I'm My Parents' Only Worry

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Rui Xin

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To my parents - love of my life.

Just An Intro

When my parents told me they were thinking about adopting a baby, they were both sixty-two.

They said it casually, over an ordinary conversation, as if they were discussing groceries or the weather. I laughed at first. A loud, uncontrollable laugh.

Adoption? Hold on—you guys are serious?

That laugh sits at the end of this book, but it also sits at its beginning. Because to understand why two aging parents would consider starting over, you first have to understand what it means to be their only worry.

I was born under China's one-child policy, into a generation shaped by absence. No siblings. No backups. No second chances. If you were born a girl instead of a boy, survival itself felt like an achievement. I lived—but I grew up knowing that my existence carried weight, expectations, and unspoken fear.

This book is not only my story. It is a record of a generation raised to be careful, obedient, and strong in silence. A generation taught to lower its head, keep the peace, and sacrifice the weakest part of itself for stability. There is an old China that taught us these rules. There is a new China that promises freedom without explaining its cost. Between the two, we learned to endure.

Through these chapters, I trace a life shaped by that tension:

Growing up lonely, because loneliness was the price of being "enough."

Being told—endlessly—that education mattered more than anything else.

Learning to divide work into "poor jobs" and "rich jobs," and people into winners and disappointments.

Leaving home to go abroad, believing distance might bring clarity.

Getting sick, and discovering that the body keeps truths the mind avoids.

Entering marriage the Chinese way—practical, silent, heavy with compromise.

Finding a voice through writing, almost by accident.

Becoming an immigrant, and watching how some people leave their homeland but never leave their time.

Facing inherited wealth, inherited trauma, inherited duty.

Reaching the moment where the question of children returns—not as policy, but as choice.

And finally, fighting for something rare and dangerous: true freedom.

Along the way, there are photographs of my childhood—small moments wrapped in culture, history, and expectation. There are memories of being mistaken for a high school student on my master's graduation day, of strangers congratulating me for a youth I was already outgrowing. There are observations about Asian restraint, about the habit of pretending not to care as a survival strategy—the Chinese way of saying I don't give a shit when caring too much would break you.

I have seen too many immigrants who moved west in the 1980s and stayed there forever—mentally, emotionally—unchanged, frozen in the moment they left. This book is not about nostalgia. It is about movement. About asking, again and again, how a woman chooses her life when history keeps choosing for her.

At around twenty thousand words, this is not a grand autobiography. It is a quiet accounting. A daughter looking back at her parents. A generation looking at itself. A question passed from old hands to younger ones.

And at the end, the laughter returns.

Because sometimes, when life becomes too heavy with meaning, the only honest response is to laugh—and then keep going.

Chapter 1.
I Was Just a Little Brat

A lot of things in life take their time.

Growing up, for example.

Becoming a person doesn't happen overnight. It's slow, awkward, and full of trial and error. Maybe that's why being a child is so hard — and why we come into this world crying at the top of our lungs. It's not drama. It's honesty.

According to family legend, my story started with tears long before I was born.

When my mother was pregnant, my father and my grandmother apparently issued her a "warning." They told her that if the baby turned out to be a girl, they didn't want it.

Yes. Didn't want it.

This was enough to scare my mother half to death. Night after night, she had nightmares. And in every single dream, she was certain of one thing: the baby was a girl.

Turns out, she was right.

Luckily for me, my father didn't follow through on his so-called threat. Not even close. Instead of abandoning me, he adored me to an almost ridiculous degree. Every day

after work, without fail, he would come straight to my crib just to play with me, talk to me, and make silly faces.

The only problem?

I loved playing too — just not on his schedule.

By the time he got home, I was usually fast asleep. And instead of letting me rest, he would grab my tiny feet and start playing with them like they were toys. Naturally, I would wake up screaming like a fire alarm.

At that point, my father would throw up his hands, stomp off to my mother, and complain dramatically:

"See? This is what happens when you have a daughter. All she does is cry. Completely useless."

To be fair — and this is something I only understood much later — my father wasn't entirely wrong. Not about the crying, but about the world he was speaking from.

Back then, women didn't exactly have it easy. They faced discrimination both at home and at work. Many people still carried ideas straight out of ancient philosophy, especially Confucius' greatest hits. You know the ones — like "A woman's lack of talent is her virtue."

Lovely.

As a baby, of course, I didn't care about any of that. I had food. I had milk. Life was simple. And without even realizing it, I grew a little taller, a little stronger, a little louder.

Once I learned how to walk — and then run — I became unstoppable.

I had a pair of small red shoes that I absolutely loved. I would put them on and run and run and run, as if the world had only just begun. Everything felt new. Everything felt possible. The future didn't exist yet — only the joy of movement, the thrill of going forward.

That innocence didn't last long.

My grandmother and my maternal grandparents were, how should I put this gently... extremely biased. Whenever there were snacks, treats, or anything remotely good in the house, it always went to my cousin first.

Always.

And to make matters worse, my own parents often went along with it.

Even as a child, I found this deeply unfair. I didn't know words like inequality or resentment, but I knew one thing very clearly: I was not okay with this.

So I rebelled.

In my own small, creative ways.

Whenever we visited relatives or family friends, I would immediately go into reconnaissance mode. While adults were chatting, I was busy searching for food. No hesitation. No guilt. I didn't care about rules or manners — first I identified the target.