

A Mother's Promise

By Andrea Hong

“Mother?” A hand reached out towards the receding figure of a woman, lightly grabbing onto her dress.

“Yes, dear?” The woman turned around, holding onto the boy's outstretched hand. Making her way closer to him, she leaned on the frame of her son's bed.

The boy looked down at his covers, fidgeting with them. “Do you love me?” He looked up at his mother with bright, blue eyes, his eyebrows furrowed in a frown.

The woman sat down next to her son on the bed, holding her son's hand in her lap. “Of course I love you, dear.” She tenderly stroked her son's golden locks.

“Really?” Looking down once again, he continued. “Do... do you and Father really, truly love me?”

Sighing heavily, the woman shifted to hold her son closer. “Dear, I love you more than anything in this world. And your father does as well, although he may not show it.”

“I- I...”

“Yes, dear?”

“I don’t think Father likes me.” A tear slipped down the boy’s cheek, only to be wiped away by his mother.

“Now, now, don’t cry, dear.” She cupped his face in her hands. “Your father has a very... special way of showing his love.” She let out a soft chuckle. “He’s adamant about it, but deep, deep down, he loves us. And he loves you more than anything.”

The boy pouted, leaning into his mother’s touch. Looking up into her eyes, he whispered, “I want Father to show he loves us.” As soon as the words left his mouth, he buried his face into his mother’s arm.

“So do I,” the woman admits. Letting out another sigh, she continues. “But your father is a busy man. And so are you, young man.” She gently flicks her son’s nose, causing him to giggle softly. “Now, it’s time for bed. You have school tomorrow.”

Nodding, the boy lay back in his bed, turning towards the soft glow outside the door of his room. “Mother?”

“Yes, dear?”

“You’ll love me... forever, right?”

After a few seconds of silence, the woman smiled, though it was hard to make it out in the dark. “Love is hard, dear. But a mother’s love is unconditional. Wherever you go, I will follow you, Eli. I will support you every step of the way. You’re my son, and I promise I’ll be by your side forever.”

With that, she closed the door to her son’s room, leaving the boy in darkness.

You’re my son, and I promise I’ll be by your side forever.

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“You lied...”

Eli gripped the papers in his hands, unwilling to look at them again. One word on the page haunted him.

Divorce. Madeline Brookes née Ōtsuka requests for a divorce certificate to be issued.

His shoulders trembled as he tried to hold back his tears. “You- You lied.” Eli raised his head to meet his mother’s eyes.

“Eli...” His mother walked toward him, reaching a hand out to his shoulder.

Eli shoved his mother’s hand away, shouting “No! Get off of me!” Turning away from his mother, he lowered his gaze.

Hesitantly, his mother lay her hand on his shoulder, with no resistance this time. “Eli... I can explain-”

“Pray tell me, what is there to explain?” Still looking at the floor, Eli continued. “You and I both know that if you get a divorce, I’ll have to stay with Father.” Running his hands through his hair in frustration, he says, “You’re job can’t sustain both of us for long. You’ll be leaving me.”

His mother shook her head, mumbling, “Give your father a chance, Eli.”

A tear slipped down Eli’s cheek, which he hastily wiped away. “No! Mother, this isn’t about Father anymore. Don’t you see?” He gestured to his mother. “You! You get a free pass out of this place! You get to get out of here scot-free!” Freely crying now, he pointed at himself. “I can’t get out of here. I won’t be able to for years!”

“Eli-”

“You promised, Mother!” Eli, feeling his energy slip away from him after his outburst, sank into his mother’s waiting arms. “You promised to never leave me. You promised to always be by my side.”

Without waiting for his mother’s reply, Eli backed away and shoved his hands into his pockets. He began to walk away, before stopping at the sound of his mother’s voice.

“Eli... I’m so sorry.”

There was a pause, as both mother and son stared at each other. Then, Eli turned away.

“It’s too late for that, Mother.”