

MIRA COMES HOME

Mira Comes Home

Mira goes on a road trip without the girls. She's gonna visit her parents for the first time in five years. Meanwhile, Rumi and Zoey are planning something on the phone...

At the time of day when Seoul looks like night, Mira heads down fifty floors to the bottom level. There, standing alone in her polar bear pajamas, the exact ones Celine had given her when she first moved in, she opens her mailbox. Slipping out of the hatch, the fifth rejected envelope this week lands in her hand.

Mira takes those untouched millions of won up the elevator to the penthouse. In her private room, she tosses the new envelope onto the other four. The address of her childhood home repeats five times across her desk in her handwriting.

Mira unplugs her phone and checks the weather. It's going to rain in the evening. The polar bear in her sweater frowns.

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As gold rises from the mountains in the distance, Mira counts up the total with her fingers. It would have been more than enough to pay off several thousands of accumulated debts.

Mira clicks into her contacts. Bobby's near the top of the list. It takes a dozen separate calls before Bobby finally picks up the phone.

Clamping the phone between her shoulder and ear, Mira says, "Morning, Bobby."

Pre-coffee Bobby says back, "Mira? Why are you calling me at 6 AM?" He groans. "It's vacation. Go to bed."

Before Bobby drops the call, Mira tells him, "I'm taking the car."

Bobby clears his throat, or maybe the connection blips.

"Uh, with the girls?" he asks.

Mira says, "No."

"Where are you going?" he asks.

Mira says, "Nowhere."

She slides a hand across her desk to push the envelopes together, but two of them end up falling to the floor.

"It's none of your business, really," she tells Bobby. "I'll be back soon, so don't worry. But I'm still asking. Can I take the car?"

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“Uh, you know you can always take it,” Bobby sighs. “I mean, I guess I do appreciate you telling me, but did you really need to ask?”

Mira shifts the phone to her other ear.

“I’m asking you like you’re my dad,” Mira says.

“Well, that’s”—Bobby yawns—“a statement.”

“I meant it in a good way, Bobby,” Mira says. “Thanks.”

Right when she picks up the fallen envelopes, her phone drops to the floor.

Mira drives with glasses on instead of contacts. She has one arm on the wheel and the other against the open window. In the passenger’s seat next to her sits a duffel bag carrying the five envelopes addressed to her family. The car passes through street corners, tight turns decorated with potted plants and utility poles. The other day, she could’ve been waving at passersby walking to the morning markets. Today, her eyes stick to the quiet road.

Maybe the house is gonna look the same. The house, the big house, her family, the sour faces they had up to when she moved out for good. She was eight at that party. She had to wear that fancy dress so her

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dad could impress some guy. She couldn't stand still when her mom grabbed her to pin the buttons on. Everyone tried washing out her red hair dye—the water bill was huge—but it stuck.

Mira smiles a little in the car. She's worn better dresses now. She's *made* better dresses now. If her parents found out what she wore to the Met Gala last year...

Little Mira couldn't take the food. The lights shone too brightly—not the way concerts look, more like staring at the sun. Walking over velvet floors, Mira's father yanked her arm towards the front desk of the most expensive restaurant they had ever visited—nothing her parents could ever afford.

She's been to better restaurants now. Way better restaurants now. She only goes to them with the girls. Food feels so much better when you're around people you love.

Her mom and dad forced little Mira into the seat at the round table. Kicking, she told her parents, I'm not hungry, but they scowled at her and pressed her down. When the plates arrived, she called again, I'm not hungry! Her stomach was hurting. The sparkling lights burned. If she put her hands on the table, her mother slapped her. When Mira's father

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grabbed her chopsticks and started forcing stuff in her mouth—what it was, she can't remember—she screamed and shot her arms out, and a dozen glasses of wine stained the tablecloth deep red.

In the car, Mira grips the wheel harder.

Her family sauntered out of the restaurant while Mira cried. Her mother scolded her, clenching her hand as she pulled her along. She whispered something to her brother that Mira couldn't hear. He whispered back. Mira couldn't hear.

Her father never got that promotion. He didn't last long at that company.

They locked Mira out of the house that night. It was the first time she had to sleep outside, alone. It took all of their savings to pay for their loaned suits and dresses, the ones that made them look rich, look professional, for just one moment.

In the car, Mira tells herself that it's not their fault.

Noon. Clear skies this summer. Mira's driving a little faster on an empty road when Zoey's bar from *How It's Done* starts rumbling from her phone.

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Her eyes fixed on the horizon, Mira taps the screen, sees the dash light up, and says, “Hello?”

“Mira!” Zoey shouts.

Her voice crackles from the bad reception.

“Mira! Where you at?” Zoey asks.

“I’m, uh,” Mira starts. “Heading to my parents’ house in... Hannam.”

“Ooh, that’s fancy!” Zoey says.

In the background, the faint hiss of cooking buzzes through the speaker.

“Not as fancy as the penthouse, though,” Mira says.

“Duh, I guess?” Zoey laughs. “Get us something when you get back! I already miss you!”

“Relaaax, I’ll do it!” Mira drawls. “But I’ll make it a surprise. Got it?”

This is the way she talks when her voice is smiling but her face doesn’t follow.

“Okaaayy!” Zoey says back. “See ya soo—”

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Mira ends the call before Zoey can say anything more. The sun glares through the windows like the chandeliers at the restaurant she can barely remember.

Mira also misses the turn to Hannam. After all, her family doesn't live there.

Mira parks the car and steps out for some fresh air and a choco pie. In front of her is the high school where she met Rumi. Mira had been seeing that lavender braid on her living room TV since she was a little kid. It's Rumi, she was thinking, the most famous girl in the whole school—maybe every school in the country.

“You see that girl, Mira,” her mother told her once, while she was watching TV.

Rumi stared into the camera.

Shoulders straight.

Mira said, Yeah.

“You should be like her,” her mother told her once.

Mira said, Okay.

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“Be *nice* like her,” her mother hissed. “It will make your life easier. Please.”

The two girls were in the same year. Rumi was just a couple months older. The whole country knew about Rumi’s voice and her dead mom, how she was pop star royalty born for fame. Only Mira saw how the princess had to hide under that hoodie every time she tried scooting through the cafeteria.

Nepo baby.

She saw Rumi in person for the first time at an after-school talent show. They rejected Mira’s audition, so she watched Rumi from the darkness of the crowd.

Even back then, Rumi managed to stand under that expensive spotlight, microphone in hand, and—just like that—hit an A5.

And held it.

Without screaming.

It was the same note that her mother would hit, when she was still alive.

Mira stood with all her classmates whose auditions also got rejected.

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One of them whispered to Mira, “Check out that *nepo baby*.” She whispered, “That’s Mi-yeong Ryu’s daughter. Did you know she doesn’t have a dad?” She giggled. “No one knows who her dad is. Have you heard anything about that?”

Mira didn’t say anything.

“Let’s jump her,” another classmate cut in. “She’s the last act for tonight.” He said, “We’ll go backstage and *get* her.”

The other kids in the group snickered. Mira didn’t say anything.

The lights in the gymnasium barely lit up the group creeping backstage.

“Heyy, Rumiii!” her classmates chanted under their breaths. “You must be sooo sad when your mom died...”

Mira didn’t say anything.

“Is your dad picking you up?” her classmates chanted. “Ohh, you don’t have one?”

They kept going, fists raised.

“You must be an *accident*,” they said. “So we’re gonna...”

And right as Rumi’s braid came into view—

Slam!

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Mira's classmates went down in a single swing.

"I'm gonna smash your face in!" Mira sneered. Kicking at the coaches who were trying to pull her back, she yelled, "You do *not* make fun of someone for who they came from!"

The amount of times Mira got in trouble—for punching someone's face whenever they called Rumi names—might as well be the same amount as the strands of her pigtails.

Rumi locked eyes with Mira before running away. They didn't talk for a while.

While Rumi sang, Mira danced—the only thing she could get good at, she thought. Even after that backstage incident, the two had only glanced at each other. While practicing in the gym, making big turns, Mira would say to herself, You should be like her.

I'm gonna dance, she would tell herself, snapping her arms out. I'll sign up for the auditions, and I'll get out there, and I'll make a name for myself.

She often stayed in after school, though, whether it was because she knocked another kid's teeth out for calling her a homo, or because her parents were home.

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“If you keep this up, you’re going to get arrested!” Mira’s mom had yelled at her once. “We can’t afford to let you have a criminal record, Mira!”

At the car, Mira’s eaten half of her choco pie. The crumbs fall onto the pavement while the AC starts up.

To Mira, Rumi never looked rich, despite living under a former Sunlight Sister. The way she wore a hood all the time, covering herself up. The way she’d immediately leave after class.

Mira did manage to nab an audition from Rumi—just not for a talent show. Rumi slipped Celine’s phone number into Mira’s hand when the latter went in for detention. Mira watched Rumi’s back as she walked down the hall, but she had to stay extra for failing to sit down right away.

At some point, she started acting out so she wouldn’t have to go home. At least she had Celine’s number by then.

But her mom threw a hand mirror at Mira’s head when she found out.

“You don’t know what you’re doing!” she yelled at her daughter as the latter was entering the house. “A life like that isn’t stable. You can’t live like that!”

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When Mira stepped onto the living room carpet, her mother yanked her backpack off her and slammed it to the ground. She swiped the card from Mira's hand and crushed it.

Her mother yelled, "What are you gonna do, have a five-year-career before some other girl replaces you?" She yelled, "You think they'll want you forever? Are you gonna be dancing and singing when you're old like me?"

Mira covered her head and ran through the kitchen, and her mother shouted, "Are you gonna go sleep with a producer?" She shouted, "Are you gonna have *anyone* take care of you when someone like that gets you pr—"

As Mira headed up the stairs, her mother screamed, "Look at us, Mira! Look at your father! He has nothing because of you. Your brother. Look at your brother. He's at least *trying*." She yelled, "*You* have no future, Mira. You don't even *want* one. You're not doing *anything*." She yelled, "Mira, I can't keep cleaning up after you!"

The locked door of Mira's room muffled her words.

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Mira sticks her hand out and sees raindrops pool in her palm, so she throws away the choco pie wrapper and hops back into her car. Then she pulls the switches to close all the windows.

Before continuing her drive, Mira stretches her arms and cracks her fingers before grabbing her phone. She clicks into the five-year-old group chat called... “REAL FAM!”.

Mira’s eyebrow twitches, but she smirks. Maybe Zoey picked it. Just this morning, it was called “SURVIVORS!! 🔥 ✨,” and it’s been that way since they formed the new Honmoon. Zoey’s always been the one changing the name whenever she feels like it.

Today, the chat’s called “REAL FAM!”.

“Real Fam,” Mira mumbles, chuckling and rolling her eyes at no one.

Mira looks at the bottom of the chat. In small, grey text, it reads: “Group name last changed at 8:44 AM...”

“... By *Rumi*,” she says.

Scrolling up, Mira finds texts from her girlfriends that read: “Image was unsent. Image was unsent. Message was unsent. Image was...”

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Mira sees a text from Zoey that reads, “are mira’s glasses fake or real? idk like she wears contacts sometimes so idk if theyre fake rn but like whats her prescription right? Rumi do u know? Im at the store rn don’t let me buy the wrong thing lol.”

Right as Mira reads it, it turns into: “Message was unsent.”

Mira smiles. “What the heck, guys,” she laughs to herself.

But she stops. She stops for a while.

Then she finds herself swiping to her contacts. She swipes to the tab for blocked accounts. Aside from spam numbers, her mom and dad’s contacts are on that list.

Mira stares at the two entries. Then, one by one, she clicks on them, scrolls to the bottom, and hits the red button that says, “Unblock.”

She squeezes her phone in her hand for a moment before putting it down on the dash.

The rainstorm gets stronger as she gets back to driving.

Her old school’s far behind her now, but on the road, Mira’s gripping the wheel hard with both hands.

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Her family sold Mira's entire wardrobe to send her to a hagwon. They didn't do the same for her brother, who passed on his first try.

A life like that isn't stable.

Just don't think about it.

Mira wrote those words down in the corners of her notebooks.

On the last day of school, Mira stared down at the score stamped on her CSAT. Rumi had perfect marks, but she didn't look at her classmate at first. Mira's a tough girl. Mira could beat her up if she looked at her wrong. But Rumi could see her. It was the first time she saw fear in that tough girl's face.

Rumi tugged at the strings of her hoodie and hid under its shadow.

At first, Rumi went to Mira's house—Celine drove her—but she took no more than a step towards the front door when she turned around and ran down the street. It was raining that night.

Even now, under the roof of the car, Mira can still feel that rain on her face.

It was raining when Rumi caught up to Mira and found her sitting on the curb a couple blocks down. Water soaked Rumi's hood and started

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bleeding through the spare she was offering to the other girl. Mira was shivering in the rain with her head and arms exposed.

“Please take it,” Rumi said.

Buzz off, Mira growled.

“You’re going to get sick,” Rumi said. “I heard you sneezing down the street.”

I said buzz off, Mira growled, along with her stomach.

Rumi stared down at Mira on the curb for a good while. Rain poured around them in circles.

Rumi thought for a bit, before finally telling her, “We have spicy food at my place.”

The two teenagers stared at each other before they both started sneezing.

After Mira’s name got wiped from the school roster, she stayed at Rumi and Celine’s place for a day. That night, Mira put on her polar bear pajamas for the first time. For dinner, Mira and Rumi were feasting on Sunlight Sisters ramyeon when Mira told her.

Why can’t I be like you? she asked.

Rumi took a sip and didn’t look at her.

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How do you make it so easy? Mira asked.

“It’s not easy,” Rumi said back.

Yes, it is! Mira yelled. You make it look that way.

Mira slurped up a ton of noodles. Rumi looked down at the broth in her cup.

Slowly, she asked the other girl, “Do you think I wanna be like this?”

Celine’s not kicking you out, is she? Mira spat.

Rumi blinked. “*What?*”

The two girls sat silent for a moment.

“You know, you can... stay here?” Rumi said. “Move in with us?”

Mira scoffed. She said, Oh, you’re being nice to me? Rumi, my own family doesn’t want me around. She said, You’re gonna have me make a mess here.

The girl dumped a dozen packets of chili powder into her ramyeon. It was themed after Celine—the label called her “Spice Queen”—but it tasted like nothing.

Rumi pinched the chopsticks hard between her fingers.

“Mira,” Rumi snapped, “*I like you.*”

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Mira's chopsticks splashed into her ramyeon cup.

Rumi said, "I've been looking up to you since"—she paused.

"Since I saw you dancing in the gym."

Mira blinked behind her glasses.

You *watched* me? Mira said.

"I... don't have a lot of friends," Rumi mumbled.

I can see that, Mira sneered.

Rumi frowned. Her and Celine's place was in the middle of nowhere, where she'd spend entire afternoons slicing dummies. *And* she couldn't drive. Even in the present time, only Mira has a license.

Rumi shook her head.

"Like," she told Mira, "you're the only one whose phone number and address I know?"

Keep going, Mira said.

Rumi told her, "I know it's... weird. Look, Celine can teach you, and then you can get your GED that way."

We can have Celine give me a lifetime supply of ramyeon, and then I can bum off of you that way, Mira said.

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“I’m being serious,” Rumi said. “Stay with us. We were planning to have me do homeschooling anyway.”

No way, Mira laughed. Aren’t you about to graduate? You’re just gonna throw away your future like that?

“It’s not important,” she sighed. “I just—I just thought I should let you know,” Rumi said, “that I want you to be the first one to join my group.”

Mira blinked. Your group, she said.

“My group,” Rumi repeated. “Celine’s got us covered.”

Stirring the noodles in her cup, Mira said, You mean like pop stars.

“You can come up with the dances,” Rumi said. “And I *know* you can sing.”

Okay, Mira said. You believe in me that much.

Rumi threw her hands up and said, “Yes! I’ve seen you on stage!”

Mira pulled her cup to her face and took in a *big* gulp of broth.

So, how’s the rent? she teased.

Rumi said, “I can just help you move out—”

No, Mira cut in.

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Her voice sliced through the air like a lance.

Rumi said, “Mira, it’s not a prob—”

I said *NO*, Mira pressed. I’ll do it on my own. Her glasses crooked, she demanded, *Don’t* follow me.

Rumi had her hands folded on the table. She slipped them towards herself before dropping them under. An invisible hood shielded her from the other girl’s glare.

In the end, Mira told her, You don’t want to know what it’s like to get hit the way they do me. Alright?

Leaning to the side so she could look past Rumi, Mira lifted her cup of ramyeon by the open part and shook it around.

Hey, lady, Mira called to the back, are these expired?

An older woman’s voice echoed from the kitchen.

“It’s ramyeon,” Celine replied. “It can’t expire.”

On the road, Mira’s rolled up the windows. Rain drizzles onto the glass as she drives slower over the slippery roads. Right as the wheels hit a bump—

LIKE I’M BORN TO BE~!

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–Rumi’s high note from *Golden* blasts out of her phone.

Mira taps it and forces out her voice.

“Hey!” she starts.

Barely audible in the speaker, Rumi says back, “Hey.”

With the window-wipers flapping side-to-side and the mist so thick she can’t see a car-length away, Mira doesn’t connect the call to the car radio.

“The reception here sucks,” Mira says. “Sorry if I cut out.”

“Where *are* you?” Rumi asks.

“I’m fine,” Mira grunts. “I just passed by our old school.”

The connection blips out for a bit.

“–re you visiting your parents?” Rumi asks.

Mira turns the wheel and splashes through a puddle. The car almost slips.

Louder, to drown out the rain, Mira says, “Zoey didn’t tell you?”

“No,” Rumi groans. “She’s too busy watching turtles on TikTok.”

She laughs while Mira grins.

“I hope she can save some couch time for me!” she says, cold in the car with the heater not running fast enough.

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The car rolls down the road for three blocks of silence. At first Mira thinks, maybe her phone died. She had accidentally left the charger in the lower compartment. There's nowhere to park. She just imagines Rumi's phone with the timer ticking past minutes of silence. Her one hand supporting it might drop it onto her face.

Mira's tires splash through another large puddle.

"What," Mira grunts.

She hears shuffling coming from the half-volume speaker.

"Rumi. Ugh," Mira groans. "Look, you can say it. I've already made up my mind."

"It's okay," Rumi tells her. "You already know."

Mira's forehead grows hot.

"I miss you," Rumi says. "I'll see you home tonight?"

Mira taps her fingers on the wheel.

"Bye," she says.

She passes by another block of silence.

Then, "Bye," Rumi says back.

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As the car approaches her district, Mira's rehearsing her words. She'll button up right. She'll keep her glasses straight. She'll check for any creases on the five envelopes inside her bag. She'll check her GED too, that it has no tears. That it has her name on it. On the road with the clouds getting thicker, there's no time for her to open each envelope and re-count the won inside.

Walking slowly so she won't trample the flowers, Mira's gonna climb up those steps for the first time in five years. She's gonna open the door, and the first person she'll see is her mother.

Hey, Mom, she'll say.

Her mother will be standing at the door. They'll see each other face-to-face. Maybe her mom has greying hair by now.

How's my brother doing? Mira will ask her. And—I finally got enough to pay things off for us. I'm serious! You guys can take it easy now.

She'll smile. She'll try to smile.

You've been watching me on TV, right? she'll ask. Everyone loves us! Huntrix is taking the whole country by storm—the whole world! I made a name for myself, Mom.

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Mira will say, I know I've been a bad kid my whole life. But I finally got it together. You saw me on TV, Mom. We saved the world. My girlfriends take care of me. They made me better, Mom. I'm not *that* much of a mess anymore.

Then she'll bring out her degree and hold it with two hands to show her.

I got my GED! she'll tell her. I worked so hard for it.

I got my GED, Mom.

I got my GED.

Mira mulls the words over in the car. But after hitting a bump on the road, she slaps her head.

Called a problem child 'cause I got too wild, but now that's how I'm getting paid!

Shoot! She literally dissed her family during the *Golden MV*. They had to have heard it. They had to have *seen* it.

Mira turns on the headlights and keeps driving with her nose scrunched up.

“Uuuuuuuughh,” she groans.

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Mira's trying to convince herself that her parents deserve better than this. That it's not their fault. She's trying to convince herself that it's not their fault that she's the problem child. That she ended up like this. She tells herself, they need to know that it's not their fault. The words turn cyclones in her mind.

She parks the car under some trees to shield herself from the storm. Then she hops out of the car, duffel bag over her shoulder and baseball cap pressed on her head.

She buttons up right. She keeps her glasses straight. She skips checking the creases on the envelopes so they don't get wet from the rain. Same with her GED. She simply crosses her fingers, that fortune will clean it all up.

She walks slowly, approaching the door of her childhood home. She doesn't trample any flowers, because there are none. She looks down at the pavement, glossy from the rain. Her hair's still red. Her makeup's not runny. She looks good.

She climbs the steps, one by one. The wood's more creaky than it used to be. The house, too—it's smaller compared to the growth spurt she got after she left.

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Mira gets right up to the door. She reels back a little, to take a big breath. She balls her hand into a fist. Then she closes her eyes and raps five times against the door.

She steps back. Sheets of raindrops as plentiful as the won in her bag crash around her. Nothing happens.

She thinks about moving closer to press her ear against the door. She thinks about hopping to the windows to see if anyone's inside. But she remains still as her breaths fog up her glasses. The same glasses she grew up with.

Mira rolls her shoulders and takes another deep breath. As she turns away, she takes another look at the door before closing her eyes and going down one step.

But right before she gets back onto the path, the door behind her opens.

Mira stops. She turns around. The awning covers only half of her, so a quarter of the duffel bag's getting soaked by the rain, and her bare shoulders shiver.

Mira's mother is standing at the open door.

Mira blinks. Her tongue's dry.

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Here's the face she hasn't seen in five years.

Mira says, "Oh, I..." She says, "I figured no one was home."

Her mother looks back at her with an empty face. Disheveled grey locks cover her head.

Mira asks her, "How've you been?"

Her mother says nothing back.

"I"—Mira starts—"I. You look good."

She nods at her mom. Still nothing.

"How's my brother?" Mira asks. "How's Dad? I—I mean."

Her tongue's parched.

"I finally... I finally got enough to pay everything off. I"—she stutters—"You saw me on TV right? You—you know, right?"

Her mother stares back at her with nothing in her face.

"Everyone... loves us," Mira says. "Huntrix is..."

Her glasses get crooked.

"I—I know I've been bad my whole life, like—I got," she says, "I got it together, Mom. I'm better. I—my girlfriends made me better."

When Mira takes a step forward, her mother takes a step back.

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“No—wait, wait!” Mira says. “I promise you, Mom, I’m not a mess... I’m not a mess anymore. I’m not... Look.”

She snaps open her bag so hard the zipper almost flies off. With her sweating fingers, she scavenges through the papers inside before pulling out her certificate.

“Mom,” she begs, “Mom, I got my GED.”

Her mother winces, stepping back farther.

“Mom, Mom!” Mira begs, “I got my GED!”

But the door slams in her face. The lock clicks.

And the walls of her childhood home muffle her cries.

In the evening, at the worst this rainstorm can get, Mira’s sitting on the curbside a couple blocks down, the same place where Rumi found her on the street to change her life. She’s thrown the soaked duffel bag back onto the passenger’s seat like a wet kimbap.

Mira holds her head in her hands. The round lenses of her golden glasses fog up from the mist, and her head grows hotter and hotter.

Then she grabs her glasses by their handles and slams them to the ground. She screams to no one before rising to her feet and crushing her

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glasses with her boot. The lenses shatter and explode in a million directions.

She sits back down on the curb. Cold and shivering, kicked out of the house again.

Then—

Took blood, sweat, and tears, to look natural—uh—

Mira rips her phone out of her pocket and accepts the video call. It rings for a bit before Rumi and Zoey appear, fighting for space in the frame.

“Heyyy, Mira!” they say together. “What’s up!”

Mira shuts her camera off before the video fully loads.

“Oh, um,” she says, “I’m about to come back.”

Zoey smiles a dopey smile. She yells, “You are!?! Great! I got us a *bunch* of food for when you come back!”

Rumi elbows her and says, “Hey, don’t spoil the surprise!”

Mira shifts the phone to her other hand.

“Yeah,” she mumbles. “I miss you guys.”

On video, Zoey gets up close and whispers something to Rumi’s ear. Rumi whispers something back, and the two are giggling.

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“Hey, Mira,” Rumi asks, “why don’t you video us?”

“Yeah!” Zoey says. “Come on, let’s see you!”

But Mira chokes up her words. She stares down at her two girlfriends smiling on her phone. She thinks about the stupid GC name that Rumi set this morning. She thinks about that stupid text, about Zoey trying to figure out how Mira’s glasses work and what to get her when she comes back.

Mira smiles. Mira tries to smile.

But Mira says, “No, I... I’m crying.”

She hits the red button and shuts off her phone.

Rumi and Zoey were the first people to ever hug Mira close. Every other time she’s been hugged, it was by her parents. It was to show off that their family was happy. It was to show off that they’ve fixed Mira, that things are getting better.

Rumi and Zoey have never done that. They’re not capable of that.

Mira rolls those thoughts around in her head.

Sitting on the curb, Mira’s head dips low into her crossed arms.

Through the mist, with headlights on, a car whirrs slowly, barely

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splashing through the puddles in the ground, before stopping just a little in front of her.

Mira looks up to see who's in the driver's seat. It's Bobby.

Then the doors in the back open. Rumi and Zoey, wearing hoodies and raincoats and bucket hats, step out and run up to Mira on the curb.

They dip down and hug her tight in their arms. The three of them are surrounded by rain and broken glass, but they're warm in this little place, the place that changed Mira's life.

Mira's tears soak into their shirts as she cries.

Rumi and Zoey bring Mira to the backseat. Mira sits with Rumi to her left and Zoey to her right, and they put a warm towel over her shoulders. She looks like a frowning polar bear.

With Bobby's car still parked, Zoey hops over the back. She pulls out a thermos full of 9 AM hot water from the trunk. Rumi also pulls out a cup of Spice Queen ramyeon from the side compartment and rips the top off.

"Now?" Mira says, sniffing. "Right here?"

Then she reels back and sneezes.

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“Sorry,” she mumbles.

They’re so close to her here, but Rumi’s and Zoey’s faces are totally blurred. The markings trailing around Rumi’s body glow rainbow in raindrop-smudged circles.

“Take it easy,” Rumi tells Mira.

Zoey jumps back and throws something out of the trunk again. Then she pulls out a new pair of rainbow glasses and fastens them onto Mira’s head. Everything’s still blurry for Mira, but her body’s finally warming up.

“Thanks,” Mira says.

She pulls her shoulders close to take up less space.

After filling up the ramyeon cup with hot water, Zoey leans her head against Mira’s shoulder.

“Mira,” Zoey starts, “I’m glad you didn’t, like... run away.”

Mira blows on the broth.

“You thought I was gonna do that?” she asks.

“No, no,” Rumi cuts in, waving her hand. “But we thought you were just going on a quick trip. I didn’t know it was gonna be like *this*.”

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Shaking Mira's arm with her hands so fast that the ramyeon almost spills, Zoey says, "We were scared!"

From the driver's seat, Bobby looks back at the three.

"Hey, yeah," he says. "Nothing wrong with a little trip. Things would have been a total disaster if you actually disappeared, though." He says, "I can't keep going without my girls."

Mira looks around at everyone's blurry but smiling, teary-eyed faces through her new dorky glasses.

Then Rumi taps Mira's leg.

"I'll take the car back," she says.

Mira's eye twitches.

"What?" she asks. "Since when did you get a license?"

Rumi pushes open the door and climbs out of the car. She leans down under the roof to look back at Mira, who's still sitting with a warm towel over her back and the spiciest, hottest ramyeon in her hands.

Winking, Rumi tells her, "I've had one since you taught me for the *Golden MV*."

M I R A C O M E S H O M E

Zoey cracks a pair of chopsticks in half and hands them to Mira. As Mira clicks them together and takes in the taste wafting up from the cup, she stops.

Celine's cartoon face stares at her.

Mira asks, "Are these expired?"

She looks at Rumi.

Rumi looks at Zoey.

And Zoey looks at Mira.

The three of them snicker.

"It's ramyeon," Rumi replied. "It *can't* expire."

Written over 24 August 2025 - 1 September 2025.

Edited by my partner Jane. Thank you for the proofreading, advice, and research!

[Annotated version](#) if you're interested in my thought process on writing this.