

Graduation

Based on the story of Brother's Keeper by Julie Lee

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It was my last day of school here. My heart ached at the thought of leaving this place I've come to know so well behind me. Despite this, I felt a strange sense of accomplishment, of nostalgia to when my biggest dream was simply to go to school, graduate if I was truly lucky. After Youngsoo's death, I guess my mother took pity on my desperation. I doubt she would make the same decision again, I like to think it a miracle that she allowed me to attend in the spur of the moment. I remember that excitement, that pure joy over the fact that she actually said yes, that she would be letting me go to school.

I smiled at the memory, but my heart panged again at the reminder of Youngsoo. A frown creased my face and my eyebrows knitted together. *I missed him.* I missed his laugh, his childish innocence that was forced to leave him too quickly. I missed those quiet moments when we didn't have to say anything to be happy or to understand each other. *I wonder what he would be like if he was still here.* He would probably still find contentment in his old hobby of fishing, maybe even pursue it further in his life. He would still be at school, just a few years behind me.

Youngsoo was the one who was supposed to be here, to continue his schooling. I would have never gotten the opportunity to even see the light of day about it from my mother if he didn't have to meet that unfair fate. I'm doing this all for him, continuing what he couldn't. Maybe Mom has realized that at some point too, maybe she doesn't resent me anymore.

I shook myself from my thoughts, I can think about that later. My last class droned on, but a part of me listened so intently and remembered every word, just so I can reflect on them

later when I'm in the isolation of my room. I guess that's the 12 year old me's determination for a chance at school striving onward. She would be proud of who I am today.

Before I could doze off more, the bell ringing that I would normally find annoying started screaming in my ears. *It's done.* It was a bittersweet thought, but I said my goodbyes to my friends that would be moving back to their hometowns after today. I packed up my things from my classes and left the entrance doors.

I briskly walked to my temporary living place to pack up the rest of my things, as I had to leave soon to catch the train back to Busan. I had packed most of my belongings the night before, knowing that I might stall to get just a little more time in this place. It wasn't a nice home, more like a cheap shelter to stay in while I was away from my actual home. The walls were basically caving in but strangely enough I found more comfort here than I had at home with my family.

I arrived at the train station late in the night, the freezing wind pinching at my face and tossing my hair relentlessly in every direction. On the whole walk there I had been contemplating what I should first say to my parents when I arrive back there. I remembered the smooth polished floors of the home and the patch of land behind the dwelling where me and mom would wash the family clothes together. I remembered all those moments with Youngsoo while he was sick.

When I saw the train after another long while of walking, I faintly thought back to the last time I rode a train into Busan. It had been from a different location, but the memory still stood. The image of the people falling off the top of the train and being run over was still burned into my mind. Not letting myself spare another moment stalling, I forced my feet to move into the open doors. The train was incredibly full, but a small seat near the doors remained vacant. I sat down on the plastic and put my bag on the ground, visibly relaxing with the burden off my shoulders. *Finally, here we go.*