

# Accidentally become a father

Chapter 51: Saturday's Atonement

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Saturday afternoon in Apartment 203 was quiet.

Too quiet.

Sunlight spilled through the small living room window, casting slanted beams across the slightly faded tatami mats.

Against the wall, an old television was turned on.

The volume was low.

+--

A slice-of-life anime was playing.

On the screen, a little girl in a red apron stood in a kitchen, rolling an omelet.

"Papa is going to love this," the character on TV said cheerfully.

In front of the television, Yuna sat cross-legged with her back straight.

Her hands rested neatly on her knees.

She didn't blink.

Behind her, I sat leaning against the wall.

Plain black t-shirt.

Gray sweatpants.

---

On the floor in front of me was a coil of a five-meter extension cord.

Some parts of its insulation were torn.

I slowly twisted the end of the wire, soldering the broken parts together.

A thin trail of smoke rose from the tip of the soldering iron.

The faint smell of hot plastic filled the room.

---

Yuna glanced slightly over her shoulder.

"Papa."

"Hm."

"Are you working again?"

"Not working."

I blew on the freshly soldered end of the wire.

"Maintenance."

"Oh."

She turned back to the television.

On the screen, the anime character served the tamagoyaki on the dining table.

Her father looked deeply moved.

Yuna watched the scene for a long time.

A very long time.

Then, her gaze slowly shifted.

From the television screen...

toward me.

I let out a small yawn.

I set the soldering iron down on the floor.

I coiled the repaired cable back up.

Minor task complete.

---

I lay down on the thin carpet.

I picked up the old electronic manual I'd been using as a work mat and placed it over my face.

The room was dimly lit.

The afternoon air felt warm.

"Are you sleeping, Papa?" Yuna asked.

"Just for a bit."

"For how long?"

"Thirty minutes."

"Why thirty?"

"It's the ideal amount of time to rest the brain without entering a deep sleep phase."

"Oh."

A few seconds of silence.

Then, I added.

"If someone knocks on the door, don't open it."

"Okay."

"Especially if they're selling pots."

Yuna turned her head slightly.

"Why?"

"Because they always show up when people want to sleep."

"Oh..."

I shifted the manual slightly off my face.

"And they never leave quickly."

Yuna nodded slowly.

"Understood."

I covered my face with the manual again.

---

The room fell quiet once more.

The low sound of the television continued playing.

On the screen, the anime character was washing dishes while humming.

Her father could be seen sleeping in the living room.

Yuna stared at the scene.

Her eyes shifted again.

Toward me.

I was already still.

My breathing was steady.

A few minutes passed.

The sound of soft breathing began to emerge from beneath the manual.

Yuna looked down.

Her hands formed small fists on her knees.

She muttered very softly.

Almost as if speaking to herself.

"...if I'm useful..."

She looked at the television again.

"...Papa won't throw me away."

On the screen, the anime character said:

"I want to help Papa."

Yuna stared at the small kitchen in the corner of the room.

Barely two meters wide.

A tiny sink.

A single-burner stove.

A metal dish rack.

She stood up slowly.

Carefully.

Very carefully.

---

She took off her socks.

Folded them small.

And placed them near the floor cushion.

First step.

Slow.

No sound.

She looked over at me.

I remained motionless.

Second step.

Still silent.

Yuna walked toward the kitchen.

Her gaze changed.

No longer hesitant.

No longer afraid.

But filled with resolve.

Like someone about to carry out an important mission.

---

She stopped in front of the kitchen counter.

Looked up.

The counter was too high.

Yuna thought for a moment.

Then she dragged a small wooden chair over from the dining table.

Scrrkk.

A small scraping sound rang out.

She instantly froze.

Her head snapped quickly toward the living room.

I was still asleep.

Yuna breathed a sigh of relief.

She pushed the chair right up to the counter.

Then climbed onto it slowly.

Now her head was level with the countertop.

---

She opened the mini-fridge.

A white light clicked on.

Inside were eggs.

Some vegetables.

And leftover rice from last night.

Yuna carefully took out two eggs.

Placed them on the counter.

She grabbed a glass bowl from the rack.

Then a bottle of soy sauce.

Everything was arranged neatly.

Yuna gave a small nod to herself.

As if signaling the start.

In the living room...

my breathing remained steady.

And the manual still covered my face.

---

Chapter 52: A Two-Square-Meter Battlefield

---

The kitchen in Apartment 203 was barely two meters wide.

One counter.

One small stove.

One sink.

For an adult, the kitchen was already cramped.

For a nine-year-old...

it was like a rock-climbing wall.

Yuna stood on top of a small wooden chair.

Her legs wobbled slightly; the chair had not been made to stand on.

---

In front of her was a glass bowl.

Two eggs.

And a bottle of soy sauce.

She stared at everything with utmost seriousness.

Like a scientist preparing for a crucial experiment.

"In the anime... this is how they do it..."

She picked up one egg.

Her hands were small.

Her fingers gripped the egg carefully.

Yuna raised it slightly.

Then tapped it against the edge of the bowl.

Tap.

It didn't break.

She blinked.

"...Not hard enough."

She tried again.

A little harder this time.

CRACK!

The egg broke.

But it didn't crack neatly like in the anime.

The shell shattered.

The egg white and yolk plummeted straight into the bowl—along with fragments of the shell.

A few drops splattered onto the counter.

One drop landed on Yuna's cheek.

---

She froze.

Stared at the bowl.

Inside was a messy mix of raw egg and jagged shell pieces.

"...Eh."

She grabbed a small spoon.

Tried to scoop out the broken shells.

But there were too many tiny fragments.

Her spoon ended up piercing the yolk instead.

The yellow liquid bled across the bowl.

Yuna began to panic.

"This... isn't like the anime..."

She hurriedly snatched a small cloth from the kitchen hook.

Wiped the counter.

But her movements were frantic.

Her elbow bumped the soy sauce bottle.

The bottle wobbled.

Yuna saw it.

Her eyes widened.

"...Ah."

The bottle tipped over.

Thud.

The cap popped open.

Dark liquid spilled out.

The soy sauce spread rapidly across the counter.

Then reached the edge.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

Dark drops fell onto the linoleum floor.

---

Yuna went into a full panic.

"No, no, no—"

She tried to grab the bottle.

She moved too fast.

The chair beneath her feet shifted.

Yuna lost her balance.

She hopped down from the chair.

Her feet landed on the floor already slick with soy sauce.

Slippery.

Far too slippery.

Her feet slid out from under her.

"Ah—!"

Smack.

She fell hard on her bottom.

A small but loud noise in the cramped kitchen.

The soy sauce bottle rolled slowly.

The dark sauce now formed a thin puddle on the floor.

Yuna sat in the middle of the mess.

Her hand gripped the dirty cloth.

Her shirt was splattered with egg whites.

Her arms were sticky.

She stared at the floor.

The puddle of soy sauce.

The eggshells.

The dirty bowl.

The tilted chair.

The small kitchen now looked like the site of a completely failed experiment.

Yuna's breathing quickened.

Her chest heaved.

Her hands trembled.

Old voices surfaced in her head.

Voices she had heard countless times before.

"Why do you always cause trouble?"

"You can't do anything right."

"Just stay in your room."

"Don't be a nuisance."

---

Tears began to well up in her eyes.

She tried to wipe the floor with the cloth.

But the rag was already saturated with soy sauce.

The more she wiped...

the further the dark stain spread.

"I'm sorry..."

Her voice was barely a whisper.

"I'm sorry..."

Tears fell to the floor.

Small drops mixing into the soy sauce.

She stared at her dirty hands.

"Why do I... always fail..."

---

Suddenly—

Thump.

The sound of something dropping came from the living room.

Yuna froze.

Heavy footsteps sounded.

Slow.

Approaching.

Thud.

Thud.

Thud.

The footsteps stopped right in front of the kitchen.

A shadow fell across the wet floor.

Yuna tensed.

Perlahan...

she turned her head toward the kitchen doorway.

Itsuki stood there.

---

## Chapter 53: A Miscalculation

---

I woke up to the sound of something falling.

It wasn't loud.

But enough to disturb a light sleep.

The manual resting on my face fell to the floor.

I opened my eyes.

The apartment was still quiet.

The television was still playing softly.

But there was another sound.

The sound of something dripping.

...coming from the kitchen.

---

I got up from the floor.

I made my way to the kitchen.

As I reached the doorway, I stopped.

The situation was quite clear.

Eggshells on the counter.

A bowl containing a mangled egg.

A knocked-over bottle of soy sauce.

And a puddle of dark liquid spreading across the floor.

---

In the middle of it all—

Yuna sat on the floor.

Her shirt was dirty.

Her hand clutched a small rag.

Her face was pale.

The moment she saw me, she moved.

Too fast.

She bowed until her head nearly touched the floor.

Her hands pressed against the sticky floor.

"I'm sorry!"

Her voice trembled.

"I... I just wanted to make lunch..."

Her breathing came in short, shallow gasps.

"I knocked over the soy sauce by accident..."

She shook her head rapidly.

"I'll clean it all up... I promise..."

Her hands pressed harder against the floor.

"Please don't be mad..."

Her voice grew smaller.

"...please."

I didn't answer right away.

---

I looked at the floor.

The puddle of soy sauce had almost reached my socks.

If I took another step carelessly, I would definitely slip.

I waited a few seconds.

Yuna kept her head bowed.

Her body trembled slightly.

I stepped into the kitchen with slow, deliberate steps.

Avoiding the wettest parts of the floor.

Then, I crouched down in front of her.

Now, we were at eye level.

She still didn't lift her head.

---

I grabbed a paper towel from the counter.

There was egg white stuck to her forehead.

I wiped it off gently.

Yuna stopped moving.

A few seconds later, she slowly looked up.

Her eyes were red.

She looked like she was on the verge of tears.

I pointed at the floor.

"The floor is slippery."

She blinked.

"...Eh?"

"Soy sauce reduces friction."

I pointed at her knees.

"If you stay down there, your knees will get sticky."

Yuna just stared at me.

It seemed like she was trying to process those words.

I offered her my hand.

"Stand up first."

She hesitated for a moment.

"...Papa isn't mad?"

"No."

She stared at me again.

"...Really?"

"Yes."

She slowly took my hand.

Her hand was small and cold.

She stood up slowly.

---

The moment she was fully standing—

her stomach suddenly growled.

Loudly.

GRUMBLE.

We both fell silent.

Yuna immediately clutched her stomach.

Her face flushed red.

"...Sorry."

I looked at the clock on the kitchen wall.

It was almost two in the afternoon.

"You haven't eaten?"

She shook her head.

"Not yet..."

"Why?"

She stared at the counter.

"...I wanted to make something first."

I followed her gaze.

The smashed egg.

The soy sauce on the floor.

The chair pulled up to the counter.

The hypothesis was simple.

---

"You tried to cook."

Yuna gave a small nod.

"...I saw it on TV."

"Anime."

"Yes."

I looked at the counter again.

"The experiment failed."

Yuna immediately looked down.

"...Yes."

I took a rag from the hook.

I handed it to her.

"Let's clean this up first."

She took the cloth with both hands.

Still looking hesitant.

"...Papa really isn't mad?"

I grabbed the mop from the corner of the kitchen.

"If getting mad could clean the floor faster, maybe I would be mad."

I started mopping the puddle of soy sauce.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't."

Yuna stood in silence for a few seconds.

Then, she finally knelt on the floor.

This time, not out of fear.

She started wiping the counter with the small rag in her hands.

Her movements were still cautious.

But at least—

she wasn't trembling anymore.

---

## Chapter 54: Data, Not a Sin

---

It took about five minutes to clean up the puddle of soy sauce.

I mopped the floor.

Yuna wiped the counter.

Her movements were still cautious. Sometimes too cautious.

She seemed afraid of making a second mistake.

Once the floor was no longer sticky, I wrung out the mop in the sink.

---

"That's enough."

Yuna was still scrubbing a small spot on the counter.

"...there's still a little bit left."

"It's fine."

She stopped.

Stared at the counter for a moment.

Then put down the rag.

The kitchen looked the way it had before.

Small. Cramped. But no longer like the scene of an accident.

---

I opened the fridge.

There were still a few eggs left.

I took out two.

Yuna watched from behind me.

"...Is Papa going to cook?"

"A repeat experiment."

She tilted her head.

"...Experiment?"

I placed an egg in her hand.

"Hold this."

She immediately tensed up.

"...What if it breaks again?"

"If it breaks, it means we know the threshold for excessive force."

She stared at the egg like a fragile object that might explode.

---

I pointed to the kitchen counter.

"Tap it here."

Yuna hesitated.

"But earlier... it smashed."

"That was because you used too much force."

I stood behind her.

Her hands were small.

I held her wrist lightly.

"At this angle."

I guided her hand a little.

"Just a little force."

She swallowed.

"Like this?"

"Yes."

The egg was tapped against the counter.

Tap.

A thin crack appeared on the shell.

Yuna froze.

"...It cracked."

"Good."

I nodded toward the clean bowl on the counter.

"Now open it."

She separated the shell carefully.

The egg white fell into the bowl.

The yolk remained intact.

Yuna stared at the bowl with wide eyes.

"...It worked."

"Yes."

She looked genuinely surprised.

As if she had just discovered a magic trick.

---

"I... can do it."

"You can."

I cracked the second egg the same way.

We beat the eggs in the bowl.

Added a little sugar.

A little soy sauce.

I turned on the small stove.

The pan heated up.

Yuna stood beside me.

Observing intently.

As the eggs were poured into the pan, she said quietly,

"...I thought Papa was going to be mad earlier."

"Why?"

She looked at the floor.

"...Because I made a mess in the kitchen."

"Kitchens often get messy."

"At Mama's house... that wasn't allowed."

I didn't answer right away.

The egg in the pan began to set.

---

I rolled it slowly with chopsticks.

Yuna watched the movement.

"If I made a mistake..."

She paused for a moment.

"...I usually got yelled at."

I transferred the rolled egg to a plate.

Then said,

"A mistake is not a crime."

Yuna looked at me.

I continued in the same tone.

"A mistake is just data."

"...Data?"

"Information about what doesn't work."

I cut the tamagoyaki into several pieces.

"If an experiment fails, we don't punish the experiment."

"Then what?"

"We try again with a different method."

I placed the plate on the folding table in the living room.

Yuna sat across from me.

The tamagoyaki didn't have a very good shape.

One side was slightly burnt.

I took a piece.

Chewed it.

It tasted a bit too salty.

---

"Too much soy sauce."

I swallowed.

"Good data."

Yuna stared at her piece of egg.

"...Can I eat it?"

"Yes."

She picked up a small piece.

Bit into it gently.

She chewed for a few seconds.

Then her eyes widened slightly.

"...It's good."

"It can still be improved."

She nodded.

For the first time since coming to this apartment—

Yuna smiled.

Not the polite smile she usually showed to adults.

Not a smile that looked practiced.

But a small smile.

Light.

Like a child who finally felt safe.

We ate in silence.

In the small kitchen that was now clean.

And for that day—

no other experiments needed to be done.

---

Chapter 55: The Miscalculated Sky

---

The sky began to turn about ten minutes before the dismissal bell rang.

Dark clouds rolled in from the west, slowly covering the sky above the elementary school.

I stood in front of the school gates.

The iron gates were half-open.

A few parents were already waiting for their children.

Some were looking at their phones.

Others were chatting quietly.

---

The wind blew a little colder than usual.

I looked up at the sky again.

The probability of rain was quite high.

Around seventy percent.

The school bell finally rang.

The classroom doors began to open one by one.

Children spilled out in small groups.

The sound of footsteps and chatter filled the courtyard.

I waited.

---

About thirty seconds later, Yuna emerged from the corridor.

Her sky-blue backpack hung from her shoulders.

She was walking with two other girls.

As soon as she spotted me at the gates, she stopped.

She gave a small wave.

"Papa."

I raised my hand slightly in response.

She said a quick goodbye to her friends.

Then jogged over to me.

She stopped once she reached me.

Panting slightly.

---

"Were you waiting long?"

"Five minutes."

"Oh."

She looked up at the sky.

Her expression shifted slightly.

"It's cloudy."

"Yes."

The wind blew again.

The leaves on the trees in the schoolyard rustled gently.

Yuna tugged at her backpack straps.

"I think it's going to rain."

"The probability is high."

We began walking out through the school gates.

The sidewalk in front of the school wasn't too crowded.

A few children were walking home with their parents.

Some had already opened their umbrellas.

The sky was growing darker.

---

Yuna walked on my left.

Her steps were small.

Her backpack swayed slightly with each step.

After a few minutes, she spoke quietly,

"Earlier at school... my friends said the rain is fun."

I glanced down at her.

"Fun?"

"Yes."

She kicked a small pebble on the path.

"They said if it rains hard, you can jump in the puddles."

"That is technically true."

She gave a small nod.

But then added,

"...but Mama said I'm not allowed to."

"Why?"

"Because I'll get sick."

The wind blew again.

A few small drops began to fall from the sky.

Tap.

A single drop hit the sidewalk.

Then another.

Tap.

---

Yuna looked up.

"It's raining."

It wasn't heavy yet.

Just a drizzle.

We kept walking.

But about twenty seconds later—

the rain fell faster.

It was no longer a drizzle.

But a steady, heavy rain.

People on the street began opening their umbrellas.

Some children broke into a run, looking for shelter.

Yuna shielded her head with her backpack.

"Papa."

"Hm."

"The rain is getting heavier."

"Yes."

I looked at the building up ahead.

A small shop with its metal shutters rolled down.

Its awning was wide enough to provide shelter.

We headed toward it.

Once there, Yuna stood under the awning.

The rain poured down onto the sidewalk in front of us.

The sound of the downpour filled the street.

I stood beside her.

A few other people were also taking shelter nearby.

The street began to slick with water.

Small puddles began to form in the dips of the pavement.

Yuna watched the rain.

Silently.

---

Then her eyes shifted across the street.

Three boys had just come out of a convenience store.

They didn't have umbrellas.

One of them jumped into a puddle.

Splash.

Water sprayed everywhere.

The boys laughed loudly.

The others joined in, jumping as well.

Splash.

Splash.

Rainwater sprayed all around them.

Yuna stared at the sight for a long time.

A very long time.

Her hands were still gripping her backpack straps.

But her eyes never left the puddles on the street.

---

Chapter 56: Observing a Child Subject

---

The rain grew heavier.

Water fell from the shop's roof in straight lines, forming a thin curtain in front of the sidewalk.

The puddles on the street began to widen.

Yuna was still standing beside me.

She had lowered her backpack from her head.

Now she just stared at the rain.

Or more accurately—

stared at the children across the street.

One of them jumped into a puddle again.

Splash.

Water sprayed all the way up their pants.

They laughed.

Loudly.

None of them looked worried about getting wet.

---

Yuna watched it all.

Silently.

I looked at her for a moment.

Her expression wasn't hard to read.

Young children usually aren't very good at hiding their curiosity.

She didn't move.

But her eyes followed every jump in the puddle.

Like someone watching something deeply fascinating.

About twenty seconds passed.

Then one of the children ran through the rain.

The others chased after him.

Their shoes slammed into the puddles.

Splash.

Splash.

The sound of the water was clear even from where we stood.

---

Yuna finally spoke quietly,

"...they aren't going to get yelled at, are they?"

I looked in the same direction.

"Their parents aren't there."

"Oh."

She gave a small nod.

But she kept watching them.

A few seconds later she spoke again,

"...it looks fun."

"Yes."

She kicked the tip of her shoe against the sidewalk.

A small movement.

Hesitant.

"Earlier at school..."

She paused for a moment.

"...my friends also said the rain is nice."

"Hm."

"But Mama said I'm not allowed to."

"Because you'll get sick."

"Yes."

The wind carried the spray of the rain under the awning.

A few drops hit the ground near our feet.

Yuna took a half-step back.

Then stared at the rain again.

Her eyes followed the stream of water falling from the roof.

As if calculating something.

Or imagining something.

---

I waited.

Usually, young children will speak again after a few moments.

Sure enough.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

She was still looking at the rain.

"...if you get rained on..."

She stopped.

"...do you really get sick right away?"

"No."

She turned to look at me.

"Really?"

"The human body does not immediately break down from water."

She thought for a moment.

"Does that mean... I can?"

"Not necessarily."

She went back to staring at the rain.

The children across the street were still playing.

One of them was now trying to stomp on the biggest puddle.

Water splashed high into the air.

Yuna followed the movement with her eyes.

A few seconds passed.

Then she said very quietly,

"...I never have."

I looked over at her.

"Never have what?"

She pointed at a puddle on the street.

"...that."

"Jumped in a puddle?"

She nodded.

"Never."

I looked out at the rain.

Then back at Yuna.

Her expression was still the same.

Not sad.

Not pouting either.

More like—

someone looking at something they wanted to try...

but was already used to not doing it.

---

For a few seconds, we just stood in silence.

The sound of the rain filled the street.

Yuna finally spoke again,

"...if I do it..."

She paused.

"...will Papa be mad?"

I didn't answer right away.

I looked at the puddle on the sidewalk.

Quite shallow.

The risk of slipping was low.

The air temperature wasn't too cold either.

The probability of getting sick was not high.

I looked back at Yuna.

She was still waiting for an answer.

I asked,

"Yuna."

"Hm?"

"Do you want to try it?"

---

## Chapter 57: The First Rule Violation

---

Yuna didn't answer right away.

She just stared at me.

As if trying to make sure she hadn't misheard.

"Huh?"

"Do you want to try it?" I repeated.

She looked out at the rain again.

Then at the children across the street, still running through the puddles.

Her hands went back to gripping the straps of her backpack.

"...can I?"

Her tone was half-hopeful, half-disbelieving.

"That does not answer my question."

She looked down slightly.

"...I want to."

Her voice was incredibly quiet.

Almost drowned out by the sound of the rain.

---

A few seconds passed.

Water continued to fall from the shop's roof.

The puddle on the sidewalk was growing larger.

I opened the bag I was carrying.

And took out a folding umbrella.

Click.

The umbrella opened.

Yuna immediately stepped closer to me.

A reflex.

Like a child used to seeking shelter from the rain.

I looked at the rain falling in front of the sidewalk.

Then I looked at the puddle.

Not too deep.

The risk of falling was low.

I closed the umbrella again.

Click.

Yuna blinked.

"...Papa?"

I put the umbrella back into my bag.

"An experiment requires data."

She tilted her head.

"...experiment?"

I stepped out from under the awning.

Directly into the rain.

Water fell on my shoulders.

On my hair.

On the ground around my feet.

Cold, but not too cold.

Yuna was still standing under the awning.

She stared at me with wide eyes.

"...Papa, you're wet."

"Yes."

I looked down at the puddle on the sidewalk.

"No structural damage."

"...what?"

I pointed at the puddle.

"If you want to try it, now is the time."

Yuna swallowed.

---

She looked at the rain.

Then at me.

Then at the puddle.

Her foot moved a little.

But stopped again.

"...Mama said I'll get sick."

"A hypothesis."

"...hypo... what?"

"A guess."

The rain grew heavier.

Water began to form small streams at the edge of the street.

I stood motionless in the rain.

Waiting.

Yuna watched me for a few seconds.

Then finally took a single step out from under the awning.

Raindrops immediately hit her hair.

She flinched slightly.

"...it's cold."

"Normal."

She took another step.

Now her entire body was in the rain.

Her school uniform began to get wet.

Her hair clung slightly to her cheek.

She stared at her hands.

Rainwater dripped from her fingertips.

"...this is rain."

"Yes."

She looked toward the puddle on the sidewalk.

The one she had been watching from under the roof.

Now it was only one step away.

She approached it slowly.

Stopping at the edge of the puddle.

Staring at it as if it were a foreign object.

I said,

"The depth is approximately three centimeters."

She didn't answer.

She raised one foot.

Still hesitant.

"...what if my shoes get wet?"

"Shoes can be dried."

She thought for a moment.

Then—

she lowered her foot into the puddle.

Plop.

The water rippled slightly.

Yuna froze.

Staring at her shoe.

Then at me.

"...it's wet."

"Yes."

A few seconds of silence.

Then she lifted her foot again.

And this time—

she jumped a little.

Splash.

A small spray of water flew up.

Yuna gave a start.

Not out of fear.

But out of surprise.

---

She stared at the puddle.

Then at her shoes.

Then—

slowly—

a small smile appeared on her face.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"...this is weird."

"How so?"

She stared at the puddle again.

Her eyes began to sparkle.

"...it's fun."

And without another thought—

she jumped once more.

Splash.

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Chapter 58: Atmospheric Experiment

---

The rain hadn't stopped.

Water continued to fall from the sky, turning the street in front of the shop into a collection of small puddles.

Yuna stood in one of those puddles.

Her uniform was already half-wet.

Her hair clung to her cheek.

But she didn't seem to care.

She stared at the water beneath her feet.

---

Then she looked at me.

"...can I do it again?"

"The puddle is not forbidding you."

That was enough for her.

She jumped again.

Splash.

The water splashed higher this time.

A few drops hit the hem of my pants.

Yuna stared at the splash.

Her eyes widened.

"...wow."

She stepped in the puddle again.

Not jumping this time.

Just pressing down with her foot.

Water pushed outward from her shoe.

Plop.

She let out a small laugh.

A sound I had never heard before.

Light.

Not like the polite laugh she usually used when talking to adults.

---

She tried again.

Jumping into another puddle.

Splash.

Water splashed in all directions.

"Papa, look!"

"I am looking."

She jumped again.

Splash.

Her shoes were completely soaked now.

The hem of her uniform skirt was also starting to get wet.

But she didn't stop.

She walked quickly to the next puddle.

A bigger one.

She stopped at the edge.

Inspecting its depth.

---

Then she turned to me.

"...is this one okay?"

I looked at the puddle.

About five centimeters.

"The splash risk is higher."

She nodded seriously.

"...okay."

Then she jumped.

Splaash.

The splash was much higher.

A few drops even hit her face.

Yuna immediately squeezed her eyes shut.

Then opened them again.

Water dripped from her hair.

She wiped her face with her sleeve.

"...it's cold."

"Rainwater is usually like that."

She stared at her wet hands.

Then she looked up.

The rain fell directly onto her face.

She closed her eyes for a few seconds.

As if feeling every drop.

Then she opened her eyes again.

And laughed.

Louder this time.

"Papa!"

"Hm."

"The water is falling from the sky!"

"Correct."

She raised her hands into the air.

Trying to catch the raindrops.

A few fell into her palms.

She stared at them in awe.

"...so many."

---

I stood on the sidewalk.

The rain had already soaked my shoulders.

Yuna went back to jumping in the puddles.

Splash.

Then again.

Splash.

Now she had no more hesitation.

She took two quick little steps and jumped.

Splaash.

The water splashed up to her knees.

She stopped.

Her breaths came a little faster.

But her face was bright.

Vastly different from the cautious expression she usually wore.

---

She walked back toward me.

Her shoes went squish, squish with every step.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

She looked at me with a serious face.

"...this experiment is a success."

"Preliminary conclusion?"

She thought for a moment.

Then said with absolute certainty,

"...rain is fun."

I gave a small nod.

"That is valid data."

She laughed again.

Then she looked at the street, still full of puddles.

"...can I do one more?"

I looked up at the sky.

The rain showed no signs of stopping.

I looked at the puddles in front of us.

"Go ahead."

Yuna immediately turned around.

And jogged toward the largest puddle on the sidewalk.

Without hesitation.

Without fear of being scolded.

She jumped.

Splaash.

Rainwater scattered everywhere.

And for the first time since I had known her—

Yuna looked like a normal child.

---

Chapter 59: Completely Soaked

---

The rain was still falling when we arrived at the apartment.

Not as heavy as before, but enough to keep the street in front of the building wet.

Yuna's shoes squeaked as she walked.

Squish.

Squish.

Water seeped out from inside her shoes with every step.

She stared at her own feet as she walked.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"The water followed us home."

"Because you brought it."

We climbed the concrete stairs to the second floor.

The steps were slightly damp.

Yuna walked slowly so she wouldn't slip.

But her wet shoes kept making noise.

Squish.

Squish.

Once we reached the door to apartment 203, I unlocked it.

As soon as the door opened, Yuna stepped right in.

Then stopped in the genkan.

---

She looked down.

Water was starting to drip from the hem of her uniform skirt.

Small drops immediately speckled the entryway floor.

"...everything is wet."

"Yes."

I closed the door.

Yuna took off her bag.

Then she tried to take off her shoes.

As soon as the first shoe came off—

Plop.

A little water spilled onto the floor.

She froze.

Staring at the floor.

"...eh."

I grabbed a small towel from the shoe rack.

"Here."

She accepted it with both hands.

"Thank you."

She began wiping the small floor of the genkan with absolute seriousness.

Her movements were extremely careful.

As if wiping too hard would damage the floor.

I hung my wet jacket near the window.

Yuna was still wiping the floor.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"There is a lot of water."

"That is because you jumped into a large puddle."

She stopped for a moment.

Then said quietly,

"...but it was fun."

"Yes."

She gave a small nod.

Then sneezed.

"—achoo."

She immediately covered her mouth with the towel.

---

I looked at her.

"Your body temperature is dropping."

"...I am fine."

"Hm."

She sneezed again.

"—achoo."

I walked toward the bathroom.

"We are taking a bath."

Yuna lifted her head.

"...now?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Rainwater is not clean water."

She thought for a moment.

"...oh."

She stood up.

Still holding the towel.

Her wet hair clung to her cheeks.

As she walked past me toward the bathroom, she said quietly,

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"My hair is cold."

"Because it is wet."

She stopped for a moment in front of the bathroom door.

Her hand touched her own hair.

"...so much water."

"Yes."

I opened the bathroom door.

A small room with a shower in the corner.

The cold dampness radiating from our wet bodies made the air inside feel even more humid.

---

Yuna stood at the door.

Still looking at the shower.

As if thinking about something.

Then she said,

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"Do families..."

She paused for a second.

"...usually bathe together?"

I looked at her.

"No."

She blinked.

"...they don't?"

"They do not."

She looked slightly confused.

"But on TV... they do."

I waited for her to continue.

She held up one finger.

"In anime."

Then a second finger.

"In soap commercials."

She thought for a moment.

"...my classmates said so, too."

I answered briefly.

"Television is not a reliable source of data."

---

Yuna stared at the shower again.

Water was still dripping from her hair.

Then she spoke very quietly.

"...I have never."

I looked at her.

"Never what?"

She kept her eyes glued to the bathroom floor.

"...taken a shower by myself."

---

Chapter 60: Information from Television

---

I stared at Yuna for a few seconds.

Water was still dripping from her hair.

She had not changed out of her uniform yet.

A few drops fell onto the bathroom floor.

"...I have never taken a shower by myself."

I answered briefly.

"Now you will learn."

She looked at the shower.

Then looked back at me.

"...by myself?"

"Yes."

She appeared to be thinking hard.

Her hands were still gripping the edge of the towel.

"...what if the soap gets in my eyes?"

"Rinse them."

"...what if the water is too hot?"

"Turn it to the left."

"...what if it is too cold?"

"Turn it to the right."

She fell silent again.

---

It seemed she was processing the information one piece at a time.

Then she spoke again,

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"What if I fall?"

"The floor is not slippery."

She looked down at the bathroom floor.

Then shuffled her foot slightly.

Testing it.

"...it is a little slippery."

"A little."

She stared at the shower again.

Then stared at me.

"...did Papa shower by yourself when you were little?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I do not remember."

She tilted her head.

"...weird."

"Why?"

"Because usually on TV... families bathe together."

I let out a small sigh.

"Television often oversimplifies reality."

She did not look like she understood that sentence.

But she kept trying to explain.

"In the anime I watch... the father helps wash their hair."

She raised her hands.

As if demonstrating.

"Then the child says, 'thank you, Papa.'"

I remained silent.

She continued.

"And it is like that in soap commercials, too."

She pointed at her own hair.

"The father helps rinse it."

I answered briefly.

"That is a commercial."

---

Yuna looked at me.

"...so it is a lie?"

"Not always."

"But not always true."

She thought for a moment.

Then said quietly,

"...my friend said so, too."

"Which friend?"

"Miho."

She twisted the end of the towel in her hands.

"She said when she was little, she would often bathe with her papa."

I asked,

"When she was little?"

"Yes."

She stared at me.

"...I am still little, too."

I did not answer immediately.

---

Yuna stood quietly at the bathroom door.

Water was still dripping from her hair.

Then she spoke in a very small voice.

"...Papa."

"Hm."

"...if I shower by myself..."

She stopped.

"...I am scared the soap will get in my eyes."

I looked at her.

Her expression was not dramatic.

She was not crying.

She merely looked hesitant.

Like someone who had never tried something before.

She added quickly,

"...Papa doesn't need to help."

I waited for her next sentence.

"...Papa just has to... stay right there."

She pointed to the corner of the bathroom.

"So if I do it wrong... Papa will know."

I shook my head slightly.

"No."

My answer was too fast.

Yuna blinked.

"...I can't?"

"No."

She stared at the bathroom floor.

A few seconds of silence.

Then she said quietly,

"...oh."

There was no drama.

There was no crying.

She simply gripped her towel tighter.

And looked at the shower again.

As if trying to decide whether she was truly brave enough to shower by herself.

---