one eye.

"...Eggs?"

"Yes."

I got up slowly.

Sat up.

Yuna stood up immediately.

Her face brightening again.

I walked to the bathroom.

Washed my face.

It felt cold.

I came back.

Sat down.

Yuna was setting the table.

One plate.

I looked at it.

A single egg.

The yolk, intact.

The whites, perfectly cooked.

Not a single burnt spot.

I stayed silent.

Staring.

"Yuna."

"Yes, Papa?"

She was still in the kitchen.

She turned her head.

"Why isn't the egg burnt?"

She looked at the table.

"Oh."

"That one is mine."

She grabbed another plate.

Brought it over to me.

"Here, this one is yours."

I looked.

slightly burnt around the edges.

I gave a small nod.

"Hm."

Yuna went back.

Grabbed the rice.

Set it down.

We started eating.

Without saying much.

Only the sound of spoons.

And the slow breath of the morning.

finished.

Yuna stood up immediately.

Cleared the table.

Washed the dishes.

Without being asked.

Without delay.

she packed a lunch.

Neat.

Organized.

Looking like perfectly stacked blocks.

coffee.

She brought it to the table.

Set it in front of me.

I looked at her.

"Yuna."

"Yes?"

"Stop."

She stopped.

"What's wrong?"

"Sit down."

She sat down.

Without asking.

I took a sip of the coffee.

Warm.

"Why are you in such a rush?"

She thought for a second.

"Because..."

"Grandpa's place is far."

I nodded.

"Yeah."

"Pretty far."

I looked at her.

"So? What about it?"

She was a little confused.

Struggling to answer.

"..."

"We might not get there until the afternoon."

"Or at night."

"Or maybe tomorrow."

I leaned back.

"The important thing is that we get there."

I looked at her again.

"So there is no need to rush."

"Alright... Papa."

Quiet.

The clock ticked slowly.

Yuna started getting restless.

Her eyes darted.

To the closet.

To the kitchen.

To the bathroom.

she stood up.

Started pacing.

Opened the closet.

Looked inside.

Closed it.

To the kitchen.

Checked the groceries.

To the bathroom.

Checked on something.

I just watched.

Without saying a word.

she grabbed a bag.

Sat on the floor.

Opened it.

Started packing.

Toothbrush.

Towel.

Clothes.

Checked.

Folded.

Placed inside.

Schoolwork.

Summer assignments.

In they went.

The lunchbox.

In.

The bag started to bulge.

But it wasn't full yet.

I stood up.

Walked to the closet.

Opened it.

Looked for a moment.

"Hm..."

My hands moved.

Grabbing two t-shirts.

One pair of jeans.

I walked over to Yuna.

Held them out to her.

"Here."

"Pack these for me."

Yuna looked at them.

Then looked up at me.

"Papa..."

"Just this?"

"Yeah."

She furrowed her brow.

"But... that's barely anything."

I sat back down.

Grabbed my coffee.

"We aren't moving away."

She stayed silent.

Stared at the clothes.

Then gave a small nod.

Tucked them into the bag.

"Yuna."

"Yes?"

"Ready?"

She zipped the bag closed.

Stood up.

"Ready!"

I looked at my coffee.

Still half full.

"In that case..."

I raised the mug.

"...we'll leave after I finish this."

"Okay!"

Time passed.

Slowly.

Without a rush.

we finally left.

That morning.

We took the bullet train.

Then transferred.

To a regular train.

we sat side by side.

Quiet.

Only the sound of the tracks.

clack... clack... clack...

the scenery moved.

tall buildings.

Dense.

Packed tightly.

it changed.

Into small houses.

More spread out.

Quieter streets.

the suburbs.

the countryside.

Before I knew it.

Everything shifted.

And kept shifting.

only vast expanses remained.

Rice paddies.

Green.

Endless.

"Woah..."

Yuna pressed her face against the glass.

Her eyes widened.

"Papa... the rice fields are so huge..."

"Yeah."

I gave a short reply.

a dark line.

A forest.

small mountains.

The train kept moving.

it appeared.

White.

Tall.

Clear.

Mount Fuji.

"Mount Fuji!!"

Yuna immediately turned to me.

"Papa, look! It's so clear!"

"Yeah, I see it."

I leaned my head back.

Stared outside.

my mind had become like this.

More... focused.

No longer a mess like before.

All because of Yuna.

because of responsibility itself.

But this isn't pressure.

Not like an obligation forced by others.

This is different.

Calmer.

Deeper.

but also something I don't want to let go of.

would not do this.

Would not come home.

Would not show up in person.

a phone call.

Just a voice.

Just small talk.

Just... enough.

I am here.

On this train.

Time passed.

The train stopped.

We got off.

A small town.

Not crowded.

Not deserted.

We continued.

Took a taxi.

The roads grew narrower.

The houses grew sparser.

the village.

the sun had begun to set.

An orange sky.

Long.

Warm.

Wooden houses lined up.

Gardens beside them.

Rice fields at the end of the road.

I took a deep breath.

The air filled my lungs.

Fresh.

Different.

I exhaled slowly.

Yuna raised both her arms.

Took a deep breath.

"Haa..."

Her face brightened.

"The air is so fresh here, Papa..."

"Hm."

She looked around.

Then up at the sky.

"The sunset is pretty..."

I started walking.

"If you're done looking—let's go."

"Okay!"

She immediately caught up.

Walking beside me.

The streetlights flickered on.

A dim white glow.

The streets were empty.

No vehicles.

Only the sound of our footsteps.

we arrived.

A house.

Larger than the rest.

Wooden.

Old.

But sturdy.

The door was open.

Just like always.

"Papa..."

Yuna stared at it.

"Is this Grandpa's house?"

"Yeah."

"It's so big..."

I gave a small smile.

"It is."

I stepped inside.

Without hesitation.

"i'm home."

My voice was flat.

But loud enough.

Yuna followed behind.

"Excuse me..."

Her steps were small.

Slow.

A girl appeared.

Around the age of a sixth grader.

She saw me.

Froze.

She immediately spun around.

Ran.

"Mom!! Mom!! Big brother is home!!"

Her voice echoed inside.

Yuna turned to me.

"Is she... your little sister, Papa?"

"Yeah."

I kept walking.

Past the living room.

Empty.

Quiet.

the sound of a TV.

From deeper inside.

We entered the family room.

The TV was on.

Lights flickering.

A woman sat in front of a sewing machine.

Her hands moved quickly.

whirrr... whirrr...

The girl from earlier was beside her.

Still speaking rapidly.

sleeping in a chair.

His hair a mix of white and black.

Almost gray.

lying down.

Playing on his phone.

a little kid.

Sleeping in front of the TV.

Around Yuna's age.

"It's lively..." Yuna whispered.

I stepped further inside.

"i'm home."

Everyone stopped.

Turned.

Looked at me.

The woman at the sewing machine stood up.

Quickly.

Approached.

"Itsuki??!!"

"Mom."

I took her hand.

Bowed my head.

Touched my forehead to the back of her hand.

"i'm home, mom."

Her hand trembled slightly.

"brother...?"

The teenager sat up.

Staring at me.

The man in the chair opened his eyes.

Slowly.

Stared.

"itsuki..."

His voice was heavy.

"welcome back."

shifted.

To Yuna.

Silent.

Asking without words.

merely glanced at her for a second.

Then looked back at me.

"honey."

His voice was calm.

"make some food."

"and coffee."

"right away."

Mom moved immediately.

To the kitchen.

The little girl followed.

"sit."

I nodded.

I stepped forward.

Sat on the floor.

At the low table.

Yuna set her bag down.

Then sat beside me.

Close.

Quiet.

Her eyes still looking around.

At this house.

At these people.

A completely new world for her.

"How was the trip?"

The voice was calm.

Level.

"Did it go smoothly?"

I gave a slow nod.

"Smooth."

"That's good."

The man leaned back in his chair.

His eyes remained open.

Watching me.

"So?"

"What's the matter?"

"It's rare for you to come home so suddenly."

"Usually, a phone call is enough when you want to talk."

I looked down.

Staring at the wooden floor.

Quiet.

"I..."

The word hung in the air.

I glanced to the side.

Yuna was looking down, too.

Her hands resting on her knees.

Small.

Still.

I took a slow breath.

"I just wanted to come home."

I paused for a moment.

"And..."

"...introduce my daughter."

My hand moved.

Gently guiding Yuna's head.

Resting it on my lap.

"Papa...?"

"It's okay."

My hand stroked her hair.

Gently.

"What?!!"

The teenage boy immediately sat up straighter.

"When did you get married??!"

His voice was a mix of shock and curiosity.

remained unchanged.

Just watched.

Narrowing his eyes slightly.

"Adopted?"

He asked simply.

"Yes."

I met his gaze.

"Just like you did."

Silence.

...

"Hm..."

He gave a small nod.

"I understand."

The teenager nodded along.

"Ohh... I see..."

As if he had completely understood.

The sound of footsteps.

Mom returned.

With the little girl from earlier by her side.

They brought food.

Two plates.

Glasses of water.

And two cups of coffee.

Set down on the table.

One coffee was pushed closer to the man in the chair.

Mom sat down.

Close to me.

The little girl sat near the teenage boy.

Her eyes still stealing occasional glances at me.

And Yuna.

"So..."

Mom looked at Yuna.

"What is her name?"

"Yuna."

I answered.

Quietly.

Yuna raised her head slightly.

Looked at Mom.

"Grandma..."

Her voice was tiny.

Hesitant.

Mom immediately fell silent for a second.

Her eyes softened.

"Oh my..."

She reached out.

Stroked Yuna's hair.

Gently.

Slowly.

Yuna stayed still.

Didn't pull away.

Just accepted it.

"So, Yuna..."

"What grade are you in now?"

Yuna sat up straight again.

"Fourth..."

"My..."

Mom smiled.

"That makes you the same age as Itsuki's youngest sibling."

Yuna turned her head slightly.

"Papa's youngest sibling...?"

"Yes."

Mom pointed toward the front of the TV.

The little kid was still asleep.

Not moving.

"Right there."

"That's him."

"Still asleep."

"Oh..."

Yuna watched him for quite a while.

Mom clapped her hands together softly.

"Itsuki. Yuna."

"Let's eat first."

I nodded.

Yuna gave a small nod as well.

We started moving.

Took the plates.

And ate.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 112: The Answer. 2

~~~ • ~~~

We finished eating.

The plates had been cleared away.

The atmosphere grew more relaxed.

Yuna sat beside me.

Silent.

Her eyes occasionally darted toward me.

I raised my cup.

Took a sip of coffee.

Warm.

Bitter. \_

"Papa..."

Her voice was soft.

I turned my head slightly.

"Can I have a little?"

I handed her the cup in my hand.

"Here."

She took it with both hands.

Took a tiny sip.

Then immediately set it back down.

As if she just wanted a taste.

I pulled out a cigarette.

Slipped it between my lips.

Lit it.

A small flame.

Then—

smoke rose slowly.

"Haa..."

I leaned back.

My eyes sweeping the room. \_

"This place..."

"...is still the same as ever."

"Still the same?"

The teenage boy turned his head.

Smirking slightly.

"You just haven't been here during the rainy season."

I glanced at him.

"Why is that?"

"The roof leaks."

He held up a hand.

"A lot."

"Maybe five of them."

I raised an eyebrow.

"Whoa."

—

The little girl from earlier stood up.

Approached Yuna.

Sat down beside her.

"Yuna."

"Yes, Auntie?"

She instantly froze.

"Auntie?? Me??"

Silence—

then—

"Hahaha!"

Everyone immediately burst into laughter.

The teenage boy even slapped his knee.

"You really do look old." "Go look in a mirror."

The girl shot him a sharp glare.

Gave a small huff.

"Don't call me Auntie."

She looked at Yuna.

"Call me big sis."

Yuna looked thoughtful.

"But... you're Papa's little sister..."

"Which means you're still an Auntie."

"Hahaha!!"

Laughter erupted again.

"See!" "You really are old!"

The girl immediately turned to Mother.

"Mom..."

Her tone was sulky.

Mother just smiled.

Chuckled softly.

Offering no defense.

—

The girl turned back to Yuna.

"Whatever."

"I have some dolls."

"Wanna see?"

Yuna tilted her head up slightly.

"What kind of dolls?"

"Come on, follow me."

She stood up.

Pulling Yuna by the hand.

Yuna looked back at me for a moment.

I just gave a small nod.

They left.

—

The teenage boy lay back down.

Playing on his phone.

Mother shifted a little closer.

Looking at me.

"How is your work over there?"

"It's going well."

"What do you usually eat?"

"Eggs."

"Do you have a girlfriend yet?"

"No."

"What is your apartment like?"

"Like a normal apartment."

My answers were short.

One by one.

Offering nothing extra.

Mother still wanted to ask more—

but—

"That's enough, honey."

The man in the chair spoke up.

His voice remaining calm.

"Let Itsuki rest."

He looked at me.

Straight on.

"If you want to ask something..."

He paused for a moment.

"...just this will do."

Silence.

"Itsuki."

"Are you doing well over there?"

I looked at him.

For a few seconds.

"I'm fine."

"No complaints."

He gave a small nod.

That was enough.

—

Footsteps sounded once again.

Yuna returned.

Her expression was blank.

I turned to her.

"How was it, Yuna?"

She was quiet for a moment.

"I..."

I cut in.

"You're not interested in dolls, are you?"

She gave a small nod.

"Mhm."

—

"What do you like, Yuna?"

Mother asked again.

Yuna stared straight ahead.

"Anime."

She answered softly.

The teenage boy immediately sat up.

"Anime??"

His eyes sparkled.

"Do you like serious adventure anime?"

Yuna nodded immediately.

"I do!"

He quickly grabbed the TV remote.

"Perfect timing."

"It's broadcasting right now."

The TV turned on.

Channels flipped.

Found it.

The opening was just starting.

The light from the screen illuminated their faces.

"Yuna."

"Yeah?"

"Which character is your favorite?"

Yuna sat closer to the TV.

"The mage."

"Ooh... good choice."

"I like the samurai."

They immediately fell silent.

Focused.

—

"Yuna."

"Yes, Papa?"

She didn't turn her head.

Her eyes remained glued to the screen.

"Don't forget your homework."

"Don't worry, Papa..."

"...there's still plenty of time."

I didn't reply.

—

Time passed.

The episode finished.

The sky outside had grown dark.

The house lights were fully on.

Mother returned.

Carrying a futon.

"Itsuki..."

"You'll be sleeping on the floor, alright?"

"This is for Yuna."

"Umm..."

Yuna turned her head.

"I can just sleep with Papa, Grandma."

Mother paused.

"Oh..."

She smiled.

"That's fine, then."

—

One by one—

they started to leave.

Retreating to their respective rooms.

The teenager yawned.

Left.

The little girl from earlier followed suit.

The youngest child—

was moved to a bedroom.

Carried off.

The TV was turned off.

The house slowly fell silent.

—

Leaving—

me.

Yuna.

And—

that man.

"Itsuki."

"Yuna."

"It's time to rest."

His voice was calm.

"Go to sleep."

I turned to Yuna.

"Yuna."

"Go on ahead to sleep."

"Okay, Papa..."

She stood up.

Then walked away.

Her footsteps soft.

Disappearing out of the room.

—

Now—

it was just me and him.

In a room that had fallen quiet.

---

Silence.

Only the sound—

tick... tick... tick...

The hands of the clock moved slowly.

I sat.

Staring at the table.

Cigarette smoke rose.

Thin.

Disappearing into the ceiling.

"Father..."

My voice was low.

Brief.

"Yes..."

He answered.

His eyes were still closed.

His body remained in the chair.

As if he hadn't moved since earlier.

—

I stayed silent for a moment.

Searching for words.

"How did you..."

"...manage to provide for this family?"

There was no immediate answer.

...

"Hm..."

"Don't you already know?"

I raised my head slightly. Looking at him.

"From what I know..."

I began slowly.

"You don't work."

"You stay at home."

"Sometimes you go to the garden."

"To the fields."

"Fixing the roof."

"The motorcycle."

"The car."

I paused for a moment.

"Sometimes..."

"...doing nothing at all."

Silence.

"Hm."

He gave a small nod.

"True."

I continued.

"And sometimes..."

"...people would come by."

"Buying land."

"And sometimes..."

"...you're the one buying."

I looked at him.

"You trade land."

"Yes."

His answer was short.

Flat.

"I do."

He opened his eyes.

Slightly.

Staring straight ahead.

"So?"

"What else do you want to ask?"

—

I fell silent.

It was true.

I already knew the answer.

I had for a long time.

"Family."

"Responsibility."

I spoke quietly.

As if rearranging my own thoughts.

"You trade land..."

"...to meet our financial needs."

"You don't work..."

"...to meet the need for your presence."

Silence.

"Yes."

He answered.

Briefly.

"So?"

—

I looked down.

Staring at the floor.

The old wood.

"I..."

The word felt heavy.

"I have Yuna now."

I paused for a moment.

Taking a breath.

"...and I'm struggling."

He didn't answer immediately.

He simply looked at me.

"Struggling with what?"

I gave a small laugh.

Soundlessly.

"What part of it isn't..."

He didn't smile.

Didn't react.

Just waited.

I finally answered.

"Finances."

He moved immediately.

Picked up his coffee cup.

Took a sip.

Then set it back down.

Slowly.

Then—

a cigarette.

Lit it.

A small flame ignited.

Smoke rose.

"Your salary isn't enough."

It wasn't a question.

A statement.

"Yes."

I nodded.

"Just so you know..."

He leaned back slightly.

"The problem is simple."

I turned to him.

"Simple?"

"Yes."

He took a drag from his cigarette.

Deeply.

Then exhaled.

"Do you want money..."

"...or time?"

I remained silent.

He continued.

"If you want money—"

"work more."

"Work a steady job."

"Work every day."

"If you want time—"

"accept having less."

"Accept a constrained life." \_

I reached for my cup.

Took a sip of coffee.

Bitter.

It tasted stronger than earlier.

"So?"

He asked.

"What do you choose?"

I stared at the coffee in my hands.

"I can't possibly..."

My voice was quiet.

"...work every day."

I gave a small shake of my head.

"I don't want to live like that."

I set the cup down.

Clink.

A small sound against the table.

Silence returned.

—

—

"So?"

Father's voice cut through the silence.

"What is it that you want?"

I raised my head.

He was already looking at me.

Sharp.

Focused.

Unblinking.

As if waiting for something more honest than mere words.

"I..."

I took a short breath.

"I want advice."

"For independent work."

His cigarette smoke rose slowly.

He didn't answer immediately.

"Hm..."

"Shouldn't you already know the answer?"

I frowned.

"What answer?"

He lifted his chin slightly.

Staring deeper into me.

"Open your eyes."

"Wider."

Silence.

"Look at yourself."

His tone was flat.

But heavy.

"You now..."

"...are not the same as before."

I remained silent.

"Itsuki."

He called my name.

Softly.

But firm.

"You are Itsuki."

"My son."

—

I raised my head fully.

Meeting his gaze.

We stared at each other.

Neither of us looking away.

"Itsuki..."

He continued.

"If you truly look at yourself—"

"...the answer is already there."

—

I didn't answer immediately.

I leaned back.

Tilting my head up slightly.

Eyes closed.

Taking a deep breath.

Exhaling slowly.

Me.

Itsuki.

Who I was.

Who I am now.

The sound of the clock—

tick... tick... tick...

Grew louder.

—

Father never really handed out answers.

Not even back then.

He only—

made me find them myself.

—

I opened my eyes.

Staring straight ahead.

"I'm going to open a workshop."

Silence.

Father heard it.

Unsurprised.

As if he already knew.

"In that case..."

He leaned back slightly.

"You'll need a place."

"I'll give you a piece of my land."

I shook my head slowly.

"There's no need."

He turned his head.

"No?"

"I won't settle in one place."

I looked down at my own hands.

"I don't have a name out there yet."

"It's better..."

"...if I go to the work."

He remained silent.

Listening.

"A mobile technician."

I paused for a moment.

"Benriya."

He repeated softly.

"Benriya..."

—

I continued.

"I'm not sure it's enough to just be a technician."

"So, I'll do it all."

"Whatever others refuse to do."

—

Father took a drag from his cigarette.

Deeply.

Then—

exhaled slowly.

"Oh..."

"In that case—"

"just use my tools."

I turned to him.

"But..."

"What if you need them?"

He gave a small smile.

Faint.

"If that happens..."

"I'll just hire your services."

—

I gave a small laugh.

Brief.

"So?"

He asked again.

"Starting tomorrow?"

"Yes."

I answered simply.

—

"In that case..."

He shifted his posture slightly.

"Tomorrow morning."

"Wake up earlier."

"I'll give you your first job."

I immediately turned to him.

"You're hiring me?"

He looked at me.

A little longer than usual.

"Hey, Itsuki."

I stayed silent.

"Look at me."

His tone remained calm.

But this time—

it carried more depth.

"I'm getting old."

"I can't do everything the way I used to."

I didn't answer right away.

"Hm..."

Finally, I nodded.

"Alright."

—

Silence returned.

Lighter than before.

—

"Now..."

He closed his eyes again.

"Go to sleep."

"It's late."

I stood up slowly.

"Yeah."

I put out my cigarette.

My steps were slow.

Crossing the wooden floor.

Heading out of the room.

—

Before leaving completely—

I paused for a moment.

Glancing back.

Father was still there.

Sitting.

Calm.

As always.

—

I resumed my steps.

Leaving him there.

—

I reached my room.

My old room. Back when I used to live here.

—

The room was...

clean.

Too clean.

Almost empty.

No desk.

No chair.

Not a single trace of my old life remained.

Only—

a wardrobe in the corner.

And on top of it...

a few of my old books.

Lined up.

Covered in a thin layer of dust.

—

In the middle of the room—

a futon.

Yuna was already there.

Asleep.

Her blanket had shifted slightly.

One foot poking out.

—

I stepped inside.

Slowly.

Making no sound.

Stopping beside her.

Looking down.

Watching her face.

Peaceful.

Unburdened.

As if the world was always meant to be this way.

—

My hand moved.

Gently pulling her blanket.

Covering her foot again.

Smoothing it out.

—

"Hm..."

—

I stood there for a moment.

Staring at the futon.

Then—

looked away.

—

After all...

there was no way I could sleep there.

With her.

—

I took a step.

One.

Two.

Three.

Stopped.

Then sat down.

—

Slowly—

I lay down.

On the floor.

—

Cold.

Hard.

Felt instantly against my back.

—

I turned my head to the side.

Yuna was there.

On the futon.

Warm.

—

Her bag was nearby.

I reached for it.

Opened it slightly.

Took out two pieces of clothing.

Folded them.

Turned them into a makeshift pillow.

Placed them under my head.

—

Finally—

I closed my eyes.

—

Silence.

Quieter than the city.

No sound of vehicles.

No voices.

—

Only—

Yuna's breathing. Soft. Steady.

—

And—

tick... tick... tick...

The ticking of a clock in the distance.

—

Occasionally—

the sound of a night bird.

Passing by.

—

Thump.

A small sound.

I opened my eyes slightly.

Yuna shifted onto her side.

Her blanket moved.

—

"Papa..."

Her voice was quiet. Half-asleep.

—

"Yes."

I answered.

Almost a whisper.

—

A small smile appeared.

Unconsciously.

—

I closed my eyes again.

Letting the night pass.

Slowly.

And my consciousness.

Slowly faded away.

~~~ • • • ~~~

Chapter 113: The Annoyed Sister.

Chapter 113: The Annoyed Sister.

A touch.

Gentle.

Shaking my arm.

"Papa... wake up..."

I opened my eyes.

Morning light spilled through the window.

Soft.

Yuna was already standing beside me.

Already dressed.

Her hair combed.

Her clothes changed.

"Hm...?"

My voice was still heavy.

"What is it, Yuna...?"

She looked at me.

Slightly puzzled.

"Why did you sleep on the floor, Papa...?"

"Even though I told you..."

"...you could sleep with me."

I just let out a small sigh.

"Yeah..."

her hands were already pulling my arm.

"Come on, Papa, get up."

"Grandma already made breakfast."

I sat up.

Then stood.

My body still felt stiff.

Aching all over.

My back.

Shoulders.

Arms.

Probably from sleeping on the hard floor.

Yuna didn't let go.

Pulling me out of the room.

Straight toward the kitchen.

the atmosphere changed.

Warm.

Lively.

The kitchen was simple.

A gas stove on the counter.

Near the window.

A traditional wood stove.

A large fire burning.

a stack of firewood.

A large pot resting on top.

Water boiling softly.

Mother stood there.

Cooking.

A frying pan on the gas stove.

sizzle...

Everyone was already gathered.

My younger sister was busy beside Mother.

Helping.

Or at least looking like it.

sat on the floor.

Playing on his phone.

With his older brother.

a woven mat was laid out.

Father sat relaxed.

With a coffee.

At a small table.

"Grandma, I brought Papa."

Yuna's voice instantly filled the kitchen.

Mother turned.

Toward me.

"Oh... thank you, Yuna."

Yuna immediately sat down.

Near Father.

Without hesitation.

I walked toward the counter.

Approaching Mother.

My path was blocked.

My younger sister stood right in the way.

"Move."

My hand immediately grabbed her shoulder.

Shifting her aside.

She turned her head quickly.

"What's your problem?"

"Move over a little."

I kept moving forward.

She stepped aside.

A little.

I pushed her again.

"Seriously, what is your deal?!"

"Move."

"I already moved!!!"

Her voice rose.

I didn't stop.

My eyes were focused.

On the drawer.

I pulled it.

Clack.

It opened.

Coffee grounds.

Inside.

"Just say so if you need to open the drawer."

I didn't answer.

My arm extended.

Pushing her again.

Further away.

"What now?!"

I grabbed a spoon.

Scooped the coffee grounds.

Put them into a glass.

Then sugar.

I closed the drawer.

My hand reached for the thermos.

Pouring the hot water.

Steam rose.

The aroma of coffee spread.

I stirred it.

Slowly.

Lifted the glass.

Breathed in the scent.

"Hm..."

I tasted a little with the spoon.

Sweet.

Bitter.

Just right.

I turned around.

And simply walked away.

my sister was still pouting.

I reached the small table.

Set down my coffee.

Sat down.

Yuna was there.

Sitting.

Her head resting on the table.

Her eyes half-closed.

Still sleepy.

"Papa..."

Her voice was quiet.

"Can I have some..."

"Coffee?"

She gave a small nod.

"It's still hot."

"Yuna."

Father slid his cup.

Toward Yuna.

"Here."

Yuna turned to him.

"But this is Grandpa's..."

"It's fine."

Father replied.

Calmly.

Yuna sat up straight.

Reached for the cup.

Blew on it softly.

Then took a small sip.

"Sweet..."

She smiled a little.

"...not like Papa's."

"Bitter."

Her eyes were fully open now.

Not sleepy anymore.

I took a sip of my coffee.

Hot. It burned my lips slightly.

"Dad..."

"What work do you have for me later?"

Father didn't answer immediately.

He reached for his coffee cup.

Took a sip.

"Replacing the roof tiles."

"And changing the brake pads."

"Oh..."

I nodded slowly.

My hand reached for the pack of cigarettes in my pocket.

I placed it on the table.

"Which ones are leaking?"

I opened the cigarette pack.

"This kitchen."

"Then the bedroom."

"And the living room."

"Hm... That's quite a bit..." I slipped a cigarette between my lips.

Yuna was quiet.

Bored.

Her hands moved slowly.

Picking up my cigarette pack.

Father's cigarette pack.

Which looked more expensive.

She lined them up.

Neatly.

Inspecting them.

Closely.

Her eyes moved as she read.

Slowly.

Then stopped.

"Smoking kills."

Her eyes immediately widened.

Her mouth fell open slightly.

Shocked.

I was still talking.

"About the brake pads..."

"Drum or disc brakes?"

"Probably the rear ones."

Father answered casually.

"But just check all of them later."

"Oh... alright."

"Papa..."

Yuna's voice was quiet.

But clear.

Father and I turned at the same time.

"Yeah?"

Yuna slid the cigarette pack over.

Showing the warning label.

I looked at it.

"Oh..."

"Yeah, I already know."

"And?"

Yuna looked at me.

Serious.

"Papa, you have to stop smoking."

...

"Listen to her, Itsuki..."

Mother's voice called from the kitchen.

Half-joking.

I let out a small sigh.

"It's just text, Yuna."

"As long as I don't overdo it—it's fine."

"But..."

Yuna didn't give up.

Leaning in slightly.

I pointed at Father.

"Look at your grandpa."

"He's perfectly fine."

Yuna immediately turned her head.

Toward Father.

Father just gave a small nod.

"The important thing is not to overdo it."

Yuna sat back down.

Slower this time.

"Grandpa... how old are you?"

"Hm..."

Father thought for a moment.

"Probably around sixty-five."

"Oh..."

She put the cigarette pack back down.

And didn't touch it again.

Her eyes shifted to the back.

my younger brother.

Who was still playing on his phone.

Yuna stood up.

Walked over to him.

"What are you playing, Uncle?"

The teenager glanced at her.

"Hm? Oh, Yuna."

Yuna leaned down.

Looking at the screen.

"What game is that...?"

"A MOBA."

"MOBA...?"

Characters.

Items.

Skills.

A massive map.

Colorful effects.

Yuna went quiet.

Watching closely.

Not long after.

"I'm dizzy."

She immediately stood up straight.

Walked away.

She came back.

Sat down beside me.

Just like before.

Her head resting on the table.

Using her arms as a pillow.

a quiet voice spoke up.

"Bro..."

My youngest brother.

Still staring at his phone.

"What was her name again?"

"Yuna."

His older brother answered.

"Is she Brother Itsuki's kid?"

"Yeah."

"Kids..."

Mother's voice rang out.

Firmer this time.

"Enough playing on your phones."

"Let's have breakfast."

Mother walked over.

Carrying the rice.

My younger sister followed behind her.

Carrying the fried chicken.

They placed it on the table.

In front of us.

The aroma immediately spread.

"Itsuki..."

Mother looked at me.

"Go wash your face."

"Then eat."

"Yuna, too."

"Okay, Grandma..."

Yuna answered first.

I stood up.

A small hand reached out.

Toward me.

I grabbed it.

Pulled gently.

Helping her to her feet.

We reached the washing area.

I turned on the faucet.

Water immediately poured out.

Clear.

I washed my hands.

Then washed my face.

The cold water touched my skin.

Refreshing.

Washing away the lingering sleepiness.

"Papa..."

A small voice beside me.

"...I can't reach."

I glanced over.

Yuna was standing there.

Reaching out.

But her hands couldn't reach the faucet.

I looked at her for a moment.

"Short."

"Papa...!"

My hands immediately grabbed her.

Lifting her up.

Light.

Yuna leaned forward a little.

Washed her face.

Water dripped from her chin.

Her eyes were fully open now.

Not sleepy anymore.

I set her down.

She stood there.

Shaking a little water off her hands.

We headed back.

everyone was already gathered.

Sitting around the low table.

The mat was full.

Lively.

Yuna and I sat down.

In the space between them.

Near Mother.

"Here."

Mother handed out plates.

To me.

To Yuna.

"Yuna..."

Mother smiled a little.

"Eat a lot."

"So you can grow up fast."

"So you can be like Itsuki."

"Like Papa?"

Yuna immediately turned.

Looking at me.

From head to toe.

"Just eat a normal amount."

"When you're full, stop."

Yuna nodded.

Her hand reached for the rice.

Scooping a full plate.

I stared at her.

"Hey..."

"That's too much."

"who's going to eat it?"

"Papa."

She answered quickly.

I raised an eyebrow.

"What if I'm already full?"

"Umm..."

Yuna paused.

Looked at her plate.

scooped a little.

Moving it to my plate.

"I can finish this much."

"Right..."

Mother came over again.

Placing the side dishes.

Fried chicken.

Onto our plates.

"Do you like spicy food, Yuna?"

Mother asked.

"Yeah..."

Yuna answered quietly.

"But only a little."

"In that case..."

Mother slid the mortar over.

Red sauce.

The scent of chili immediately wafted up.

"Here."

Yuna raised her spoon.

About to take some.

My hand immediately stopped hers.

"Yuna."

She turned to me.

"You don't know how spicy Grandma's sauce is yet."

"Try a little first."

Yuna went quiet.

Then nodded.

She put the spoon back down.

Used the tip of her finger.

Touching the sambal lightly.

tasted it.

... ..

Her reaction changed instantly.

Her eyes went wide.

Her face tensed.

I immediately grabbed my coffee cup.

"Here."

"Drink this. Quick."

Yuna took it.

Without hesitation.

Drank it right away.

A little.

Not enough.

She drank again.

More.

until it was empty.

"Haa..."

She let out a breath.

"Are you okay, Yuna?"

Mother asked.

Yuna just nodded quickly.

Still quiet.

I looked at her.

"How was it?"

"Did my coffee work?"

Yuna turned to me.

Her lips were still a bit red.

"Yeah..."

"...it worked really well."

"The spiciness is completely gone."

I chuckled.

"Good."

We went back to eating.

savory.

Slightly sweet.

With a hint of saltiness.

It seemed it was fried using leftover salted fish oil.

it added more flavor.

The rice was warm.

Fluffy.

Not too mushy.

Not dry.

Just right.

I ate slowly.

beside me.

As usual.

Neat.

Not making a mess.

faster.

A little more enthusiastic.

Her spoon didn't stop.

Eating heartily.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 114: bug. double Chapters.

— • —

A touch.

Gentle.

Shaking my arm.

"Papa... wake up..."

I opened my eyes.

Morning light spilled through the window.

Soft.

Yuna was already standing beside me.

Already dressed.

Her hair combed.

Her clothes changed.

"Hm...?"

My voice was still heavy.

"What is it, Yuna...?"

She looked at me.

Slightly puzzled.

"Why did you sleep on the floor, Papa...?"

"Even though I told you..."

"...you could sleep with me."

I just let out a small sigh.

"Yeah..."

Before I could continue—

her hands were already pulling my arm.

"Come on, Papa, get up."

"Grandma already made breakfast."

—

I sat up.

Then stood.

My body still felt stiff.

Aching all over.

My back.

Shoulders.

Arms.

Probably from sleeping on the hard floor.

Yuna didn't let go.

Pulling me out of the room.

Straight toward the kitchen.

—

The moment we arrived—

the atmosphere changed.

Warm.

Lively.

—

The kitchen was simple.

A gas stove on the counter.

Near the window.

Below it—

A traditional wood stove.

A large fire burning.

Beside it—

a stack of firewood.

A large pot resting on top.

Water boiling softly.

—

Mother stood there.

Cooking.

A frying pan on the gas stove.

The sound of oil—

sizzle...

—

Everyone was already gathered.

My younger sister was busy beside Mother.

Helping.

Or at least looking like it.

—

My youngest brother—

sat on the floor.

Playing on his phone.

With his older brother.

—

In the middle of the room—

a woven mat was laid out.

Father sat relaxed.

With a coffee.

At a small table.

—

"Grandma, I brought Papa."

Yuna's voice instantly filled the kitchen.

Mother turned.

Toward me.

"Oh... thank you, Yuna."

Yuna immediately sat down.

Near Father.

Without hesitation.

—

I walked toward the counter.

Approaching Mother.

—

My path was blocked.

My younger sister stood right in the way.

"Move."

My hand immediately grabbed her shoulder.

Shifting her aside.

She turned her head quickly.

"What's your problem?"

"Move over a little."

I kept moving forward.

She stepped aside.

A little.

—

I pushed her again.

"Seriously, what is your deal?!"

"Move."

"I already moved!!!"

Her voice rose.

I didn't stop.

—

My eyes were focused.

On the drawer.

—

I pulled it.

Clack.

It opened.

Coffee grounds.

Inside.

—

"Just say so if you need to open the drawer."

I didn't answer.

My arm extended.

Pushing her again.

Further away.

"What now?!"

—

I grabbed a spoon.

Scooped the coffee grounds.

Put them into a glass.

Then sugar.

—

I closed the drawer.

My hand reached for the thermos.

Pouring the hot water.

Steam rose.

The aroma of coffee spread.

—

I stirred it.

Slowly.

Lifted the glass.

Breathed in the scent.

"Hm..."

—

I tasted a little with the spoon.

Sweet.

Bitter.

Just right.

—

I turned around.

And simply walked away.

—

Behind me—

my sister was still pouting.

—

I reached the small table.

Set down my coffee.

Sat down.

—

Yuna was there.

Sitting.

Her head resting on the table.

Her eyes half-closed.

Still sleepy.

"Papa..."

Her voice was quiet.

"Can I have some..."

"Coffee?"

She gave a small nod.

—

"It's still hot."

—

"Yuna."

Father slid his cup.

Toward Yuna.

"Here."

—

Yuna turned to him.

"But this is Grandpa's..."

"It's fine."

Father replied.

Calmly.

—

Yuna sat up straight.

Reached for the cup.

Blew on it softly.

Then took a small sip.

—
"Sweet..."

She smiled a little.

"...not like Papa's."

"Bitter."

—
Her eyes were fully open now.

Not sleepy anymore.

—
I took a sip of my coffee.

Hot. It burned my lips slightly.

"Dad..."

"What work do you have for me later?"

Father didn't answer immediately.

He reached for his coffee cup.

Took a sip.

"Replacing the roof tiles."

"And changing the brake pads."

"Oh..."

I nodded slowly.

My hand reached for the pack of cigarettes in my pocket.

I placed it on the table.

"Which ones are leaking?"

I opened the cigarette pack.

"This kitchen."

"Then the bedroom."

"And the living room."

"Hm... That's quite a bit..." I slipped a cigarette between my lips.

—

Beside me—

Yuna was quiet.

Bored.

Her hands moved slowly.

Picking up my cigarette pack.

Then—

Father's cigarette pack.

Which looked more expensive.

—

She lined them up.

Neatly.

Inspecting them.

Closely.

—

Her eyes moved as she read.

Slowly.

Then stopped.

—

"Smoking kills."

—

Her eyes immediately widened.

Her mouth fell open slightly.

Shocked.

—

I was still talking.

"About the brake pads..."

"Drum or disc brakes?"

"Probably the rear ones."

Father answered casually.

"But just check all of them later."

"Oh... alright."

—

"Papa..."

Yuna's voice was quiet.

But clear.

—

Father and I turned at the same time.

"Yeah?"

—

Yuna slid the cigarette pack over.

Showing the warning label.

—

I looked at it.

"Oh..."

"Yeah, I already know."

"And?"

—

Yuna looked at me.

Serious.

"Papa, you have to stop smoking."

...

"Listen to her, Itsuki..."

Mother's voice called from the kitchen.

Half-joking.

—

I let out a small sigh.

"It's just text, Yuna."

"As long as I don't overdo it—it's fine."

—

"But..."

Yuna didn't give up.

Leaning in slightly.

—

I pointed at Father.

"Look at your grandpa."

"He's perfectly fine."

—

Yuna immediately turned her head.

Toward Father.

—

Father just gave a small nod.

"The important thing is not to overdo it."

—

Yuna sat back down.

Slower this time.

"Grandpa... how old are you?"

"Hm..."

Father thought for a moment.

"Probably around sixty-five."

"Oh..."

—

She put the cigarette pack back down.

And didn't touch it again.

—

Her eyes shifted to the back.

Looking at—

my younger brother.

Who was still playing on his phone.

—

Yuna stood up.

Walked over to him.

"What are you playing, Uncle?"

The teenager glanced at her.

"Hm? Oh, Yuna."

—

Yuna leaned down.

Looking at the screen.

"What game is that...?"

"A MOBA."

"MOBA...?"

—

On the screen—

Characters.

Items.

Skills.

A massive map.

Colorful effects.

—

Yuna went quiet.

Watching closely.

Not long after.

—

"I'm dizzy."

She immediately stood up straight.

Walked away.

—

She came back.

Sat down beside me.

Just like before.

Her head resting on the table.

Using her arms as a pillow.

—

From behind—

a quiet voice spoke up.

"Bro..."

My youngest brother.

Still staring at his phone.

"What was her name again?"

"Yuna."

His older brother answered.

"Is she Brother Itsuki's kid?"

"Yeah."

—

"Kids..."

Mother's voice rang out.

Firmer this time.

"Enough playing on your phones."

"Let's have breakfast."

—

Mother walked over.

Carrying the rice.

My younger sister followed behind her.

Carrying the fried chicken.

—

They placed it on the table.

In front of us.

The aroma immediately spread.

—

"Itsuki..."

Mother looked at me.

"Go wash your face."

"Then eat."

"Yuna, too."

—

"Okay, Grandma..."

Yuna answered first.

—

I stood up.

—

A small hand reached out.

Toward me.

—

I grabbed it.

Pulled gently.

Helping her to her feet.

—

We reached the washing area.

I turned on the faucet.

Water immediately poured out.

Clear.

I washed my hands.

Then washed my face.

The cold water touched my skin.

Refreshing.

Washing away the lingering sleepiness.

—

"Papa..."

A small voice beside me.

"...I can't reach."

I glanced over.

Yuna was standing there.

Reaching out.

But her hands couldn't reach the faucet.

—

I looked at her for a moment.

"Short."

—

"Papa...!"

My hands immediately grabbed her.

Lifting her up.

Light.

—

Yuna leaned forward a little.

Washed her face.

Water dripped from her chin.

Her eyes were fully open now.

Not sleepy anymore.

—

I set her down.

She stood there.

Shaking a little water off her hands.

—

We headed back.

—

Inside—

everyone was already gathered.

Sitting around the low table.

The mat was full.

Lively.

—

Yuna and I sat down.

In the space between them.

Near Mother.

—

"Here."

Mother handed out plates.

To me.

To Yuna.

—

"Yuna..."

Mother smiled a little.

"Eat a lot."

"So you can grow up fast."

"So you can be like Itsuki."

—

"Like Papa?"

Yuna immediately turned.

Looking at me.

From head to toe.

—

"Just eat a normal amount."

"When you're full, stop."

—

Yuna nodded.

Her hand reached for the rice.

Scooping a full plate.

—

I stared at her.

"Hey..."

"That's too much."

"If you can't finish it—"

"who's going to eat it?"

—

"Papa."

She answered quickly.

—

I raised an eyebrow.

"What if I'm already full?"

—

"Umm..."

Yuna paused.

Looked at her plate.

Then—

scooped a little.

Moving it to my plate.

—

"I can finish this much."

—
"Right..."

—
Mother came over again.

Placing the side dishes.

Fried chicken.

Onto our plates.

—
"Do you like spicy food, Yuna?"

Mother asked.

—
"Yeah..."

Yuna answered quietly.

"But only a little."

—
"In that case..."

Mother slid the mortar over.

Red sauce.

The scent of chili immediately wafted up.

"Here."

—
Yuna raised her spoon.

About to take some.

—

My hand immediately stopped hers.

—

"Yuna."

She turned to me.

—

"You don't know how spicy Grandma's sauce is yet."

"Try a little first."

—

Yuna went quiet.

Then nodded.

—

She put the spoon back down.

Used the tip of her finger.

Touching the sambal lightly.

Then—

tasted it.

... ..

Her reaction changed instantly.

Her eyes went wide.

Her face tensed.

—

I immediately grabbed my coffee cup.

"Here."

"Drink this. Quick."

—

Yuna took it.

Without hesitation.

Drank it right away.

—

A little.

Not enough.

—

She drank again.

More.

—

And again—

until it was empty.

—

"Haa..."

She let out a breath.

—

"Are you okay, Yuna?"

Mother asked.

—

Yuna just nodded quickly.

Still quiet.

—

I looked at her.

"How was it?"

"Did my coffee work?"

—

Yuna turned to me.

Her lips were still a bit red.

"Yeah..."

"...it worked really well."

"The spiciness is completely gone."

—

I chuckled.

"Good."

—

We went back to eating.

—

The fried chicken—

savory.

Slightly sweet.

With a hint of saltiness.

It seemed it was fried using leftover salted fish oil.

But exactly because of that—

it added more flavor.

—

The rice was warm.

Fluffy.

Not too mushy.

Not dry.

Just right.

—

I ate slowly.

—

Yuna—

beside me.

—

As usual.

Neat.

Not making a mess.

—

But this time—

faster.

A little more enthusiastic.

—

Her spoon didn't stop.

Eating heartily.

~~ • ~~

Chapter 115: Leak Test.

Chapter 115: Leak Test.

Chapter 115: Leak Test.

I caught a fleeting glimpse of that from above.

Then I kept climbing.

Higher and higher.

The wind grew stronger.

Until finally, my head cleared the edge of the roof.

A gust of wind immediately swept across my face.

Fresh.

And quite strong.

Summer in the village really was different from the city.

The heat was there. But the wind felt alive.

—

I hoisted myself fully onto the roof.

A vast expanse of roof tiles spread out beneath my feet.

In the distance, I could see the roofs of other houses. Trees. Orchards. And

further out—

A sprawling expanse of rice fields.

A long stretch of green.

I slowly stood up at the very peak of the roof.

Keeping my balance.

Because the wind up here felt stronger than I had imagined.

—

My feet stepped carefully along the surface of the tiles.

Down below, Father grabbed a long wooden pole.

A fruit-picking hook.

A long bamboo rod.

Then he walked into the house.

Yuna trailed right behind him.

I walked toward the middle of the roof.

Stopped.

And waited.

—

A few seconds later—

Thump.

A roof tile lifted slightly from below.

Poked by the pole.

I immediately moved to that vertical line of tiles.

"So it's here."

I crouched down.

My hands began removing the topmost tile.

Slide.

Lift.

Set it aside.

The wooden batten underneath was exposed.

I grabbed the safety line.

Tied it around my waist.

Then I hooked the carabiner onto the batten.

Only then did I step forward.

Stepping onto the batten.

Removing the second tile.

Then the third.

Continuing downward, slowly.

With every row I descended, I moved the hook down to the next wooden beam.

—

"Papa!! Be careful!!!"

Yuna's voice called out from below.

I took a quick glance.

She was standing near Father. Her face looked utterly serious.

"Yeah!!!"

I went back to work.

But a few seconds later, I realized something—

Yuna was standing directly beneath the path where I was removing the tiles.

"Yuna!" I looked down.

"Don't stand right under me!" "You'll get dust in your eyes!"

Father immediately grabbed Yuna's hand.

Pulling her back and away.

"Over here."

Yuna obeyed.

"Which one, Dad?" I asked again.

"Two more rows down."

I removed two more layers of tiles.

And then, I finally saw it.

A tile with a fairly large crack on its bottom edge.

The batten underneath was still in good condition.

—

Father grabbed the long pole again.

This time, there was a small bag hanging from the end.

He hoisted it up toward me.

"Here."

"Got it."

I took the bag.

Inside was a new roof tile.

I pulled out the replacement tile. Then put the broken one into the bag.

The bag was lowered.

After that, I immediately slotted the new tile into place.

A perfect fit.

I started putting all the tiles back in order, slowly climbing my way up.

"That's one done."

—

Thump.

The second signal from below.

I opened up another path of tiles.

This time—

"Hm..."

The batten was damaged.

Not broken.

But it was starting to rot.

The bag from below came up again.

Inside was a new tile and a short piece of batten.

I took both of them.

I swapped the broken tile into the bag.

The bag was lowered.

—

I inspected the old batten more closely.

Tapped it lightly.

Still solid on the inside.

"Still usable..."

I placed the new piece of wood directly over the rotting section.

Grabbed a nail.

And my hammer.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

The sound of the hammer echoed faintly across the roof.

Down below, Yuna kept watching.

Her face tense.

—

"Papa! Be careful!!!"

"Yeah, yeah!"

The reinforcement wood was secured.

I replaced the tile.

Then put everything back in place.

"Tile number two, done."

Thump.

The final signal.

"Yep." I took a breath. "Last one."

I started moving again.

Suddenly—

Whoosh.

A heavy gust of wind swept through, strong and sudden.

My body instinctively dropped low.

Crouching down fast.

My heartbeat spiked.

My vision swayed for a moment.

"Haa..."

My hands clamped onto the wooden batten.

"I really hate heights..."

I stayed still for a few seconds.

Waiting for the wind to die down.

Then I started moving again.

A few minutes later—

Done.

—

All the roof tiles were tightly sealed once again.

I walked back up to the peak of the roof.

Looked down.

Father and Yuna were already standing there, holding the ladder.

Waiting.

I began my descent slowly.

Creak...

The bamboo ladder groaned once again.

One step.

Two steps.

Until finally, my feet touched the ground.

Safe.

—

I took a deep breath.

And exhaled slowly.

"Haa..."

"Good job, Itsuki," Father said casually.

Yuna immediately came closer.

"Papa is amazing..."

I didn't answer her.

I just averted my gaze.

This wasn't amazing.

It was terrifying.

—

"Take a break," Father said, patting my shoulder once. "Do you want coffee or something cold? I'll ask your mother to make it."

"Just coffee."

"Hm."

Father walked into the house.

I stood still for a moment in the side yard.

The summer breeze blew softly.

My t-shirt was slightly damp with sweat.

And only now did I really feel it—my palms were aching from gripping the roof tiles and wooden battens for so long.

—

"Is Papa afraid of heights?"

Yuna's voice came from my side.

I glanced at her.

"Huh? Me?"

Yuna stared at me for a long moment.

"I'm a little scared," she said quietly. "If you fall..."

Fall.

That word made my mind wander for a second.

The impact.

The body losing its footing.

Emptiness.

Truthfully... it wasn't just about falling.

Even just standing somewhere high up was enough to make my chest feel tight.

The wind felt different.

The ground felt far away.

And the body seemed acutely aware—that one wrong step could end it all.

—

The sound of footsteps approached.

Father came out of the garage carrying a long hose.

"Yuna," he called out. "Please turn on the tap."

"Okay, Grandpa!"

Yuna immediately sprang into action.

She followed the line of the hose stretching across the yard.

"We'll test it right now," Father said with a small smirk.

"Haha, obviously."

"If it still leaks, that means you're going back up," Father said casually.

"What if the tile you gave me was defective?" I shot back.

"Then it's my fault." "And if you didn't install it tight enough?" he added.

I glanced at him. "Yeah... then that's my fault."

—

Shortly after—

Water began flowing through the hose.

Yuna jogged back over to us.

"I turned it on!"

"Alright."

Father held the end of the hose.

He placed his thumb over part of the nozzle.

Instantly, the water sprayed out with much greater force.

High into the air.

And directly struck the roof.

Splashhh.

The sound of the water hitting the tiles was quite loud.

"Now go check inside, Itsuki."

"Yeah."

—

I walked into the house.

The wooden floor felt slightly cold against the soles of my feet.

I reached the living room.

Looked up.

The sound of water kept battering the roof above.

Splashhh.

Splashhh.

Yuna followed me inside.

She tipped her head back, looking utterly serious.

Her eyes darted back and forth.

"No leaks."

"Yeah," I said, leaning against a wooden pillar. "That's how it should be."

"Go tell Grandpa," I said. "Tell him it's clear."

Yuna immediately nodded.

As if accepting a crucial mission.

"Okay."

She dashed right back outside.

Fast.

I could hear her voice from the yard. Muffled, but clear.

—

"Grandpa!! No leaks!!"

Father's voice answered, even more muffled.

"Now for the bedroom."

Not long after—

Yuna reappeared.

"Papa." Her breathing was a bit fast. "Grandpa says check your old room now."

"Yeah."

We walked.

Into my old room.

The sound of water could be heard overhead again.

I looked up.

Waited.

No drips.

No seeping moisture.

"No leaks," Yuna said again, sounding satisfied.

"Yeah."

This time, without being told, she immediately ran back outside.

I smiled faintly. This kid was way too excited.

I stepped out of the room. But I didn't head out to the yard.

I went to the kitchen.

—

When I got there—

Mother was making coffee.

The rich aroma of hot coffee grounds immediately filled the room.

The sound of water streaming off the roof could still be heard faintly.

Then—

Pat-pat-pat.

Small, quick footsteps approached.

"Papa, Grandpa says—"

Yuna stopped herself mid-sentence.

Looked up at the kitchen roof.

Listened.

For a few seconds.

"No leaks," she said quickly. Then she instantly dashed out again.

Mother chuckled at the sight.

"Itsuki, look at that daughter of yours," she said, sliding a cup forward.

"Here, your coffee is ready."

"Yeah, I know."

I walked over to Mother.

Took the cup.

Hot.

I carried it to the low table.

Sat down.

The sound of water above finally stopped.

The test was over.

—

I poured a little coffee into the saucer.

Sip.

"Haa..."

Bitter.

Warm.

Just right.

A few moments later—

Yuna appeared again.

She was panting slightly.

Her cheeks were a bit flushed from constantly running back and forth.

She walked over to Mother.

"Grandma..." she said, raising her hands a little. "Can I have some water, please?"

Her arms were too short to reach the glasses on the top shelf.

Mother immediately poured her some water.

"Here you go."

Yuna accepted it with both hands.

Then gulped it down quickly.

Finished it in one go.

She placed the glass back on the counter.

After that, she walked over to me.

And without saying a word—

Flop.

She lay down beside me.

Resting her head on my thigh.

—

"Why were you running around like that?" I asked, looking down at her.

"There was no need for that."

"I know, Papa..." she mumbled, closing her eyes.

~~ ◆ ~~

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 116: Brake Pads

~~ • ~~

Now, we stood in front of the garage.

The doors were wide open.

Inside, Father sat in the driver's seat. A silver Avanza—not exactly new, but not quite old enough to be called an antique, either. Its paint was slightly dull, coated in a thin layer of dust.

The engine idled quietly.

The car slowly backed out of the garage.

Yuna and I stood by the door.

Yuna stayed quiet, watching the rear wheel roll toward her.

It was very close.

Maybe just ten inches from the tip of her sandals.

Her body went stiff.

She didn't dare to move.

The car kept backing up, passing slowly in front of us.

Once it was far enough, Father turned the steering wheel and parked it in the yard.

I went straight into the garage.

The smell of iron, dust, oil, and damp wood all mixed into one.

I crouched down in front of the pile of tools.

"Car jack..."

My hand reached for the old hydraulic jack in the bottom corner.

I lifted it and set it on the floor near Yuna.

Then I grabbed the lug wrench.

And two jack stands.

I placed them beside me, one by one.

Yuna had been staring at the jack this whole time.

Her hands reached out to lift it.

Her body tilted slightly, bracing against the weight.

It didn't budge.

"Heavy..."

She gave up immediately.

"Papa, what is this for?"

I glanced over.

"The jack? To lift the car."

"Huh?"

Her expression changed instantly.

"How? It's so small, but the car is huge."

"You'll see in a bit."

Father walked over.

"Jack, jack stands, lug wrench."

"Yeah, I know."

"Carb cleaner, flathead screwdriver, ten-millimeter wrench..."

"Yeah, yeah..."

I let out a short sigh.

"I'm looking for them right now."

My hands kept digging through the pile of tools.

Found the screwdriver.

Found the carb cleaner.

I set them aside.

Father was standing right behind me now.

"Sandpaper, a small container, brake fluid, new brake pads."

I stopped.

Stood up.

Looked at Father.

"Why don't you just do it yourself?"

"I'm just reminding you," he answered casually.

"Besides, I don't have the strength to take a tire off anymore."

His tone was so casual.

So perfectly ordinary that I couldn't even bring myself to be annoyed.

I exhaled slowly.

"Fine..."

I crouched back down.

Beside me, Yuna stood quietly, looking back and forth between us.

Like she was watching two old mechanics argue about the exact same thing for the hundredth time.

Found the ten-millimeter spanner.

Twelve-millimeter ring wrench.

Fourteen.

A long bolt.

Coarse sandpaper.

A small container.

Everything was starting to come together.

"Dad, where's the brake fluid and the new pads?"

Father looked thoughtful for a second.

"Oh, right..."

"They're inside the car."

He walked away.

I grabbed a few clean sacks and started tossing the tools inside to make them easier to carry.

I hoisted the sack onto my shoulder.

And walked out to the yard.

Yuna immediately followed behind me.

We stopped near the car's rear wheel.

I set the sack down.

I took all the tools out and arranged them neatly on top of another sack I had laid out as a mat.

The car door opened.

Father stepped out carrying two small boxes.

The new brake pads.

And the brake fluid.

"Here."

He handed them to me.

"Don't just replace them right away. Check them first."

I frowned.

"Why?"

"Isn't it easier to just swap them out?"

"To save money."

"Fine, fine..."

I took the boxes and set them down near the other tools.

Just as I was about to start—

"Itsuki."

"Hm?"

"Get some blocks."

"Yeah, yeah..."

I walked to the edge of the yard and grabbed four large rocks.

I wedged them against the front wheels.

In front of and behind the tires.

So the car wouldn't roll when it was jacked up later.

Meanwhile, Father got into the car and pulled the handbrake.

Click.

I crouched near the rear wheel.

Popped off the hubcap.

The lug nuts were visible underneath.

I grabbed the lug wrench.

Fitted it on.

Then stepped on the end of it with my foot.

Creak.

The nut moved a little.

I stepped on it again.

It started to turn more easily.

One by one.

I loosened the other nuts, too.

I didn't take the tire off yet.

The nuts were still attached.

Just not as tight.

Father stood a few steps behind me, smoking.

Watching in silence.

I moved to the other wheel.

Started loosening the nuts.

"Papa..."

I glanced over.

"I want to help, too."

"You can't."

"I can too."

Her face was completely serious.

"I just need to step on the wrench, right?"

"Yeah."

I fitted the lug wrench into place.

Yuna immediately stepped onto the iron bar.

Both her hands gripped the body of the car.

Her tiny frame tried to apply pressure.

It didn't budge.

She tried doing a little hop.

Still nothing.

The nut didn't even shift a fraction of an inch.

I stared at her flatly.

"Are you done?"

"Why can't I do it..."

"Get down."

I gently nudged her aside.

"You're not heavy enough."

I stepped on the lug wrench once.

Creak.

The nut instantly gave way.

Yuna's mouth fell open slightly.

"Ooh..."

A little while later, all the nuts were finally loose.

I grabbed the jack.

Then crouched by the rear bumper.

"Lifting point..."

I looked under the car.

The differential.

The axle.

The chassis frame.

"Found it."

Yuna crouched down next to me.

Her face was dead serious as she peered under the car.

"Where?"

"Right there."

She still looked completely lost.

I grabbed another sack to lie on, then slid underneath the car.

I slowly shifted the jack into place.

Perfect fit.

Father walked over.

Crouched down for a second.

Checked the jack's position.

Then stood back up with a small nod.

I started pumping the jack handle.

Click.

The piston rose slowly.

Made contact with the differential.

Kept going.

Higher.

The car's body began to lift.

Both tires slowly hung in the air.

Until they were finally suspended about four inches off the ground.

I slid out from under the car.

Grabbed a jack stand.

Placed it under the support point.

Father checked it again.

And gave another small nod.

Beside me, Yuna quietly fetched the other jack stand.

She dragged it slowly toward me.

"Here, Papa."

I glanced at it briefly.

"Yeah. Thanks."

I slid it into place.

I lowered the jack, until the stands were fully supporting the car's weight.

Then I pulled myself out from under the car again.

—

I took off the lug nuts one by one.

Clack. Clack.

Yuna watched for a moment.

Then, without saying a word, she walked around to the other side.

She crouched near the other wheel.

Her hands started turning the nuts just like I had.

Slowly.

Using both hands at once.

A few moments later—

Pat. Pat.

Small footsteps approached.

"Here, Papa. I took them off."

Several lug nuts rested in the palm of her hand.

I glanced over.

"Just put them over there."

"Okay, Papa."

She walked back to the other side and carefully set the nuts down near the wheel.

I started pulling the tire.

Heavy.

The tire slid off the wheel studs.

Thud.

I lowered it slowly and slid it under the car.

Not too deep.

Just as a failsafe in case the jack stands gave out.

When I stood up—

Yuna was already back.

She looked at me.

Then she started heading toward the other side to help again.

"Yuna."

She stopped and looked back.

"I'll do it."

"Why, Papa?"

"It's heavy."

"Ooh..."

I walked around to the other side.

Took off the second tire.

And slid it under the car as well.

A thin layer of dust coated my hands.

Father walked over.

He had a hammer and a rag in his hands.

I understood immediately.

If the brake drum was stuck or seized, it had to be knocked loose first.

I took them both.

Then grabbed the carb cleaner.

"Yuna, step back."

She immediately took a few steps back behind me.

Pshhh.

The carb cleaner sprayed out in a harsh stream.

I aimed it at the seam of the drum.

The smell of chemicals instantly filled the air.

Once I finished spraying, I partially covered the drum with the rag.

Then—

Clang. Clang. Clang.

The hammer struck the drum.

I tried to turn it a little.

Still stuck.

"Dad, the handbrake."

"Yeah."

Father got into the car.

Click.

The parking brake lever was released.

Now the drum could move a little.

I turned it again.

Clang. Clang.

I tapped it gently all the way around.

Then sprayed it with the carb cleaner again.

Pshhh.

"Yuna."

"Yes, Papa?"

"Get me a long bolt, and the twelve and ten-millimeter wrenches."

Better to ask Yuna than to go back and forth myself.

"Okay, Papa."

She immediately jogged over to the pile of tools on the other side of the car.

...

It was taking a while.

I looked over.

"Yuna, hurry up."

"Hold on...!"

Her voice sounded slightly panicked.

Father happened to be walking past.

He crouched near the tools.

Reached out and picked up a few things.

"Here's the bolt."

"And here are the wrenches."

He handed them to Yuna.

Yuna hurried straight back.

Her hair was a little messy from running.

"Here, Papa."

I took them.

"What took so long?"

"I couldn't see the numbers..."

To be fair, the size markings on the wrenches were starting to fade and get grimy.

"Never mind."

There were two small holes on the surface of the brake drum.

I inserted the long bolt into one of them.

Turned it slowly with the wrench.

Creak...

The drum started to push outward.

Little by little.

Until finally—

Clunk.

It popped off.

"Oh..."

Yuna's eyes widened.

"So the bolt is just to take that off..."

"Exactly."

I backed the bolt out and set the drum down beside me.

I briefly inspected the inside surface.

Still fairly smooth.

Not too bad yet.

"Papa..."

"Hm?"

"What's that called?"

Yuna pointed at the half-circle parts inside.

"Those are the brake pads."

"And this one?"

She pointed to the small cylinder at the top.

"The master cylinder."

"What's it for?"

"To push the brake pads out when the brake pedal is pressed."

"Mmm..."

Yuna nodded slowly.

Her face was completely serious as she studied it.

I started inspecting the brake pads.

I ran my finger along the friction surface.

Thin.

Way too thin.

The surface had even started to wear completely smooth.

"Hm..."

I stared at it for a few seconds.

"It's past the minimum limit."

—

"Dad."

Father, who had been standing nearby smoking, walked right over.

"Yeah, what's up?"

I pointed at the exposed brake pads.

Father only gave them a passing glance.

One look was all it took.

"The pads are worn thin."

He gave a small nod.

"Just replace them."

"Yeah."

Father walked over to the other side to grab the box of new brake pads.

Meanwhile, Yuna was still crouching right beside me.

Her eyes were glued to the brake mechanism.

Way too close.

"Hey, Yuna."

"Hm?"

"Step back a bit."

"Why, Papa?"

"I'm about to take this off."

Yuna took a single step back.

"Further."

"But why..."

"It's dangerous."

Father's hand reached out from behind.

He gently pulled Yuna by the shoulder, guiding her behind me.

"Yuna, it really is dangerous."

"So step back."

"Okay..."

Now she was standing behind me.

Right next to Father.

I grabbed the flathead screwdriver.

Wedge the tip against the hook of the return spring.

And pried it.

Stiff.

The spring tension was still strong.

I pushed harder.

Ping—

Suddenly, the spring snapped off and flew across the yard.

Yuna flinched.

Her eyes went wide.

"Yuna..."

I glanced back over my shoulder.

"Now do you see why I told you to step back?"

Yuna nodded vigorously.

"Yeah..."

"Now go fetch that spring."

"Okay!"

She immediately trotted off to retrieve it.

Meanwhile, the other spring simply dropped near my feet.

I started pulling the old brake pads off.

The adjuster strut tumbled out with them.

I checked the cylinder.

The rubber seals were still intact.

No leaks.

There was still plenty of grease inside.

"Hm... looks fine."

I grabbed the new brake pads.

Spotless.

Not a speck of dust on them yet.

"Yuna, hurry up."

"Coming!"

Yuna hurried over and handed me the spring.

I set the new pads into their mounting.

Put the adjuster strut back in place.

The bottom spring went in first.

Then the top spring.

I hooked the end of the spring with the screwdriver.

Lodged the tip of the screwdriver into the anchor hole.

And levered it.

It was heavy.

Because the spring had to be stretched by sheer force against its own tension.

Yuna instinctively took a step back again.

Click.

The spring slipped into place.

"Done."

I picked up the brake drum and slid it back on.

Then I slipped the screwdriver into the small hole for the automatic adjuster.

Click. Click.

I adjusted the clearance of the brake pads.

I tried giving the drum a spin.

Stuck.

Too tight.

I backed it off a notch.

Now the drum turned freely.

The friction felt just right.

"There we go..."

I gave a small nod to myself.

"Finished."

"What about the other side?"

Father's voice came from behind me.

"Yeah, yeah, I know."

I moved over to the other wheel.

And did the exact same thing all over again.

Remove.

Inspect.

Install.

Adjust.

It went much faster this time.

Because the process was identical.

A little while later—

"Done."

I stood up, stretching out my lower back.

"Now for the front disc brakes."

I walked to the front of the car.

Father was already standing by the front tire.

"Itsuki."

"Hm?"

"You don't need to replace the front ones."

"Why not?"

"They're still thick."

I crouched down and peeked through the spokes of the rim.

The brake pads were indeed still holding up well.

"Hm..."

I gave a small nod.

"You're right."

I went back to the rear wheels.

And started putting the tires back on.

I threaded the lug nuts on one by one.

In a cross pattern.

Top.

Bottom.

Right.

Left.

"Why do you have to cross them, Papa?"

"So it centers properly. Keeps it balanced. That way it won't sit crooked."

"What won't?"

"The tire."

"Ooh..."

Yuna went quiet again, watching closely.

Once all the lug nuts were threaded on—

I fitted the lug wrench into place.

Tightened them down.

Stopped.

Then struck the end of the wrench with the heel of my palm.

Creak.

Tight.

Secure.

I did the exact same for the other tire.

Then I pumped the jack back up.

The car lifted just a fraction.

I pulled the jack stands out.

And slowly lowered the jack.

Once the car's weight was fully resting on the ground—

I gave the lug nuts one last tightening pass.

Final check.

Done.

I stood up.

And let out a long sigh.

"Haa..."

"Good job, Itsuki."

Father's voice was completely relaxed.

I cracked a faint smile.

"Haha..."

"Who taught you?"

I glanced over at him.

"You did."

Father let out a soft chuckle through his nose.

I started packing up the tools.

Yuna chipped in to help.

Slowly dragging the heavy jack.

Gathering up the scattered wrenches.

Folding up the empty sacks.

Father popped the hood.

And topped off the reservoir with fresh brake fluid.

Yuna immediately trotted over.

Peeking in from the side.

"You want to come along, Yuna?"

"Hm?"

Yuna looked up at him.

"Where are we going, Grandpa?"

"To test the brakes."

Yuna's eyes instantly lit up.

"I wanna go!"

Father climbed into the driver's seat.

Yuna scrambled into the passenger side.

The doors shut.

Father leaned out the window.

"Itsuki! You coming?"

"Nope."

"Suit yourself."

The engine purred to life.

The car slowly rolled out of the yard.

And headed down the village road.

Meanwhile, I hoisted up the last sack of tools.

And walked back inside the garage.

~~ • ~~

Theme: Brake Pads — Complete.

~~ • ~~

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 117: MOTHER'S DAY??

Chapter 117: MOTHER'S DAY??

The morning felt peaceful.

The sky was clear. A gentle village breeze blew by, carrying the scent of earth and dry leaves.

I sat on the porch. A thin trail of steam still rose from the black coffee beside me.

I opened my cigarette pack.

Empty.

No. There was still one last stick.

"Hm..."

I took out the last cigarette.

Time to buy more.

Beside me, Yuna sat cross-legged. An open notebook rested on her lap.

The pencil in her hand moved quickly. Then stopped. Erased.

Wrote again.

Erased again.

The wind blew her hair, which was starting to grow long. A few strands fell across her face.

She blew the bangs out of her eyes without looking up.

"Are you doing your homework?"

"No," she answered quickly.

Her eyes remained fixed on the notebook.

She started writing something again. Then clicked her tongue.

"Then what are you doing?"

I leaned in slightly. Peeking at her notebook.

Yuna reflexively covered part of the page with her hand.

"I'm writing a letter."

"For who?"

"For Mom."

I furrowed my brow.

"Why? If you miss her, you can just call."

Yuna's head snapped toward me.

Her eyes went wide.

"Papa, you don't know?"

"Huh? Know what?"

We stared at each other for a few seconds.

Yuna looked hesitant.

"Do you really not know that today is..."

Her voice dropped to a whisper.

"Today is Mother's Day."

"Mother's Day?"

"Shhh!"

Yuna immediately jumped up in a panic.

Both her hands clamped over my mouth.

"Sho whaf's wrong wif thaf?" ("So what's wrong with that?")

My voice came out muffled.

"Don't be so loud..."

I gave a small nod.

Only then did she take her hands away.

"So what if it's Mother's Day?"

"So whaaat?" Yuna stared at me in disbelief.

"Papa, you should be preparing a gift for Grandma."

"I've never done that before." I leaned back against the pillar. "Do I really have to?"

"You have to, Papa." Yuna's tone was dead serious.

She pointed toward the inside of the house.

"Just look at Auntie. I bet she's preparing a gift right now."

"Hm..."

I stood up.

The wooden floorboards creaked softly as I walked down the hallway.

The house felt quiet.

My other younger siblings were probably out playing.

I stopped in front of my little sister's room.

Without knocking, I just opened the door.

Creak.

My sister turned her head sharply.

She was sitting on the floor. In front of her, a bunch of loose change was scattered about.

Several coins were stacked neatly by size.

Beside her sat a clear piggy bank jar.

"Brother?! Knock first if you want to come in!"

"Alright, alright." I leaned against the doorframe. "Now answer me first."

She waved her hand, gesturing for me to come closer.

I walked in. Then crouched down beside her.

My sister immediately leaned in close to my ear.

And whispered.

"I'm going to make a gift for Mom."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

She nodded several times.

"Aren't you making one?"

"Do I really have to?"

"Not really, I guess." She picked up a few more coins. "But it's only once a year, you know."

"Hm..."

I glanced at her jar.

"So, what are you going to buy?"

"It's a secret."

"What about the others?"

"How should I know?" She shrugged. "They probably forgot."

Then she narrowed her eyes.

"By the way, what are you going to give her?"

"Me..." I stood up slowly. "I don't know. I'm still thinking about it."

I walked out.

"Shut the door, Brother!"

"Yeah, yeah..."

I pulled the door gently until it clicked shut.

I returned to the porch.

Yuna was still in the exact same spot. Her pencil moving slowly.

I sat back down beside her.

"Well, Papa?"

"Yeah." I gave a small nod. "Turns out your aunt really is preparing a gift."

"See? I told you."

"So what are you going to give her, Papa?"

"I have no idea."

I glanced at her notebook.

"By the way, are you done?"

"Not yet..."

I looked at the contents of the page.

There was only a large title at the top.

The rest was blank.

The space below it was covered in pencil smudges from erasing.

"I don't know what to write." Yuna chewed on the end of her pencil. "Do you have any ideas, Papa?"

"Nope."

"Ugh..." Yuna let out a long sigh. "Papa, you're lame."

She stared intently at her notebook again.

"Yuna."

"Yeah?..."

I stood up. And started walking away.

"You want to come?"

"Where to?" she asked without looking back.

"To the shop."

Yuna's head instantly shot up.

Her face brightened.

"I'm coming!"

She hurriedly slammed her notebook shut. Leaving it right there on the porch.

Slipped into her sandals as fast as she could.

Then jogged over to catch up to me.

"Papa! Wait up!"

"Yeah, yeah..."

I stopped for a moment until Yuna was standing right beside me.

She was panting slightly.

"Let's go, Papa." Her hand grabbed the hem of my shirt. "Off we go."

We walked slowly along the village road.

Not many vehicles passed by. Occasionally, the sound of an old motorbike echoed from a distance. The rest was just the wind and the rustling of leaves.

The air here felt completely different from the city.

Lighter.

Cleaner.

Even the heat of the sun felt gentle. Not biting, the way it was between concrete buildings.

Old wooden houses lined the street. On some, the paint had begun to fade. A few

bamboo fences leaned sideways, weathered by time.

Large trees grew in the front yards.

One of them was a mango tree.

Tall.

Leafy.

Its branches stretched out over the road.

"Yuna."

"Hm?"

"Do you want a mango?"

Yuna immediately looked up.

Her eyes followed the hanging fruit.

Some were still green. Some were turning yellow.

A few looked perfectly ripe.

"Are we allowed to, Papa?" Yuna looked at me. "Doesn't it belong to someone?"

"We are, if they give us permission."

I pointed at the wooden house behind the tree.

"Do you want one?"

Yuna looked up again.

Her gaze lingered on one particular mango.

"I want one."

We stopped in front of the house.

I raised my voice a little.

"Excuse me! Could we have a mango?"

Silence for a moment.

Then, the sound of slow footsteps came from inside.

The sliding door opened.

An elderly man stepped out, holding a hand fan.

"Yes!" He gave a warm smile. "Go ahead, help yourselves."

"Thank you."

"Thank you, Grandpa," Yuna said, giving a small bow.

The old man gave a casual wave, then went back inside.

A long bamboo pole was leaning against the trunk of the tree.

I picked it up.

"Which one do you want?"

Yuna stared up for a long time.

Her eyes darted back and forth.

"Hmm, which one..."

Then, she pointed.

"That one, Papa."

I looked up as well.

"Which one?"

"That one." She pointed even higher. "The one at the very top."

I followed her finger.

Paused for a few seconds.

"...That's really high."

It was definitely the ripest one. A bright reddish-yellow, glowing in the sunlight.

But it was also perched at the very tip of the branch.

"Can you not reach it, Papa?"

"I can reach it." I tightened my grip on the pole. "Step back a little."

Yuna immediately took a few steps back.

I stood right beneath the mango.

Adjusted the angle of the pole.

And hoisted it high.

Thwack.

"Got it."

The mango snapped off its stem.

I instinctively took a step back. Pulled the hem of my shirt forward with my left hand.

I'd catch it in my shirt.

Or so I thought.

The pole was still in both my hands.

I ended up stumbling too far back.

Thud.

The mango hit the dirt.

It split slightly.

The flesh burst out from one side.

I lowered the pole.

And leaned it back where I found it.

When I turned around, Yuna was already crouching next to the mango.

She stared at it in silence.

Her finger gently poked the skin.

She rolled it over.

Revealing the bruised and splattered side.

I walked over.

And scooped the mango up.

I peeled back the skin around the split.

Scraped off the part that had touched the dirt and tossed it aside.

"Here."

Yuna took it, though her face was filled with doubt.

"Is this still edible?"

"Huh?" I pulled her hand closer. "Watch."

I took a bite straight out of the side of the mango.

"Eee..." Yuna looked a little panicked. "That's..."

"What now?"

"That's bad manners."

"If you don't want it, give it here."

I held out my hand.

"I want it..."

"Then eat it."

Yuna still looked unsure. But eventually, she took a tiny bite.

Very carefully.

Trying not to get her hands dirty.

Trying to stay neat.

A few seconds later, her eyes widened.

"It's good..."

I gave a small smile.

We continued our walk down the village road.

Yuna ate the mango as she walked beside me.

"Papa..."

"What is it..."

I turned my head.

Yuna had stopped walking, holding the remains of the mango. Her hands were sticky. Smears of mango juice coated her lips and cheeks.

"I'm all messy..."

"Just wipe it on your shirt."

"But then my shirt will be dirty..."

"Hm..."

I looked down the road.

Just past the intersection ahead, the rice fields began. There was usually a

small irrigation ditch running along the path.

"Follow me."

I quickened my pace.

Yuna quickly tossed the mango pit to the side of the road. Then she hurried after me. Her short legs were practically jogging to keep up.

Until finally...

An expanse of rice fields opened up before us.

Green.

Vast.

water.

"Woah..."

Yuna took a few steps forward. Her eyes sparkled. A wide smile formed on her face.

She spun around slowly.

Looking left. Right. Straight ahead.

"The rice fields... they're so huge..."

I walked over to the edge of the road.

"Yuna."

"Yes, Papa?..."

She trotted over, her eyes still glued to the fields.

Once she was close, I pointed down.

"Wash your hands here."

Yuna looked down.

The water in the irrigation ditch flowed gently.

It was crystal clear.

The bottom was lined with small pebbles. A few aquatic plants swayed with the current.

"It's so clean..."

Yuna took off her sandals.

And stepped down carefully.

Splash.

The water instantly clouded with brown dirt kicked up by her feet.

But a few seconds later, it ran clear again.

She washed her hands. Then rinsed her lips and cheeks.

After that, she cupped the water in both hands.

Splash.

She went ahead and washed her entire face.

"So refreshing..." Yuna turned to me. "You should try it, Papa."

"No need."

"Just try it, Papa, the water is so cool..."

"Hurry up or I'm leaving you behind."

I started walking again.

"Papa! Wait!"

Yuna scrambled back up. Quickly slipped her sandals back on.

And ran to catch up with me.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 118: MOTHER'S DAY?? [2]

Chapter 118: MOTHER'S DAY?? [2]

We finally arrived at the store.

It was a simple building.

Wooden walls. A corrugated tin roof.

Small toys hung out front—paper pinwheels and little bells.

I opened the door.

Click.

Inside, wooden shelves were lined up tight.

They held a little bit of everything.

Kitchen supplies. Soap. Batteries. Sandals. Stationery. Lightbulbs. Even charging cables.

They had it all. Even if the choices for each item were limited.

I walked up to the cashier's counter.

A man and a woman were sitting there.

"Excuse me."

The man looked up.

"Oh... Itsuki." He gave a small smile. "When did you get back?"

"The day before yesterday."

"I see..." He stood up slowly. "What are you looking for?"

"I need to buy cigarettes. And..."

I turned my head.

Yuna was already standing in front of the ice cream freezer.

Her eyes were fixed intently on the contents inside.

"Yuna, if you want one, just grab it."

"Can I?"

"Yeah."

Yuna slid the freezer open.

Cold air immediately spilled out along with a thin mist.

She took out two ice creams.

"Just one."

"But what about you, Papa?..."

"I don't really like ice cream."

Yuna finally put one back.

Then she walked over to me, holding the ice cream carefully.

"Your daughter?" the man at the register asked.

"Yeah."

"Oh..."

I pulled my phone from my pocket.

"Cigarettes, the ice cream, and..." I opened my photo gallery. "I'd like to print some pictures."

"Sure." The man pointed to a small printer in the corner. "Just send them over Bluetooth."

"Hm."

I quickly selected several photos.

Hit send.

A few seconds later, the printer whirred to life.

Whir. Clack.

"That's quite a few..." The man glanced at the incoming data. "Is this all of them?"

"Yeah."

"Alright."

He started printing them one by one.

Meanwhile, Yuna was still struggling to open her ice cream.

Her hands twisted and turned the plastic wrapper.

But it wouldn't open.

"Here."

She handed the ice cream to me.

I tried pulling the edge of the wrapper.

It wouldn't budge.

"You can't do it either..." Yuna said softly.

"I can."

I bit the edge of the plastic.

Riiip.

It tore open.

"Here."

Yuna took it back.

She immediately took a small bite.

Her eyes narrowed in delight.

"It's good..."

"Do you want to try it, Papa?"

"Just a little bite..."

"Alright, alright..."

I took a small bite.

The cold instantly pierced my teeth.

"...Ouch."

Yuna just gave a little laugh.

"It's good, right?"

"I prefer coffee."

The printer finally stopped.

The man came over carrying a stack of photos.

Quite a few. Probably close to thirty prints.

"Take a look and make sure they're alright."

I took them.

"Hm..."

They turned out pretty good.

"Papa, whose photos are those?"

"Yours."

"Huh?"

Yuna immediately stepped closer.

"When did you take pictures of me? I don't remember."

"Here, look for yourself."

I handed her the stack.

Yuna immediately looked through them, one by one.

A look of wonder crossed her face.

There were photos of her sleeping on the train. Eating ramen. Studying. Helping with the cooking. Staring at the rice fields while spinning around.

And many more.

"Woah..." she murmured softly.

I paid for everything.

Then we left the store.

All the way home, Yuna kept looking at the photos.

"Papa..."

"Hm?"

"The pictures are really nice." She flipped to another one. "But why aren't you in any of them?..."

"I don't really like taking pictures of myself."

"Hm..."

Yuna stared at one of the photos a little longer.

"I'm going to take pictures of you later, too."

"Suit yourself."

A gentle breeze blew past.

I took out my phone.

Opened my contacts.

Older Sister.

I typed a brief message.

"Sis, come home for a bit."

Hit send.

Second Sibling.

"Oi, we're doing something at home. Come back."

Hit send.

Third Sibling.

I paused for a moment.

Then typed.

"." "Summer break has started, come on home."

Hit send.

I put my phone back into my pocket.

Beside me, Yuna was still holding the photos tightly.

"Papa."

"Hm?"

"Could you take me to the post office later?"

"Yeah."

We continued our walk home beneath the warm morning sun.

Evening was drawing near.

The sky slowly changed color. Bright blue fading into a golden orange.

Thin clouds stretched across the western horizon. Catching the last rays of the sun.

House lights flickered on, one by one.

The crackle of frying oil echoed from the kitchen. And the rich aroma of dinner began to fill the house.

I sat on the porch. In the distance, flocks of birds flew by. Returning to their nests.

The air was growing chilly.

And the mosquitoes were starting to come out.

I picked up the coffee from the small table beside me.

Sip.

Bitter. Just a little sweet.

Perfect.

Small footsteps approached from behind.

Soft against the wooden floor.

"Papa... the food is ready."

"Yeah."

Yuna stopped beside me.

Her hair was slightly tousled by the evening breeze.

"What are you doing, Papa?"

"Nothing."

I looked back up at the sky.

Silence lingered for a moment.

The sound of a car engine echoed from the end of the village road, drawing closer.

Growing steadily louder.

Headlights swept across the front yard.

A taxi rolled to a stop right in front of the house.

I stood up slowly.

"They're here."

"Who is it, Papa?..."

"Your uncles."

The taxi door opened.

A college student stepped out first. A backpack hung from his shoulder.

Behind him, two grown men also got out.

One of them carried a large paper bag. The other carried a cardboard box.

They paid the fare. Then made their way into the yard.

"Itsuki." One of them raised a hand. "We're here."

"What's this all about, anyway?" another asked while taking off his shoes.

"Just come inside first."

They stepped into the house.

Yuna stood slightly behind me. Watching them one by one.

"Who's the kid?" one of the men asked upon noticing Yuna.

"My daughter."

"Huh?!"

The three of them practically spoke at the same time.

The college student immediately glanced at his two older brothers.

"Maybe Itsuki married a divorcee."

"What are you laughing at?" I gave them a deadpan stare. "Is something funny?"

Their laughter died instantly.

"...Not really."

We walked into the living room.

The lighting felt warm and inviting. The TV was still humming softly in the corner.

"Mom... we're home."

Everyone's head immediately turned.

Mom was the most startled of all.

She froze in place for a few seconds.

"You guys..."

Her voice trailed off.

"You came home..."

Tears immediately spilled from her eyes.

She hurriedly stood up, her steps quick as she rushed over to them.

"Mom..."

The eldest brother pulled her into a hug right away.

"I'm home..."

"Me too."

"I know, I know..." Mom's voice began to tremble. "Welcome home..."

She held them tightly.

"What brought this on..." She wiped her eyes. "Why did you all suddenly come home at the same time?..."

"And you..." She looked at her eldest son. "Usually a phone call is enough..."

Then she turned to the next son.

"And weren't you busy with work?..."

"How is your child doing?..."

"Mom..."

A few tears slipped from their eyes as well.

But no one broke down sobbing.

They hurriedly wiped their faces, letting out embarrassed little chuckles.

"Papa..." Yuna gave my shirt a little tug. "Are they your brothers too?"

"Yeah."

"Woah..."

Yuna started quietly counting on her fingers.

"One... two... three..."

She looked all around the room.

Four. Five. Six. Seven.

"There are seven..." she murmured softly to herself.

I walked inside. Then took a seat a short distance away from the low table.

Giving them space to gather around.

Mom finally pulled back from the embrace.

"Sit down, all of you..."

They took their seats around the table.

Then, every gaze shifted to Dad.

"Dad... we're home."

Dad was sitting in his usual chair.

A cup of black coffee still resting in his hand.

"Yeah," Dad replied calmly. "Welcome home."

He didn't shed a tear.

But his eyes looked slightly misty.

- 1st child = Not biological, already married.
- 2nd child = Itsuki.
- 3rd child = Currently working.
- 4th child = A college student.
- 5th child = In middle school.
- 6th child = A girl, in 6th grade.
- 7th child = In 4th grade, same as Yuna.
- Yuna = Itsuki's adopted daughter (not biological).

The next day.

Somewhere else. Far from the old wooden house, the rice fields, and the chirping of night crickets.

In a quiet, luxurious apartment on the outskirts of the city, a woman sat alone in the living room.

Kanzaki Sayaka.

Her black hair cascaded past her shoulders. Straight. Neat. Yet still slightly tousled from sleep.

She wore a soft-colored nightgown. Sheer. Elegant.

The morning was silent.

There was only the low hum of the air conditioner. And the occasional, faint sound of traffic from outside the window.

On the table lay an ivory-white envelope. Fairly thick.

Beside it sat a cup of hot tea on a small saucer. The steam was still rising slowly.

Sayaka poured a little tea into the saucer to cool. Her movements were graceful.

Accustomed.

She blew on it gently.

Then took a small sip.

It was warm.

Her eyes fell back to the letter.

The sender's name was written neatly.

Her hand stopped moving.

"...From Yuna?"

She murmured softly.

Something in her eyes instantly shifted. A little surprised. A little nervous.

She quickly picked up the envelope. Opening it faster than she normally would.

The paper parted.

And several photographs immediately slipped out.

Sayaka blinked slowly.

"Photos...?"

She gathered them up.

Five in total.

The first photo.

Yuna was in her school uniform, a small apron covering her front. She was standing on a little stool in the kitchen.

A frying pan in front of her.

Her face was bright. Her eyes focused intently on the eggs she was cooking.

A small smile graced her lips.

Sayaka stared at the photo for a long time.

"Yuna..."

Her finger touched Yuna's face on the glossy paper.

Gently.

The second photo.

Yuna was studying at a small table. Several books stacked beside her.

A mug of black coffee sitting near her left elbow.

Yuna was reading with a serious expression.

But her eyes were slightly droopy. As if she was fighting off sleep.

Sayaka smiled faintly.

"Drinking coffee now, are you..."

The third photo.

Yuna sitting in front of an old television.

Her legs tucked under a kotatsu.

Both hands holding a mug of hot chocolate. Thin steam wafting from it.

Her face was so full of life.

Her eyes sparkling as she watched the anime on the screen.

Happy. Pure.

Sayaka let out a soft laugh, wiping the corner of her eye.

"I didn't know you liked anime..."

Her eyes began to well with tears.

"Forgive me..."

"I was too busy... so much that I never truly paid attention to you..."

The fourth photo.

Yuna at the park.

She was sitting on a swing alongside two other girls.

Her hair blowing in the wind.

She was laughing freely.

Truly laughing.

Not the polite, quiet little smile she used to wear.

The fifth photo.

Yuna standing in the middle of a road running through rice paddies.

The bright blue sky stretching endlessly above.

The expanse of green fields rippling like waves in the wind.

Yuna's hair was swept up by the breeze.

She was twisting her body slightly.

Her face filled with absolute awe.

As if seeing a world that vast for the very first time.

Sayaka gazed at that final photo for a long time.

A very long time.

Then, she slowly placed all the photos back onto the table.

Her hand reached for the main letter.

The paper was slightly crumpled from being opened too quickly.

She unfolded it gently.

The handwriting immediately caught her eye.

It was small.

Neat.

To Mother. Happy Mother's Day.

From Yuna.

Sayaka's eyes instantly softened.

She began to read.

Mother...

How are you doing over there? I hope you are always healthy.

I am healthy here, and Papa is healthy too.

By "Papa," I mean what I call Itsuki-san.

Sayaka's breath hitched for a second.

Her eyes moved slowly to the next line.

I have two friends here. Their names are Mika and Hana.

Mika has an older sister named Misaki. She is really nice. Her cooking is delicious.

But I like Papa's cooking more, even though it's burnt sometimes.

Sayaka chuckled softly, covering her mouth.

A few tears began to fall.

I can cook eggs and noodles now, and sometimes I make coffee for Papa.

I played in the rain once on the way home from school.

It was so much fun.

The rain was cold.

I got sick after that, but Papa took care of me until I got better.

I don't think Papa slept at all that time.

Sayaka's tears dropped onto the letter.

Leaving tiny, dark blemishes on the paper.

The bento boxes Papa makes look like bricks.

Dense. Hard. Packed tight.

But they taste good.

Sayaka laughed through her tears.

A small, broken sound.

I also went to karaoke.

After that, we went to a cat cafe.

But the cats kept running away from me.

"Haha..."

She covered her eyes with her hand.

Papa said I have a good singing voice.

But I think Papa's voice is better.

Even though he sings a little weird.

But I like it.

Sayaka's tears fell harder.

She bowed her head.

Her petite shoulders trembled slightly.

"Yuna..."

"I never imagined... that you could be this happy..."

"Forgive me..."

"Forgive your father, too..."

"We were too busy..."

"So busy we didn't realize... that we never truly looked at you..."

Sayaka took a deep breath.

Trying to calm herself.

But her voice continued to quiver.

"Being an idol was my dream..."

responsibilities..."

"He and I..."

"We just kept moving... kept chasing after things..."

"But we didn't realize..."

"We were leaving you all alone."

She went back to reading.

Papa rarely works.

Papa is usually at home with me.

Even though sometimes he doesn't do anything at all.

Sayaka let out another small laugh.

But sometimes when Papa works, he doesn't come home all day.

But he always comes home the next day.

Her eyes moved further down the page.

The day before yesterday, Papa and I went to Grandpa's house.

There are lots of rice fields there.

The air is cold.

The mangoes are super delicious.

It turns out Papa has a lot of siblings.

Grandma's cooking is really good too.

Grandpa doesn't talk much.

I like going on trips with Papa.

The final sentences were at the very bottom.

Written in slightly larger handwriting.

Thank you, Mother.

I love Papa.

Silence.

Absolute silence.

Sayaka slowly folded the letter closed.

Her hands trembling faintly.

Then, she pressed the letter and the photos tightly against her chest.

She bowed her head.

The tears fell, entirely beyond her control now.

"Yuna..."

"I'm sorry... I'm so, so sorry..."

child..."

"It made no sense to me..."

"I knew I wasn't a good mother..."

"But now..."

"I understand..."

"Itsuki-san gave you something I never could..."

Sayaka closed her eyes.

Clutching the letter even tighter.

"Yuna..."

"You really do love Itsuki-san..."

"Your Papa..."

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 119: The Taste of Tomatoes

Morning. We were already out in the garden.

My father's garden.

It wasn't as vast as the rice paddies. But you could find almost everything here.

Banana trees stood at the far end. Nearby were orange and longan trees.

Then, rows of other plants.

Chili peppers. Tomatoes. Eggplants. Spinach. Long beans. Mung beans.

There were even watermelons and melons.

The garden felt incredibly lively. Not because of people. But because of the colors.

The green of the leaves. The red of the tomatoes. The yellow of the flowers. And the ceaseless chirping of the morning insects.

How did it get to be this much?

Because back then, my father gave us the freedom to plant whatever we pleased.

If we had fruit seeds. Plant them.

If we saw an interesting plant. Try planting it.

If it failed? Plant it again.

"Itsuki! Please turn on the diesel pump, it's time to water the plants!"

My mother's voice called out from the edge of the garden.

She held a harvest basket in her hand.

"Got it!"

I turned to the side.

An old diesel water pump sat there. Its paint was starting to fade.

The intake pipe ran into a small well, barely wider than a large pipe itself.

While the output hose pointed toward the irrigation trenches between the plants.

Because it was summer.

This garden had to be watered manually.

Unlike the rice paddies, which had a robust irrigation flow. Here, we had to rely on the diesel pump.

Beside me, Yuna was still standing silently.

Her gaze darted everywhere.

Left. Right. Forward.

As if trying to take everything in all at once.

"What are you looking at?"

I asked.

"There are so many plants in the garden..."

Yuna answered without looking away.

"There are vegetables... fruits too..."

"Yeah, yeah..."

I scratched my neck briefly.

"Go join my mom over there. Looks like she's about to harvest."

Yuna finally turned to me.

"What is she harvesting?"

"How should I know."

I pointed toward my mother.

"Go see for yourself. And help her out while you're at it."

I walked over to the diesel pump.

"Help Grandma... okay."

Yuna was about to walk away.

But her steps halted again.

She looked back at me.

I flipped the switch to the ON position.

Yuna immediately changed direction. She came closer again.

Stopping a few steps away from me.

Her eyes watched intently.

On the side of the diesel pump was a starter cord.

I grabbed it.

I planted my left foot onto the body of the machine.

Clack!

I yanked the cord with all my might.

Chug-chug-chug-chug!

The diesel engine immediately roared to life.

The loud mechanical noise filled the garden.

The cord slipped from my grip and quickly recoiled.

I turned to Yuna.

"What are you looking at?"

Water began to flow through the hose.

A few seconds later, it poured out into the narrow trenches between the plants.

Yuna answered quickly.

Then she resumed her walk toward my mother.

I followed a few steps behind her.

But then I veered off toward the longan tree at the edge of the garden.

While Yuna kept going straight toward my mother.

Until she reached her.

"What are you doing, Grandma?"

She asked from behind my mother.

My mother was standing in front of the tomato plants.

Tomatoes hung heavily from the vines.

Some were still green.

Some were orange.

And many were already a ripe, vibrant red.

My mother turned around.

"Oh, Yuna."

A small smile appeared on her face.

"Grandma is about to harvest some tomatoes. Do you want to help?"

"Yes."

Yuna immediately stepped closer and stood beside her.

"In that case, pick the ones that are already red."

My mother pointed at a few of the fruits.

"The orange ones are fine too."

"Got it, Grandma!"

Yuna got straight to work.

Her small hands began plucking the tomatoes one by one.

My mother called out again.

"Yes, Grandma?"

Yuna looked back.

"If you want to eat them, go ahead. It's completely fine."

"Okay, Grandma."

Yuna turned back to face the tomato plants.

Several bright red tomatoes hung right in front of her.

She plucked one.

And brought it close to her face.

Her eyes studied the color for a long time.

"The red is... pretty."

She murmured softly.

She took a small bite out of the side of the tomato.

Crunch.

A little tomato juice immediately trickled out.

The inside was a fresh, crisp red.

Yuna's eyes went wide.

Her face brightened.

"Delicious..."

She took another, bigger bite.

"It's so sweet..."

Yuna quickly finished the rest of the tomato.

Her cheeks bulged slightly as she chewed.

Then she stared at the tomato plants in front of her again.

With renewed enthusiasm.

"Now it's time to help Grandma..."

Yuna resumed picking the red tomatoes.

One. Two. Three.

Soon, both her hands were full.

"Not enough room..."

She looked at the tomatoes in her hands. Then at the others still hanging from the vines.

A few seconds later, her expression shifted as an idea struck her.

Yuna pulled the front of her t-shirt up. Forming a makeshift pouch.

She dropped all the tomatoes from her hands into it.

"Mm... this works."

She went back to picking tomatoes.

Even faster now.

"Hmm... is this one orange or still green...?"

Yuna stared at a particular tomato for a long time.

It was half-ripe. Somewhere between yellow and orange.

She hesitated.

"Grandma!!"

Yuna's voice rang out loudly from the middle of the garden.

"Should I pick this one too or leave it?!"

My mother looked over from a distance.

She squinted slightly to focus on the fruit Yuna was pointing at.

"Not yet! Leave that one be!"

"Okay, Grandma!!"

Yuna immediately skipped over that tomato.

She picked other ones that were completely red.

Along with a few that were a ripe orange.

Before long, the pouch of her shirt began to fill up.

One tomato slipped out.

Plop.

Yuna quickly looked down.

She reached for it with one hand. While her other hand gripped the hem of her shirt to keep the rest from spilling.

Plop.

Another tomato fell out.

"Ah... this is so hard..."

She tried to scoop both up at once.

But failed.

"Mmm... I'll just get them later."

She finally gave up.

Yuna walked over to the basket near my mother.

"Do I put them here, Grandma?"

She asked.

A large rattan basket sat in front of her.

"Yes, put them right in there."

Yuna immediately let go of her shirt.

Thump.

The tomatoes tumbled down, filling the basket.

A few rolled around at the bottom.

Yuna smiled in satisfaction.

earlier.

And resumed her harvest.

Meanwhile.

I stood in front of the longan tree.

It wasn't too tall. Nor was it too big.

Beside it was an orange tree.

Roughly the same size.

My younger sibling had planted those two trees back in the day.

As for me...

I had never really planted anything in this garden.

I wasn't sure why.

I just never had much of a desire to grow anything.

I reached out for the closest longan fruit.

I gave it a gentle squeeze.

Still hard.

Not ripe yet.

I checked another one.

Same thing.

Still hard.

I glanced at the orange tree next to it.

The fruits were still tiny. And green.

"Hah... nothing is ripe yet."

I turned around.

Yuna and my mother were now harvesting chili peppers.

I walked over to them.

"What are you harvesting now, Yuna?"

Yuna looked back quickly.

"I'm harvesting chilies."

Both of her hands were full of red chilies.

t-shirt.

Inside the basket, the tomatoes and chilies were now mixed together.

A sea of red.

"Papa."

Yuna picked a single tomato out of the basket.

Then she walked up to me.

"Here, try a tomato. It's really good."

She handed it to me.

I took it.

It burst in my mouth on the very first bite.

The sweet and slightly tart flavor immediately hit my tongue.

It was incredibly fresh.

"Hmm... yeah, not bad."

I gave a small nod.

"See...?"

Yuna looked incredibly pleased with herself.

A thin layer of sweat had started to form on her face.

She raised her arm.

And used the front of her t-shirt to wipe her face.

"Aah!"

Yuna let out a small yelp.

She flailed in a brief panic.

Her eyes instantly welled up with tears.

I realized what had happened immediately.

She had just used that shirt to carry chilies. And then used it to wipe her face.

Her hands flew up to rub her eyes by sheer reflex. Only making the stinging pain worse.

"Don't rub them..."

I grabbed her wrists.

pumped by the diesel engine.

The irrigation water had already reached this section.

It was clear. And cold.

I scooped up some water with both hands.

Then splashed it onto Yuna's face.

Splash.

"Does it still sting?"

Yuna gave a small nod.

I rinsed her face again.

And again.

Water dripped from her chin and the ends of her hair.

"How about now?"

"Just a little bit..."

I rinsed it one last time.

Only then did Yuna let out a sigh of relief.

"It's better now, Papa..."

"Good."

I stood up.

"Now wash your hands thoroughly."

Yuna looked down at her hands.

There was still some chili juice left on them.

"And make sure to change your shirt as soon as we get back to the house."

Yuna gave a small nod.

"Okay, Papa."

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 120: Summer Festivals

~~ • ~~

I was still at my parents' house.

My siblings were still here as well.

The house felt much livelier than usual.

But as always—

I stayed seated on the porch.

Relaxing.

Enjoying the summer air of the countryside, which was far more pleasant than the city.

The breeze was gentle.

The heat wasn't sweltering.

From a distance, the chirping of summer insects mingled with the sound of the television from inside the house.

Beside me sat a cup of coffee.

I reached for it.

Just as I was about to take a sip—

Bzzzt.

My phone vibrated.

I took a sip of my coffee anyway.

Bitter, with a hint of sweetness.

Then, I set the cup back down beside me.

I reached into my pocket.

And pulled out my phone.

A name flashed on the screen.

[Bardy Louis]

"Hm..."

Looks like a job was coming.

I answered the call.

"Yeah?"

"Morning, Itsuki."

"Yeah, morning."

I leaned back comfortably.

"What is it? A new job?"

I guessed right away.

"Yeah."

A soft chuckle came through the line.

"And there's a lot of it."

I let out a faint sigh.

"From tomorrow until next week."

"Can you do it?"

Right...

I understood immediately.

We were at the peak of summer.

And that meant the festivals were starting.

City festivals.

Concerts.

Summer stages.

The demand for installation and technical work was bound to be through the roof.

"It's going to be packed, isn't it..."

"It is."

Bardy chuckled again.

"So? Are you in?"

I glanced back into the house.

Yuna's voice drifted faintly from within.

Since we were currently at my parents' place...

They would definitely be able to watch over Yuna while I worked.

"Alright."

I finally answered.

"I'll do it."

"Great."

Bardy sounded relieved.

"I'll send you the schedule and the address later."

"Alright."

"See you on-site."

"Yeah."

The call ended.

Silence returned.

Only the sound of the summer breeze remained.

—

That very same day, I headed back to my apartment.

I grabbed a few of my work tools.

Cables.

Technical gear.

My laptop.

Everything went into my backpack and a small suitcase.

Once I was packed—

I set off immediately.

The location was quite far.

It was a few hours' drive away.

—

I arrived.

Before me stood a massive football stadium.

Truly massive.

The building towered overhead, its steel and concrete structure looking incredibly sturdy.

I walked inside.

Heading straight for the pitch.

And—

It was bustling.

More than just bustling.

Dozens of trucks were already parked around the field.

People hurried back and forth carrying equipment.

Massive speakers were being unloaded.

Stage lights.

Steel trusses.

Cables.

The sounds of forklifts and clanking metal echoed everywhere.

I tilted my head up slightly.

The spectator seats stretched endlessly around the stadium.

Towering high.

Bzzzt.

My phone vibrated again.

I pulled it out.

[Bardy Louis]

I picked up.

"I'm here."

"I see you."

The reply came instantly.

"Get up here."

I stopped in my tracks.

"Where are you?"

"I'm in the highest row of the stands."

I immediately looked up.

My eyes scanned the area.

Left.

Front.

Right.

Back.

"I don't see you."

"Look harder."

I squinted.

Focusing harder this time.

And finally—

In the very back section.

At the highest point.

Someone was standing there holding a pair of binoculars.

"Are you the one with the binoculars?"

"Yep."

A small laugh followed.

"Hurry up and get over here."

"Yeah... alright."

I hung up.

Then I began to climb the stadium bleachers.

Step by step.

—

A few moments later.

I finally made it to the top.

Standing there was a man with short blond hair.

He looked to be in his forties.

Tall and heavily built.

He was wearing a dark blue work uniform.

Not a formal suit.

But neat nonetheless.

Long sleeves.

Trousers.

Work boots.

He was still holding the binoculars.

A large work bag rested on the seat beside him.

I walked over.

"Itsuki."

The man smiled.

"Long time no see."

He studied me for a few seconds.

"You look a lot more alive than the last time I saw you."

I gave a small laugh.

A flat one.

"Haha... thanks."

"Did something good happen lately?"

"Not really."

"Come here."

I took a few steps closer.

And suddenly—

He opened his arms and pulled me into a hug.

It was a firm, heavy hug.

Warm.

"How have you been holding up..."

His voice was tinged with relief.

I slowly returned the hug.

He patted my shoulder a few times.

"Yeah, I'm doing fine."

We finally pulled away.

"How about you?"

"Good."

He gave a brief chuckle.

"Even though I ended up in the hospital a little while back."

I raised an eyebrow slightly.

"But I'm all clear now."

"Have you eaten yet?"

He asked.

"Not yet."

"Oh?"

He immediately pulled out his phone.

"I'll order us something then."

"Thanks."

"Take a seat."

He sat down first.

I took the seat next to him.

From up here, the entire stadium was clearly visible.

The people down below looked tiny.

Bardy unzipped his bag.

And pulled out a laptop.

"That last design you worked on was incredible."

He said, opening a few video files.

Concert footage appeared on the screen.

Stage lights moved in sync with the music.

The visual effects I had worked on filled the giant screens.

"By the way..."

Bardy glanced at me briefly.

"Do you have any other designs?"

"Yeah."

I leaned back slightly.

"I have a few. But they aren't finished yet."

"Oh... good."

His eyes immediately lit up with interest.

"Show them to me later."

"I might be able to use them for the marketing of the next festivals."

"Sure."

I gave a small nod.

"Understood."

—

The Summer Festival...

From where we sat, the sheer scale of the pitch was on full display.

Down below, people were bustling about with increasing urgency.

A few workers unloaded steel trusses from the trucks.

Others carried massive spools of cable.

Forklifts rolled slowly back and forth along the edge of the field.

Out in the middle of the pitch, several people were carrying surveying tools.

They walked, pulling out long tape measures.

Marking the spots.

The exact spots where the main stage would be built.

Where the LED screens would be installed.

Where the lighting towers would stand.

And where the massive sound systems would be angled.

Even from way up here, I could already picture what this place would look like on the night of the festival.

The lights.

The music.

The roar of the crowd.

—

Beside me, Bardy opened a file on his laptop.

"The main stage is here."

He pointed at the screen.

"The main LED setup has three layers."

"And this time, they want a brighter summer theme."

I studied the design.

It was dominated by dark blue.

Splashes of purple.

And clusters of white lights resembling stars.

"Not bad..."

I commented briefly.

Bardy gave a small smile.

"The first event starts in two days."

"After that, there's an event almost every night."

"Idol concerts, bands, stage performances, fireworks shows..."

"Mm-hm..."

I gave a slow nod.

A short while later, someone arrived carrying two plastic bags of food.

"Finally here."

Bardy said.

He pulled out one of the lunchboxes and handed it to me.

"Thanks."

We started eating.

The summer breeze felt quite pleasant up here.

The sounds of the workers down below drifted up faintly.

Bardy continued to glance down at the pitch between bites.

—

"I have a daughter."

Bardy froze for a second.

He quickly turned to look at me.

"When did you get married?"

"You should have told me."

"No."

I gave a slight shake of my head.

"I'm not married."

"I adopted her."

"Oh..."

His shock quickly shifted into curiosity.

"What's her name?"

"Yuna."

"Yuna..."

Bardy gave a small nod.

"How old is she now?"

"She's in the fourth grade."

"Still quite young, then."

"Yeah."

Bardy chuckled, leaning back against the stadium seat.

"I have a daughter too."

I looked over.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"She's in middle school now."

"She can be incredibly loud."

I let out a soft chuckle.

"Well then..."

Bardy continued, pointing his chopsticks at me.

"You'll have to introduce Yuna to me sometime."

"Maybe the two of them will get along."

"My daughter loves taking care of younger kids."

"Even if she can be a bit of a nag sometimes."

"Who knows..."

I replied casually.

"That's up to Yuna."

"Haha..."

Bardy laughed again.

"The look on your face has really changed, Itsuki."

I looked over at him.

"It's more alive."

I fell silent for a moment.

A gentle breeze swept through the massive stadium.

Down below, the sound of clanking metal echoed sharply once more.

Clang.

Clang.

I watched as the workers began to erect the first structural frame of the stage.

Then, I answered softly.

"Maybe."

~~ • ~~

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.