

# Accidentally become a father

Chapter 41: An Aesthetic Assault from the Courier

---

The bento box was still warm when I slipped it into Yuna's bag.

The bag was blue.

Cheap.

That didn't mean it was bad.

It was just... very honest about its price.

I placed the bento box at the bottom of the bag.

Click.

---

The clasp locked tight.

I pressed down on the top slightly to make sure.

"If it falls, it won't shift," I said.

Yuna stood beside the small dining table.

Her hands were clasped in front of her.

Her fingers pressing against each other.

Her eyes were still fixed on the bag.

"Papa..."

"Hm."

"Other bentos... are usually more colorful."

"Color does not add nutritional value."

She opened her mouth.

Then closed it again.

"That's true."

The wall clock read 06:15.

Still plenty of time.

Yuna began packing her books into the bag.

Her movements were careful.

Too careful for a fourth-grader.

Notebooks.

Pencil case.

The cat eraser from yesterday.

She paused for a moment when she looked at the eraser.

Then she slowly placed it inside.

---

Knock.

A sudden knock at the door.

Three times.

Not a casual knock.

A neat, precise knock.

I walked to the door and opened it.

A courier stood outside.

A crisp suit.

Polished shoes.

His posture was far too formal for the hallway of an old apartment building like this.

"A package for Nishida Itsuki."

He handed over a large box.

Covered in dark velvet.

Bearing a gold seal on the top.

I recognized the symbol.

The law firm.

---

I took the box.

"Thank you."

The courier gave a small bow and left without another word.

I closed the door.

Yuna was already standing near the table.

Her eyes were immediately drawn to the box.

Her shoulders tensed.

I placed it on the table.

Opened the lid.

Inside was a school bag.

A randoseru.

Genuine cowhide.

Pale pink.

Its surface gleamed as if freshly polished.

On the front was a small gold engraving.

The letter Y.

I stared at the bag for three seconds.

Beside me, Yuna didn't move.

Her eyes shifted from the expensive bag...

to her own blue bag.

Then back to the expensive bag.

Her hands gripped the hem of her uniform skirt.

Just a little.

She didn't say anything.

Didn't touch the bag.

Just stood there.

Waiting.

---

I closed the velvet box.

Then I opened the closet near the door.

Put the expensive bag inside.

Closed it.

Locked it.

Click.

Yuna blinked.

"...Papa?"

"It reflects too much light."

She stared at me.

"It could attract pickpockets."

Yuna remained silent for a few seconds.

Then she slowly turned to look at her own blue bag.

The bag was simple.

Not shiny.

No gold engraving.

She pulled the straps over her shoulders.

Tightened them slightly.

---

"This one... doesn't reflect light."

"Yes."

She gave a small nod.

Then stood a little straighter.

"It's safer."

I picked up the apartment keys from the table.

"We leave in fifteen minutes."

"Yes, Papa."

She patted the front of her bag once.

Making sure everything was there.

Then she quietly touched the outside of the bag, feeling the bottom.

Where the bento box was.

As if checking whether the Tetris block structure was still intact.

I checked the clock.

06:20.

Still enough time before the school gates turned into... something much noisier.

---

Chapter 42: Breaching the Gossip Barricade

---

We left the apartment at exactly seven o'clock.

The narrow hallway was the same as always. Slightly faded wall paint, a row of parked bicycles, and the smell of laundry detergent from the next unit.

Yuna walked beside me.

The blue bag on her back looked a little too big.

Her steps were neat.

Too neat.

The moment we reached the external stairs of the apartment, I spotted them.

Three housewives.

Standing at the end of the narrow alley.

A classic formation.

One holding a shopping bag.

One holding a smartphone.

One just standing there with folded arms.

---

The moment they saw us—

Their chatter stopped.

All heads turned in unison.

Their gazes shifted from me... to Yuna... then back again.

The local gossip radar system had been activated.

Beside me, Yuna's pace changed.

Her back suddenly straightened.

Her shoulders pulled back.

Her chin lifted slightly.

I didn't need to look at her face to know what she was doing.

Public mode.

A mode far too formal for an apartment alley.

---

We drew closer.

One of the women broke into a wide smile.

"Oh, Nishida-kun—"

Yuna paused for a half-step.

Her hands began moving to the front of her body.

Elbows straight.

Shoulders steady.

A bowing angle of roughly forty-five degrees.

Perfect.

Too perfect.

Before she could bow—

I placed my hand on top of her head.

Pat.

Not hard.

Just enough to halt her movement.

I nudged her head slightly forward.

"Keep walking."

Yuna blinked.

Her legs automatically moved again.

We kept walking, passing by the women.

One of them still tried to initiate a conversation.

"Whose child is that, Nishida-kun?"

I just gave a tiny nod.

Maybe one millimeter.

Didn't stop.

Didn't answer.

Steps remaining straight ahead.

The second housewife let out a small laugh.

"How cute, just like a doll."

I didn't slow down.

Didn't speed up.

Just kept walking.

Yuna didn't look back either.

A few seconds later, we had passed them.

---

The sound of gossiping began again behind us.

Lower volume.

But clear enough.

We exited the apartment alley and reached the main sidewalk.

The sound of cars was much louder here.

People were walking to work.

Yuna paused for a moment.

As if she were finally taking a breath again.

Her shoulders dropped slightly.

I glanced at her.

She was still standing incredibly straight.

Too straight.

---

"A posture like that consumes twenty percent of your daily stamina."

Yuna blinked.

"...Really?"

"Yes."

She slowly relaxed her shoulders a bit more.

Still neat, but no longer like a statue.

---

"We are not in a military parade," I said.

She nodded.

"Yes, Papa."

We resumed walking toward the elementary school visible two blocks ahead.

After a few steps, Yuna said quietly—

"I almost bowed back there."

"I know."

"It was a reflex."

"It's an old habit."

She gripped the straps of her bag a little tighter.

"Those neighbors earlier... they were curious."

"Yes."

"We're not going to explain anything?"

"No need."

She thought for a few seconds.

Then she said in a small voice—

"That is also... efficient."

I nodded.

"Correct."

At the end of the street, the school gates came into view.

---

And even from that distance, something dangerous was already visible.

Dozens of parents.

Dozens of children.

And expensive, shiny school bags everywhere.

Yuna saw it too.

Her hands slowly gripped the straps of her blue bag tighter.

---

Chapter 43: A Gravity Test at the School Gates

---

The elementary school gates were already visible from the end of the sidewalk.

And just as I had expected—

the area had already turned into a morning social market.

Dozens of children stood in front of the iron gates.

Dozens of parents watched from behind.

Shiny leather school bags reflected the morning sunlight like a row of new cars in a showroom.

Deep red.

Black.

Expensive brown.

All identical in shape.

Randoseru.

In the middle of that crowd, Yuna's blue bag looked like a contract employee accidentally walking into an executive banquet.

---

I stopped two steps from the gates.

"From here, you go in on your own."

Yuna gave a small nod.

Her hands gripped both straps of her bag.

Tighter than before.

Her eyes darted around, observing her surroundings.

Children with expensive bags.

Parents in neat clothes.

Several mothers glanced toward Yuna's bag.

Stares that weren't exactly hidden.

Yuna swallowed quietly.

I watched her fingers squeeze the straps.

No comments.

No explanations.

Just the facts laid bare before our eyes.

---

Suddenly, the sound of running footsteps came from behind.

Fast.

Unsteady.

"Hey— wait—!"

A heavy-set boy ran along the sidewalk.

His black ransoseru bouncing violently on his back.

He wasn't looking ahead.

I had already predicted his trajectory half a second before the collision.

"Yuna."

I had barely spoken her name when—

Thud.

Her shoulder was clipped hard from behind.

Yuna's small frame was pushed forward.

She lost her footing.

Her blue bag slipped from her shoulders.

And—

Crash!

The bag slammed onto the asphalt.

A loud noise.

Very loud.

---

The boy's bag also fell.

He stumbled as well.

Then fell straight onto the ground.

And—

"UWAAAAAAAAH!!!"

A wail instantly erupted.

Maximum volume.

Instant tears.

I looked at the contents of his bag.

A colorful plastic bento box had sprung open.

Its contents scattered across the asphalt.

Octopus-shaped sausages.

Eggs with rabbit faces.

Star-shaped apple slices.

All mixed with street dust.

The boy pointed at his food with a trembling hand.

"My bento!!!"

Yuna stood frozen in place.

Her face was pale.

Her eyes immediately dropped to her blue bag on the ground.

Her hands trembled slightly.

She knew what was inside that bag.

The gray bento box.

The Tetris block.

And it had just...

fallen from shoulder height.

---

A woman hurried out of the crowd.

Most likely the boy's mother.

Impeccable hair.

An expensive bag over her shoulder.

She immediately crouched beside her son.

"Oh no—"

She saw the ruined contents of the bento.

Then her eyes shifted toward Yuna.

A sharp glare.

She didn't say a word.

But her meaning was clear.

---

Yuna swallowed again.

Slowly...

she knelt beside her blue bag.

Her hand touched the zipper.

Paused.

I saw her fingers trembling slightly.

She took a small breath.

Then—

Zzzip.

The bag's zipper slowly opened.

Her hand reached inside.

Touched the bento box.

She pulled it out.

The gray box.

---

Still intact.

The lid was still locked.

Yuna stared at it as if holding an archaeological artifact.

Around us, a few parents began to take notice.

The boy was still crying.

Octopus sausages were still scattered across the asphalt.

Yuna stared at the bento box for a few seconds.

Then slowly—

Click.

She unfastened the lock.

The lid lifted.

And inside—

the row of rice.

The egg.

The broccoli.

The chicken breast.

Everything was still standing upright.

Nothing had shifted.

Nothing had fallen.

The Tetris block structure was still perfect.

Exactly as it had been fifteen minutes ago in the kitchen.

---

Yuna blinked twice.

Her eyes widened slightly.

She stared at the contents of the box.

Then turned to look at me.

I was already crouching beside her.

I took the box from her hands.

Brushed a little dust off the outside.

"Standard gravity," I said.

I closed the lid again.

Click.

In front of us, the boy's mother was still staring.

---

I stood up slowly.

"Empty space in decorative bentos creates a collapse zone upon impact."

I pointed at Yuna's box.

"A dense structure is more stable."

The woman didn't reply.

She just blinked.

Beside me, Yuna covered her mouth with her hands.

Her shoulders began to shake.

She tried to muffle the sound.

But finally—

"Pfft—"

A small laugh escaped.

A very quiet laugh.

But a truly genuine one.

---

Chapter 44: Absolute Structural Victory

---

"Pfft—"

The small sound escaped from behind Yuna's hands.

She quickly clamped her hands tighter over her mouth.

Her shoulders trembled slightly.

Her eyes were still fixed on the contents of the bento, which hadn't shifted shape in the slightest.

I put the box back inside her blue bag.

Click.

Pulled the zipper.

Zzzip.

---

"The structure remains stable," I said.

Yuna gave a quick nod.

Still holding back the rest of her laughter.

In front of us, the boy was still crying on the asphalt.

His mother was trying to salvage the remains of the food, now mixed with street dust.

The octopus sausages that had stood so cutely before now looked like casualties of a minor traffic accident.

A few other parents started to stare.

Their gazes shifted back and forth between:

the crying boy,

the ruined bento on the ground,

and Yuna's cheap blue bag.

---

I stood up.

Brushed a little dust off the knees of my trousers.

The woman finally stood up as well.

Her glare was still sharp.

"My son's lunchbox was ruined because it fell," she said.

Her voice was carefully controlled.

I gave a single nod.

"Lateral impact."

She blinked.

I pointed at the ruined bento on the ground.

"Too much empty space."

Then I pointed at Yuna's bag.

"A dense structure is more drop-resistant."

The woman opened her mouth.

Closed it again.

She seemed unsure whether that was an explanation or a physics lecture.

Beside me, Yuna was still holding onto her bag straps.

But her shoulders weren't as tense as before.

She looked toward the boy's ruined lunch.

Then quietly said—

"...the octopuses were cute."

The boy stopped crying for a moment.

---

He looked at the sausages lying on the ground.

Then started crying again.

Louder.

I checked the time on my phone.

07:34.

"It's almost time for class," I said.

Yuna gave an immediate nod.

She adjusted the position of her blue bag.

Tightened both straps.

Then she looked at the school gates.

The crowd of children was still filtering inside.

Before walking away, she turned to look at me.

Her expression was much lighter than before.

A small smile appeared at the corners of her lips.

Not too wide.

Not too perfect.

But entirely genuine.

---

"Papa."

"Hm."

"The block bento... is really strong."

"Yes."

She nodded in satisfaction.

Then gave a small wave.

"I'll be going, then."

I nodded.

"Do not drop it from the second floor."

"Okay."

Yuna turned around.

She began walking toward the gates.

Her steps were light.

Her blue bag swayed gently on her back.

A few kids were still glancing at her.

But Yuna didn't pay them any attention anymore.

Before walking through the gates, she looked back one more time.

Raised her small hand.

Then jogged into the schoolyard.

The blue bag disappeared among the sea of expensive randoseru.

---

I stood there for a few seconds.

Making sure she really made it inside.

Then I turned around.

Just as I began the walk home—

The cheap phone in my pocket vibrated.

Bzzzz.

I pulled it out.

The caller ID displayed only a single word.

**KURODA**

I pressed the answer button.

"Yes."

A cold baritone voice immediately came through the speaker.

"Nishida."

"Yes."

"A quick question."

I waited.

"This morning, I sent an Italian-leather randoseru for my daughter."

I kept walking along the sidewalk without stopping.

"Correct."

One second of silence.

Then the next question came in a flat tone.

---

"Why was my daughter not wearing it when she entered the school?"

I looked straight ahead.

Then answered in a calm voice.

"It reflects too much light."

Two seconds of silence.

I added:

"It could attract pickpockets."

On the other end of the line, there was no sound.

Only a long silence.

As if someone was trying to process something utterly incomprehensible.

I slipped my free hand into my pocket and kept walking home.

The morning was still young.

And I still had to wash the bento pan.

---

## Chapter 45: After School

---

The school gates were mostly empty by the time I arrived.

Most of the kids had already gone home. All that remained were a few small groups still waiting for their parents.

Yuna was standing near the iron fence.

Clutching her blue bag against her stomach.

The moment she spotted me across the street, she stood up straighter.

Her steps were brisk but orderly as she approached.

"Papa."

"Hm."

---

We began the walk home.

The afternoon sidewalks weren't too crowded. A bicycle passed by occasionally, and the warm scent of butter drifted from the bakery at the end of the street.

Yuna walked half a step behind me.

As usual.

Still hugging her blue bag.

---

After a few steps, I spoke without turning my head.

"How was your first day?"

Yuna took a sharp little breath.

Her shoulders tensed.

Like someone preparing to deliver a critical report.

"The self-introductions in class went... reasonably well."

"Your tone of voice."

"A bit more formal than the other kids."

I could picture it perfectly.

The teacher asking the students to stand up, one by one.

Then it was Yuna's turn.

A nine-year-old girl standing far too straight, bowing with far too much precision, and speaking far too clearly.

"What was their reaction?"

Yuna was silent for two seconds.

"A few children stopped eating their biscuits."

---

I glanced back slightly.

"Intimidated?"

"It seemed like it."

She lowered her head a fraction.

The tips of her shoes traced the white line on the pavement as she walked.

"I only gave my name."

"Did you bow?"

"Yes."

"How many degrees."

"About forty-five."

I let out a brief sigh.

Third graders usually introduced themselves while scratching their heads or stumbling over their own names.

A forty-five-degree bow probably made it look like a press conference.

"Lower the angle a bit tomorrow."

"By how much?"

"Eighty percent."

Yuna did the math in her head.

"So... ten degrees?"

"About that."

She gave a solemn nod.

Her steps slowed just a little.

---

I watched her from the corner of my eye.

Her hands had started gripping her bag straps again.

It was usually a sign she was dwelling on something she considered to be a major issue.

"Is there another problem?"

Yuna kept her eyes on the asphalt.

Then spoke quietly.

"...about lunch."

We turned the corner leading to our apartment.

"The block bento?"

"Yes."

She gave a small gulp.

---

"When I opened it in class... everyone stared."

"Classrooms are like that."

"A few kids had octopus sausages."

I said nothing.

She continued, her voice even quieter.

"I thought they were going to laugh at my bento."

We took a few steps in silence.

The afternoon breeze drifted sluggishly between the old apartment buildings.

Then I prompted simply.

"And?"

Yuna paused.

She stared straight ahead.

As if recalling something specific.

---

"...it was kind of strange."

I waited.

She gripped her bag straps tighter.

"The boy who bumped into me this morning... Yamada."

"Hm."

"He came to my desk during lunch."

We reached the stairs of our apartment building.

Yuna was still gripping her bag tightly.

And for the first time that day—

a small smile appeared on her face.

---

Chapter 46: The Strange Bento

---

We climbed the apartment stairs.

Yuna's steps were lighter than they had been when we left for school this morning.

The moment the door to Unit 203 opened, she immediately took off her shoes and arranged them neatly in the genkan.

She still clutched her blue bag to her chest.

I stepped inside first and placed the keys on the small shelf near the door.

---

"Wash your hands."

"Okay."

Yuna went to the small kitchen sink.

The tap turned on.

The sound of running water filled the cramped room.

I hung my work jacket on the back of a chair.

A few seconds later, Yuna returned.

Her hands were still slightly damp.

She opened her bag and pulled out the gray bento box.

It was empty.

She handed it to me.

I took it and turned on the tap.

Water hit the plastic container with a soft patter.

I took the kitchen sponge.

I began to scrub the inside.

Beside me, Yuna stood slightly on her tiptoes so she could see into the sink.

---

"Yamada came to my desk," she said.

I didn't stop scrubbing.

"The boy who was crying this morning."

"Yes."

Yuna stared at the bento box.

As if recalling the events of the afternoon.

"He was still sad because his bento was ruined."

"Makes sense."

The sponge moved in a circular motion at the bottom of the box.

The running water washed away the remaining grains of stuck rice.

---

Yuna squeezed the edge of her skirt slightly.

"But when he saw my bento..."

I waited for her to continue.

She raised her hands a little, tracing the shape of the box in the air.

"...he went quiet for a long time."

"And then?"

Yuna held back a small smile.

"He said my bento looked like... a brick."

I rinsed the box.

The water ran heavily for a few seconds.

"An accurate observation."

Yuna nodded.

"But he said it was cool."

I turned off the tap for a moment.

Looked down at her.

"Reasoning."

"He said if it dropped, it wouldn't break apart."

I tapped the box once against the sink.

"Correct."

Yuna looked a little more relaxed now.

Her shoulders weren't as tense as they were this morning.

She continued her story.

---

"He sat next to my desk during lunch."

I picked up the lid and began washing it.

"And then?"

"He watched the way I ate."

I waited.

Yuna gazed toward the small table in the living room.

As if replaying the scene in the classroom.

"He said my bento was very neat."

"Structure aids eating efficiency."

"Then he asked if he could take a closer look."

I put the sponge down.

Gave the box a final rinse.

The water ran for a brief moment before I shut it off.

Yuna added in a quiet voice.

"After that... he offered me half of his octopus sausage."

I shook the excess water off the box.

A light tap against the edge of the sink.

Tap.

The last drop of water fell.

"Food exchange."

"Yes."

"What did you trade in return?"

Yuna held up one small finger.

"A piece of egg."

I nodded.

"A fair caloric exchange."

Yuna looked satisfied with that conclusion.

She gave a small nod.

"Yamada also said tomorrow he wants to ask his mom to make a bento like mine."

I placed the bento box on the drying rack.

"Block-shaped?"

"Yes."

Yuna finally smiled a bit wider.

"But he said his mom might not be able to make it that compact."

I took a kitchen towel and dried my hands.

"That can be trained."

Yuna chuckled.

A short laugh.

Unforced.

---

After a few seconds, she opened her blue bag again.

She reached inside.

But this time, her movements slowed.

She stared at the contents of the bag for a moment.

Her smile slowly faded.

Her hand felt the inside of the bag.

Then she pulled the fabric outward a little.

The cheap blue bag that had fallen onto the asphalt this morning.

She stared at it.

Silent.

---

Chapter 47: Good Child Syndrome at the Folding Table

---

Yuna was still holding her blue bag as she stood in the living room.

Her eyes dropped to it for a moment.

Then, she set it down gently on the floor near the wall.

And said nothing more about it.

---

I opened the small closet in the corner of the room and took out a wooden folding table.

It was a 1,500-yen purchase from a discount store.

The surface was slightly scratched, but still perfectly flat.

I set it up in the middle of the room.

Clack.

Yuna immediately knelt neatly on the floor in front of it.

Her movements were quick.

As if her body instinctively knew it was study time.

She opened her bag.

---

Textbooks came out one by one.

A notebook.

A pencil case.

A cat-shaped eraser.

A plastic ruler.

She set them all on the table.

Then she began to arrange them.

First pencil.

Second pencil.

Third pencil.

She lined the three of them up side by side.

Their tips were perfectly aligned.

Flawless.

The eraser went on the right.

The ruler just above it.

The spacing between them was almost perfectly equal.

---

I sat across from her.

My convenience store coffee cup was still half full.

Instant coffee.

The taste was nothing special.

Yuna opened her Japanese homework workbook.

The pages turned slowly.

She read a few lines.

Then stopped.

Her index finger rested on one of the questions.

For a few seconds, she just stared at the paper.

Then she swallowed nervously.

"Papa."

"Hm."

She pointed at the question.

"This one is a little hard."

I took a sip of my coffee.

"Read it."

Yuna took a small breath.

---

Her voice was quieter than before.

"The question is... what did the hare say to the tortoise after losing the race?"

She stopped.

Her eyes were no longer looking at the book.

Now, she was staring at me.

Her face was incredibly serious.

As if she were facing a university entrance exam.

"The hare is usually arrogant," she said.

I didn't answer.

She thought about it harder.

"So maybe... the hare should apologize."

She shook her head at her own suggestion.

"No... maybe he should learn from his mistake."

Her hands began to grip her uniform skirt.

Tighter than before.

Her eyes met mine again.

"Papa..."

"Hm."

"Which answer do you like?"

I looked at her.

She rushed on.

"If you prefer the hare to apologize, I'll write that."

She pointed at the book again.

"If you prefer a moral about hard work, I'll write that one."

Her breathing started to quicken.

"I can write a different answer too, if you have a better one."

Her hand was now gripping her pencil tightly.

---

"You just have to tell me."

She looked down a little.

"I'll write whatever answer you like."

The room fell silent.

Only the sound of the small wall clock ticking.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

I set my coffee cup down on the table.

Clack.

The sound of ceramic meeting wood rang out clearly.

Yuna stopped talking.

She slowly raised her eyes.

Waiting for an answer.

---

Chapter 48: The Massacre of a Fable by Biological Facts

The coffee cup touched the table with a soft sound.

Clack.

Yuna instantly fell silent.

The pencil in her hand hovered slightly above her book.

Her eyes waited.

I looked at the question for a moment.

"The hare and the tortoise."

"Yes."

"What the hare said after losing."

"Yes."

I picked up one of her pencils.

And tapped it once against the paper.

Tap.

"The hare said nothing."

Yuna blinked.

"...It didn't?"

"No."

I tapped the question again with the tip of the pencil.

"Hares belong to the family Leporidae."

She stared at me.

Still confused.

I continued in the exact same tone I used for reading food labels.

"Their vocal cord structure does not allow for the formation of complex human language."

The room fell silent for a few seconds.

Yuna still held her pencil.

Her rapid breathing had stopped.

She tried to process the sentence.

"...So..."

"So, the hare didn't speak."

I set the pencil back down on the table.

"The most biologically accurate answer is: it said nothing."

Yuna looked back down at the question.

Then at me.

Then back at the question.

"...Silence?"

"Yes."

She remained perfectly still.

As if her mind had just completely derailed from a very long track.

A moment ago, she was trying to find the moral answer.

An apology.

A life lesson.

Friendship.

Now, the answer was just one word.

Silence.

Her lips twitched slightly.

One corner curled up.

Then dropped back down.

She was trying to hold something back.

I watched her shoulders begin to tremble slightly.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"If I write that..."

"Write it."

"The teacher might get mad."

"The teacher can debate it."

Her shoulders shook again.

More noticeably this time.

A small laugh leaked out.

"Pff..."

She covered her mouth with her hand.

But she couldn't hold it all back.

"Hehe..."

It wasn't the polite, measured laugh she usually gave.

No tone control.

No calculated pauses.

Just the genuine, small laughter of a nine-year-old girl who found something truly funny.

She bowed her head.

Still giggling softly.

Then she picked up her pencil again.

Words began to appear in her homework workbook.

Her handwriting was as perfectly neat as usual.

But this time, her hand moved with a certain lightness.

After writing down a single sentence, she stopped.

There was still one question left.

She pointed to it with the tip of her pencil.

Her face was much more relaxed now.

"Papa."

"Hm."

"How about this one?"

I looked down at the page.

Yuna read the final question, her tone remarkably lighter.

"If you had wings... where would you fly to?"

She twirled the pencil between her fingers.

All traces of panic were gone.

"Usually, kids write down their dream destinations."

"For example."

"The sky."

"A tropical island."

"Grandma's house."

She looked up at me again.

The lingering traces of her laughter were still visible in her eyes.

"If you had wings, Papa... where would you fly?"

## Chapter 49: Wing Anatomy and Logical Consequences

---

"If you had wings, Papa... where would you fly to?"

Yuna was still twirling the pencil between her fingers.

The homework workbook lay open in front of us.

I looked at the question for a moment.

---

"Humans are not built to have wings."

The pencil in Yuna's hand stopped twirling.

"Not built?"

"No."

I folded my hands on the table.

"The human body is too heavy."

She immediately listened intently.

As usual.

---

"To lift a human body with your weight, the minimum wingspan would be around six meters."

Her eyes widened slightly.

"Six meters?"

"Yes."

I pointed at her chest.

"A human's chest muscles are also far too small to flap wings of that size."

She looked down at her own body.

Then she looked over her shoulder at her back.

As if trying to imagine six-meter wings.

---

I continued in a flat tone.

"If you were to suddenly grow wings and attempt to fly..."

She waited for the rest of the sentence.

"Your ribcage would most likely fracture on the very first flap."

Yuna stared at me.

Two seconds.

Three seconds.

"...So I can't fly?"

"You can."

She looked slightly relieved.

"Where to?"

"The hospital."

She stared at me again.

Her thought process was clearly visible.

Wings.

Flap.

Ribcage.

Hospital.

Then—

"Pff—"

A small laugh slipped out again.

Louder than before.

"Hehehe..."

She bowed her head.

Clutching her stomach slightly.

"That's such a weird answer."

"It makes perfect medical sense."

Yuna was still giggling softly.

She finally looked back down at her homework workbook.

---

Her pencil moved.

She wrote with a completely different energy than before.

Her handwriting remained neat.

But this time, she didn't stop to overthink.

A few minutes later, the book was closed.

Homework finished.

I glanced at the wall clock.

18:57.

I stood up.

"Dinner time."

Yuna immediately stood up as well.

She helped fetch two bowls.

We had a simple dinner.

Rice.

Instant curry.

Warm steam filled the small room.

Yuna sat in her chair.

Her legs swung gently beneath the table.

A relaxed movement that hadn't appeared all day.

"Yamada likes curry too," she said suddenly.

"Many kids like curry."

She nodded in agreement.

We ate without much conversation after that.

Once finished, I cleared the plates.

Yuna wiped the small table with a cloth.

A simple routine.

---

The clock showed almost seven.

I took the futon out of the closet.

The mattress was laid out on the floor.

Yuna helped straighten the blankets.

Just as I patted the surface of the futon to flatten it—

the phone in my pocket vibrated.

Bzz.

The screen lit up.

There was a message icon from the school's communication system.

I opened the message.

Yuna was still adjusting the pillows on the floor.

"Papa?"

"Hm."

"Who is the message from?"

---

I read the contents of the message for a moment.

Then read it once more.

The message wasn't very long.

The sender was Yuna's homeroom teacher.

I read the first part aloud in a flat voice.

"Mr. Nishida."

Yuna turned her head.

"We would like to report that your daughter was involved in a... rather unique discussion during lunch today."

Yuna stopped moving.

Her eyes slowly widened.

I scrolled down the screen a bit.

"Several students are now requesting their parents to make them... an 'anti-gravity concrete bento'."

Yuna immediately covered her face with both hands.

I continued reading.

"Furthermore, one of the students attempted to drop his lunch box off his desk to test this theory."

I stopped.

---

Then I read the final sentence.

"In order to prevent further physics experiments in the classroom, we would like to speak with you tomorrow morning."

The room fell silent.

Yuna still had her hands over her face.

"Papa..."

"Hm."

"...Is that my fault?"

I turned off the phone screen.

"Partly."

She peeked through the gaps in her fingers.

"Are you going to get scolded by the teacher?"

"Probably."

Yuna lowered her head slightly.

"I'm sorry."

I straightened the final corner of the futon.

"We'll just explain it tomorrow."

She gave a small nod.

"Okay."

The bedroom light was turned off.

The room grew quiet.

It seemed tomorrow morning was going to be slightly troublesome.

---

Chapter 50: The Staff Room and Compression Logic

---

The elementary school corridor was still relatively quiet.

Most of the students were already in class. The only sounds were the clicking of a teacher's shoes against the floor and the quiet hum of a ceiling fan spinning slowly overhead.

At the end of the hallway was a door with a small plaque that read Staff Room.

---

Inside the room, I sat on a metal folding chair.

Back straight.

Hands resting on my thighs.

Yuna stood to my left.

Her hands gripped the straps of her sky-blue backpack so tightly that her knuckles had turned white.

She hadn't spoken since we entered the room.

Across the desk, her homeroom teacher sat massaging her temples.

She was a woman in her thirties with neat, short hair and thin-rimmed glasses.

On the desk in front of us sat a plastic lunchbox.

Cracked at one of the corners.

---

The teacher let out a long sigh before finally speaking.

"Thank you for coming in so early, Mr. Nishida."

I gave a slight nod.

"It's no problem."

The teacher pointed at the lunchbox on the desk.

"This belongs to one of the students."

I looked at it for a moment.

The crack was quite obvious.

As if it had been dropped from a height.

The teacher continued.

"Yesterday during lunch, Yuna showed off her lunchbox to her friends."

Yuna stiffened slightly beside me.

"Then she explained... that her lunch wouldn't fall apart even if dropped."

I glanced slightly toward Yuna.

She looked down.

Her shoulders hunched inward.

---

The teacher sighed again.

"A few boys in the class took that as a challenge."

She pushed the cracked lunchbox slightly toward me.

"They tried dropping their own lunchboxes from the top of the classroom cabinets."

I traced the crack in the plastic with my fingertip.

The fractured edge was rough.

"No one was hurt," the teacher said quickly.

"But it caused quite a commotion. And two lunchboxes were ruined."

I gave a slow nod.

"I see."

Beside me, Yuna bowed her head even lower.

I could see the tips of her hair trembling slightly.

The teacher looked between the two of us.

"So, I just wanted to ensure... that this type of lunch doesn't trigger a similar incident again."

I lifted the lunchbox slightly.

Weighed it in my hand.

"Yuna's lunch does not defy the laws of physics."

The teacher blinked.

"Excuse me?"

---

I set the cracked lunchbox back down.

"It is merely a matter of rice compression."

The teacher looked even more bewildered.

I continued in the same flat tone.

"Compacted rice has a higher mass density. Its internal structure is naturally more stable against minor impacts."

The teacher stared at me for a few seconds.

"...I am not entirely sure third-graders would understand that phrasing."

"That is the problem."

The teacher opened her mouth.

Then closed it again.

For a few seconds, the room fell silent.

I stood up from the chair.

A simple movement.

Unhurried.

---

I bowed at an angle of roughly fifteen degrees.

"We will adjust the density of her lunch."

The teacher still looked as though she were trying to process the conversation.

"Ah... yes... I suppose that—"

I was already standing upright again.

I rested my hand lightly on Yuna's sleeve.

"Yuna."

She gave a small start.

"...Yes."

"Let's return to class."

She gave a quick nod.

"Okay."

We walked out of the staff room.

The door clicked shut quietly behind us.

---

The school corridor was a little busier now.

A few students passed by carrying gym bags.

I started walking in the direction of her classroom.

Yuna's small footsteps followed behind me.

Ten steps.

Twenty steps.

Then, a small voice called out from behind.

"...Papa."

I stopped.

Glanced back.

Yuna stood two steps behind me.

She was staring at the floor.

Her hands were still clutching her backpack straps.

---

Her voice was incredibly soft.

"...I caused trouble again."

I waited for her to continue.

She took a sharp little breath.

"If I... keep being a burden..."

Her sentence trailed off.

She bit her lip.

Then, she finally asked.

"...are you going to... send me back to Mama?"

The corridor seemed to grow a little quieter.

A few students walked past without paying us any mind.

I looked at Yuna for a few seconds.

Her face was tense.

Like someone awaiting a verdict.

---

I turned fully to face her.

"Yuna."

She instantly straightened her posture.

"Yes."

"The incident in class today was not your fault."

She blinked.

"...it wasn't?"

"The error was in conducting an experiment without a proper procedure."

Yuna tilted her head.

"...procedure?"

"Dropping objects from the top of a cabinet without a risk analysis is a terrible idea."

She fell silent for a few seconds.

Then, she asked hesitantly.

"...so... I won't be sent back?"

I let out a soft sigh.

"No."

Yuna's shoulders dropped a fraction.

The tension in her face slowly melted away.

I looked back toward the classroom hallway.

"Now, go to class."

"Okay."

She started walking.

Two steps.

Then she stopped again.

---

She looked back at me.

"Papa."

"Hm."

"...thank you."

I gave a small nod.

Yuna broke into a light jog toward her classroom.

The door opened.

She slipped inside.

The chatter of the teacher and students immediately drifted out from the room.

I stood in the hallway for a few seconds.

Then, I turned and headed toward the school exit.

It seemed the gravity experiments were over.

At least for today.

---