

ACCIDENTALLY BECOME A FATHER

Chapter 5: The Choice She Made

I stared at her.

Not at the birth certificate.

Not at the photograph.

At her.

"I remember Papa gave me juice."

Her voice was calm.

Certain.

Not guessing.

Not hoping.

Remembering.

I searched her face again.

The same eyes.

The same quiet way of watching.

The same girl from the back row.

"You were there," I said.

"Yes."

"You remember that?"

"Yes."

"How?"

She tilted her head slightly.

"I remember everything important."

Everything important?

Not everything.

Just what mattered to her.

I lowered the photograph onto the table.

"Did you choose me on purpose?" I asked.

She didn't hesitate.

"Yes."

The answer came too easily.

Too naturally.

As if there had never been any other option.

"Why?" I asked.

She looked at her hands briefly.

Then back at me.

"Because Papa was kind."

I frowned slightly.

"I just, gave you juice."

"Yes."

"That's all?"

She shook her head.

"No."

Her eyes didn't leave mine.

"You stayed."

I didn't understand.

She continued.

"Everyone else left. They went backstage. They followed Mama."

Her fingers tightened slightly on her skirt.

"But Papa stayed."

I didn't remember that part clearly.

But she did.

And that was enough.

The room felt smaller.

Quieter.

More real.

I set the photograph back down on the table.

Now everything was starting to form a pattern.

Official documents.

An exact address.

A genuine photograph.

Real memories.

If this was a plan, it was a meticulously crafted one.

And I knew one thing for certain.

A nine-year-old child couldn't possibly pull all of this off alone.

I looked at her again.

"Did you come here by yourself?"

She answered without hesitation.

"Yes."

I didn't believe her right away.

But I didn't argue, either.

Because right now, the question wasn't who sent her.

The question was—

What was I going to do with her?

It wasn't a heavy question.

It was just...

I looked back down at the birth certificate on the table. The official stamps.

The signatures. Thick paper, the kind that was difficult to forge without connections.

If this had been produced legally, it meant an adult had pulled some strings.

And that adult had resources.

I didn't need to guess too far.

Her mother's name explained half of it.

As for the rest... in all likelihood, her father was no ordinary person, either.

I let out a short sigh.

"Let's get one thing straight," I said.

Yuna sat up a little straighter.

"I know this isn't simple."

She didn't answer.

"But this document is real."

"It is real."

"And the address is correct."

"Yes."

"And you know who I am."

"Yes."

I stared at her.

"You also know I'm not the type of person to chase the truth to the ends of the earth."

She blinked.

"Does that mean Papa accepts?"

"Don't call me that."

"Okay... Papa."

I slid the certificate back to the center of the table.

If I turned her away, what would happen?

This child would return to whoever sent her.

Or worse, to somewhere she didn't want to be.

Or...

The more I thought about it, the more possibilities arose.

Troublesome ones.

Meanwhile, the alternative—

I looked around my small room.

One futon.

One empty table.

A closet with too much space and too few things.

A half-empty fridge.

Adding one more person wouldn't cause the building's structure to collapse.

At most, I'd just have to buy an extra futon.

That was much simpler.

I lifted my gaze to her.

"Have you eaten?"

She fell silent for a second.

Then she shook her head slowly.

"Not yet."

"I have rice and eggs."

"I can help."

"You're nine."

"I can crack an egg without smashing it."

"And the statistics?"

"Statistics...? Oh, right."

"Nine out of ten succeed."

"That's a high failure rate."

She almost laughed. Almost.

I stood up.

It was only a three-step walk from the table to my tiny kitchenette.

I opened the fridge. A slow breath of cold air drifted out.

I took out two eggs.

Just as I was about to close the door, I paused.

I looked back at her.

She was still sitting on the floor. Her bag by her side. The photo and the documents on the table. Her back perfectly straight.

She was still tense.

As if waiting for a final verdict.

I closed the fridge.

"Yuna."

She looked up quickly.

"Yes?"

"We'll buy a futon later."

Her eyes widened slightly.

That was her only reaction.

No tears.

No hugs.

Just a quiet breath, exhaled softer than before.

I cracked one egg into a bowl.

The yolk remained intact.

"You can use the bathroom first. Towels are on the top shelf."

She stood up slowly.

Took two steps.

Then stopped.

"Papa."

I didn't look back.

"Hm?"

"Thank you."

I poured the egg into the hot pan.

A loud sizzle filled the small room.

"Just don't cause trouble," I said.

She fell silent for a moment.

Then replied softly,

"I'll be a good girl."

I flipped the egg.

"No need."

The oil continued to sizzle.

On the table, the birth certificate still lay open.

The name "Nishida Itsuki" was printed clearly under Father.

And for some reason,

I had the feeling that someone out there had already predicted exactly what I would do with Yuna.
