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Ashton sat down beside me and instinctively wrapped his arm around my shoulders. "Are you getting bullied, Summer?" he asked while looking at her.

"No, Daddy." Summer smiled and explained calmly, "Aunt Emery and Uncle Holden were just thinking of letting me tag along to learn how to do business from them."

Ashton nodded in understanding and asked, "What do you think then? Are you interested?"

Summer pursed her lips and looked like she was still undecided.

Ashton was extra patient. "You don't have to think about what others think. Just follow your heart. You're still young, so it doesn't really matter if you don't want to. If you want to continue learning, I'll support you."

"Thanks, Daddy." Summer seemed to have gotten some bravery from her father's words and smiled. "I've actually been thinking about doing business for quite a while now. I was just afraid that Daddy and Mommy won't agree to it."

Just as I thought, the girl was hiding so much from me, and I did not even realize. All I ended up doing was putting up a resigned smile. "Let's hear it then."

At that moment, Ashton raised his hand on my shoulder for a bit and placed it back down. It felt like he was comforting me, so I looked at him, only to find him with no reaction. Maybe I'm just thinking too much.

"I want to open a bar!" Summer told us.

"The largest one in the whole city!"

"A bar?" I blurted out before Ashton had a chance to speak. That prompted me to recall all the things that happened that rainy season.

This time, the pat on my shoulder was more apparent, so I could confirm that Ashton was indeed trying to comfort me. But this time, my eyes were glued to Summer, so I did not react to it.

Having lost her parents since young, Macy, me, and my grandmother relied on each other. Macy was like a seed that fell into a crack on the wall, living tenaciously while growing up. She worked hard and became the youngest bar owner in J City, casting her pride and dignity aside in the shady parts of the city to amass some hope for our future. In those dark days, Macy was my shining star.

Alas, fate was cruel to the Leeroy family, and she left us at the best time of her life.

Every time I thought about this, I could feel my heart constrict. It was suffocating.

So, at that moment, I was instantly engulfed in horror. I was afraid that Summer was going down the same path Macy did. Start a bar, become the owner, meet a selfish man, and regret it forever.

"Yes, Mommy." Summer's eyes were burning brilliantly with passion and sincerity. "I've been to quite a few of them with my friends when I was overseas and had always been fascinated by it. I wish to build something that's like a club. A place where we can maintain the atmosphere while still allowing for maximum privacy. A place for the customers to relax or talk about top secrets without worries. I did some research and found out that there aren't many bars like that in the country. So, it should be a great prospect."

"You little devil!" Emery was ecstatic after hearing Summer's proposal. "You really are something special! That's a bold idea! I like it! I'm in!"

On the other hand, Holden rested his head on his hand while leaning back on the sofa. He did not go against Emery and merely kept his eyes on Summer. It was apparent that he was scheming up a storm in his head with how he looked at the moment. With how Holden did things, he would surely hit Summer up when Emery was not looking if he was interested. Emery would not even know when and how she lost.

But that was all an afterthought as I only had Summer's intention in mind. I was more worried than anyone present, but I did not want to show it. So, I did my best to hold it in and kept my voice calm. "Summer, tell Mommy, besides liking it, is there any other reason why you would like to open a bar?"

When the question left my mouth, I instinctively clenched my fist. I was afraid that I might hear the answer in my head, that she knew.

About her past, about Macy, and about how she died.

That said, Summer remained smiling and looked at me innocently. There was not much change in her expression when she said, "Mommy. Isn't that enough? This is the only thing I like besides math. Can I do it?"

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At that moment, my sight became blurry, and I kept seeing Macy's face overlapping with Summer's. It was like time and space no longer bound me, and that person sitting in front of me was not Summer but Macy.

"A bar is challenging for a woman for sure, but aren't other jobs the same? Rather than working our lives away for someone else, let's work for ourselves. You know, Letty. I like that dreamy feeling under the flickering lights. It helps me forget about all my insecurities. And sometimes, I get to see people I missed."

That was what Macy said that convinced me.

Because she liked it, I supported her. Because she liked it, I sent her over to Jared. Because of all that, she never got to experience true love until the day she died. Even if everyone was safe, I still feel that thorn in my heart rooted there, unremovable.

There was a fog over my eyes, and I could no longer differentiate the real from the surreal. As a mother, I should be supportive of my children's dreams, but I could feel something weighing me down, forcing my mouth shut so I could not speak.

Maybe it's Macy. Maybe she and I have the same idea. I'm sure of it.

"Your mom and I understand."

Ashton's deep voice cut through my thoughts and snapped me out of them. The next second, he grabbed my hand and pulled it over, placing it on his lap as he fiddled with it.

"That said, you should know that opening up a bar is not an easy task. Disregarding the initial funding, those complicated under-the-table connections won't be easy to handle. Let Joseph gather some information first, and we can discuss it from there. Okay?"

Summer and Audrey were different. She was not as stubborn, so she was easier to talk to. "That will do."

"Alright." Ashton gave a faint response and said, "Since you're bored of staying at home, maybe you can plan out the project the company has at Wenville?"

"Of course I can," Summer replied with a smile. It was like nothing was going on in her life worth grieving. "But I would like Mr. Cress to help me. Will that be okay?"

Summer was referring to Jared. After he sent her back, Jared had rented a place in K City and would pay short visits to the kids every day.

"It's your project. So you decide." Ashton gave her the green light to anything she wanted. As he spoke, he pulled me up and headed to our room. "If you need anything, just ask Joseph."

"Got it. Thanks, Daddy. Good night, Mommy."

"Good night," I replied in a daze, with a voice that was no louder than a kitten's while I let Ashton drag my body up the stairs.

When we got to our room, he locked it and took me into the bathroom, where he undressed me without uttering a single word.

Facing each other with our naked bodies, he turned on the shower and tested the temperature before pulling it over my head.

As the hot water flowed, he started massaging my head with the tip of his fingers. The warm sensation it gave me was enough to let me forget about even resisting.

After he dried me off, Ashton wrapped me in a towel and carried me back to the bedroom. He lifted the cover and gently put me down on the bed. Then, he came from the other side of the bed and embraced me from behind.

My body was soft like water, and it instinctively got closer to him.

"Why are you so nice to me today?" I asked him.

"Aren't I always like this?" His voice was hoarse.

"Nope." My lips curled as I was pleased and relaxed. "All you wanted to do back then was take advantage of me."

"Then, consider today an exception and let me be a saint for once." Ashton adjusted his position and buried his chin in my neck.

I could vaguely tell that he knew my mind was going wild, and that was why he did all that quietly. He wanted to calm me down, bit by bit.

However, right or wrong, it did not matter. Ashton let me understand that as long as I stay with him, all my worries would go away even if I did not say anything.

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After I collected myself, I could finally talk about Summer's decision calmly. "Are you really going to support Summer on opening a bar?"

Ashton was not some sly fox that played around with his words. He usually meant what he said, so him not denying my question was a sign of his support for Summer.

"Letty," he said all a sudden and took a deep breath.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Summer should have the freedom to do what she wants."

What he said hit me where it hurt. I could not refute that.

It was true that my manic caution should not be a shackle for the child.

"Let's use the project I gave her as a test. If she can do it well all on her own, then you should also try and let go."

Ashton took a brief pause before he continued. "I know it would be difficult if I asked you to stay on the sidelines, but you have to relax. Look at it from an objective standpoint. Summer's a good kid. She'll surprise you."

He continued, "Don't forget that I'm here if anything goes wrong."

Not long after what Ashton said, I heard a faint and consistent snore behind me. He had fallen sound asleep.

Hence, I stayed in his embrace as it was unexpectedly soothing, even though I was still not sleepy.

I got up early the next day morning and, to my surprise, bumped into Summer as soon as I opened the door.

"Good morning, Mommy." Summer was wearing a dazzling smile on her gentle face, reminding me of an angel.

I felt guilty for how I acted last night, as it was not something a good mother would do. Nevertheless, I put up a smile and walked with her down the stairs. "Why are you up so early? You don't have school."

"Did you forget, Mommy? Daddy asked me to take charge of the project in Wenville. I looked through the files last night. This is the first time Daddy's company is involved in a project like this, so there's no reference. On top of that, the culture relating to Hanfu is exceptionally meticulous. To make sure everything goes well, I asked Mr. Cress to meet up with me to research the related materials and catch up on my knowledge regarding that topic. Mr. Cress told me that the library's usually packed on the weekends, so we won't be able to find any seats if we're late."

We reached the bottom of the stairs right when Summer finished, and Jared was already waiting at the door.

Thus, Summer walked straight toward the door. "I'll get going now, Mommy. I won't be back for lunch."

"Why don't you eat something before you leave?"

"It's fine, Mommy. I'm not hungry. Bye!"

With that, Summer disappeared out the door.

I exchanged looks with Jared, asking him to take care of Summer. He proceeded to give me an affirmative nod before leaving as well.

After that, my walk to the dining hall felt like it took a lifetime. My anxiety for Summer had made me very high-strung. Nonetheless, the truth was that she had grown up to be a capable and responsible person. Someone that was curious about everything and would not easily feel defeated. With that in mind, I could not help but curl my lips. My emotion was like a ferocious beast, but it was no match for the innocence my children exuded as they unraveled my insecurities.

Then and there, I had decided to support Summer in her first business endeavor.

Ashton told me he wanted to test Summer's capabilities. But he did not say I could not help. Besides, I was not the type of mother who neglects what their children do.

"What are you so happy about?" Ashton asked after coming down the stairs. His slippers squeaked as they rubbed on the wooden floor.

"Didn't you know how to read minds? Take a guess." I was not going to give him the answer that easily.

Hence, Ashton pulled out the chair opposite of me and sat down. He did not seem to be the least bit grumpy after just waking up. "Hmm. It's probably because you finally realized our daughter has grown up. Am I right?"

It looks like he found out that Summer already left the house.

I did not get any sense of achievement from that, so I rolled my eyes at him. "Wrong! And I'm not telling you, so eat your breakfast!"

After that, for the next two weeks, I could actually count the number of times I saw Summer with just my hands.

Ashton already said that he wanted Summer to work on the project independently. He knew her well and knew that Summer would not ask me for anything unless she was in dire straits. Naturally, if she did not bring it up with me, I should stay put and not stress her out.

Therefore, things would become really awkward whenever I want to know what was going on.

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It was like Summer was not a fourteen-year-old but a strong and independent businesswoman. When people have their own business, it gives off an illusion of them being held back whenever their parents get involved.

After a few days of thinking, I finally came up with a dignified reason to visit Summer at her workplace. And coincidentally, Emery called.

"Let's go. Come with me to see how your wonder girl is doing."

"Sure!" I answered without even thinking.

When I got ready, Emery's car arrived and bumped into Ashton, who had just gotten back. So, I quickly said something like, "Why are you back?" and hopped into Emery's car under Ashton's sad gaze, leaving him immediately.

"That was Ashton, right? Why didn't you ask him to come along?" Emery asked as she took a side-eye glimpse at the villa.

"This is between us women. Besides, he's a busy man. He needs to make money for me to spend."

"True." Emery nodded in agreement.

Ashton would probably be thinking something like, "Why didn't I know I'm busy?" if he heard that.

Wenville was adapted from Fuller Corporation's previous project involving movie films and was going to be a large-scale showcase of the culture of Hanfu.

Any and all transportation was halted at the entrance, and people in traditional attire could be seen everywhere, along with tourists.

Currently, it was still in the hype-up phase of the festival, where they set up all the businesses and infrastructure to fulfill the consumer's needs. Thus, we got out of the car and did a simple registration before going in. Even the securities were in traditional uniforms for soldiers, so Emery and I looked highly discriminable.

"Mommy?"

I heard Summer's voice behind us and turned around. Her hair was in a bun while she dressed in green, waving her hand at us from on top of the wall. Jared was beside her in a white robe. Even his hair got specially styled. Looking at them reminded me of the scenes from old stories.

If I did not look back, I would not have known that all those girls at the entrance were actually looking at Jared. It was no wonder they all looked shy.

It was not a surprise since Jared was good-looking. And due to his age, he looked more profound, which attracted a lot of women.

After that, a staff member guided us to the top of the building. From there, the view was magnificent. The lights. The people. All of them made it so it looked like we went back in time.

When we met up, Summer immediately started telling us about her progress. "All the prep work is done. Mr. Cress was a lot of help. Oh, and on the day of the festival, there will be ninety-nine pairs of couples holding their wedding ceremony here in Hanfu fashion to generate publicity. There will also be tours as well people live-streaming them. I'm confident that this event will rock the whole country."

While she was talking, I could see that she was happy about the city that she had built. It was the same look that Macy had when she opened up the bar for business.

"You did great." I walked over to her, placed my hand on her shoulder, and watched the incredible view she created with her.

Suddenly, we heard a commotion from behind us.

"Let go of her! I said let go!"

"Shaun! Save me, Shaun!"

I knew just from hearing their voices that it was Audrey and Shaun. The two somehow got their hands on some children's Hanfu.

"Ms. Summer, these two didn't pay for their food and even committed theft. What do I do?" the security asked while the children struggled in midair like lobsters out of water.

"I'm not a thief! I'm not!"

It was clear that Audrey asked Shaun to sneak out with her, but they ended up losing their wallets and couldn't pay for anything.

"Mrs. Fuller, why are you here?" Shaun was the first to notice us.

"If I weren't, you two would be sleeping in the police station," I said before approaching them. "These are our kids. The Fuller Corporation will cover any damage these two caused. I'll personally bring them over and apologize to the victims. Let them go for now."

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Audrey was finally free, but she huffed in frustration, "You're mean, Mommy! I called you earlier, but you ignored me and let me get bullied!"

Oh? Is she mad at me?

I glanced toward Shaun as I was being falsely accused.

However, the boy's eyes widened as he said seriously, "It's true, Mrs. Fuller. We saw you earlier, but you ignored us. You left your wallet and Audrey before leaving."

"Were you guys seeing things?" I was really telling the truth because I had been brought away since I arrived. I never even had the chance to go anywhere else.

Still, Shaun insisted, "No, Mrs. Fuller! That person looked exactly like you."

There was a possibility if Audrey had seen it wrong since she was quite a careless person. But if Shaun was insistent on it, it had to mean that the woman really did look like me.

Even so, it didn't mean that it was right for them to sneak out.

"Audrey, I'm only going to say this once, okay? The woman you guys saw earlier looked like me, but it wasn't me. I would never leave my kids behind and ignore them. Don't you trust me?" I pretended to be angry.

Children should know that being outside was different from being at home. It wasn't somewhere they should mess around as they please. Besides, as a mother, I should not be condoning their actions.

Having heard what I said, Audrey frowned, but her anger vanished a while later. She looked aggrieved and guilty as she asked, "Was she really not you?"

I shook my head to assure her. Emery then chimed in, "Your mom was with Summer and me the whole time. We never left this place."

Hearing that, the girl let out a deep sigh and dropped her head. "Okay. I'm sorry, Mommy. I shouldn't have raised my voice at you."

"Yes, you were wrong," I said, my voice sterner than before. "But your mistake isn't mistaking someone else for me. It's that you sneaked out without telling any of us adults. Think about it. What would you do if Summer and I weren't here?"

Audrey fidgeted with her fingers and took a sideways glance at the security. Then, her head seemed to have drooped lower as she said, "I'd be treated like a naughty kid and be brought away by the police."

"That wouldn't be the end of it," Emery said. "You might have bumped into some bad guys and gotten kidnapped. Then, you wouldn't be able to see your mom, or Summer, or your Uncle John and Aunt Emma." The girl paled and burst into tears the next second. She didn't dare to cry out loud and instead sobbed silently.

Even a hero would have their soft-hearted moments, let alone a mother like me.

The metal walls in my heart tumbled down and melted into goo the moment I saw my daughter cry.

I quickly walked up to her and swept her into my arms to console her.

At that, Audrey couldn't hold it in anymore as she cried loudly. Her tiny arms were wrapped around my neck as she bawled, "I was wrong, Mommy! I won't sneak out anymore. I don't want to not be able to see you, Mommy!"

My eyes burned with tears, and I couldn't get anything else out of my mouth besides repeating, "I'm glad you know your mistake. It's fine now. Mommy's here..."

She finally calmed down after a while.

With that, I used a wet tissue to clean up Audrey's face and tidied up her clothes. Then, Emery and I brought the kids along to the restaurant they had dined and dashed to apologize and pay for the food.

Perhaps it was because Summer was present, but the owner of the restaurant was surprisingly civil. Upon finding out that the kids were her siblings, he generously decided to waive the bill and even tried to get us to have a meal before leaving. The owner continued with his offer for a long while before Summer finally got us out of the situation by telling him that she was busy.

Right when we got out of the restaurant, the owner caught up to us and handed me a wallet. "The kids left this wallet here when they were brought away by the security earlier. Keep it well."

"Excuse me, I'd like to place another order."

"Okay, coming!"

Before I could refuse, he rushed back into the shop to tend to his customers.

I had no plans on taking someone else's stuff and was going to put it on one of the vacant tables. But for some reason, I pulled out the picture popping out from one of the corners.