

Family of Foreigners

By Sophia Luo

“Adaline, there are mishaps like you all over this world,” said the man said matter-of-factly, struggling to light his cigar in the dank climate of the Chinese airport. Tightly clutching my soot-covered duffle bag, I cringed about having to start interacting with this man. I anxiously grasped my jade necklace, finding comfort in the cool mineral pressing against my fingers.

Naturally, my feet dangled over the worn out bench, being merely a little girl just shy of her twelfth birthday. Short stature, black hair, good grades; I am your typical Asian. Except, I’m not. I hate talking, because I’m afraid of ruining my image with clumsy words. I’m constantly slacking because I’m not being number one. I have no friends. Why can’t I do things better, be prettier, interact with people more? I hate the way I’m ME, but that’s not what my father told me. Dad told me I was the biggest book-worm he had ever met, he told me that I had a knack for calligraphy, and even though I was a worry wart, he still loved me. My father: kind, loving, valiant... dead. There wasn’t even a scrap of his flesh to bury after the taxi wreck. The only true friend I had left in this god-forsaken world was gone, just like that. I don’t belong anywhere.

“Why am I a mishap?” I pressed hollowly.

“Because parent-less folks like you are an unlucky accident.” The man blew out a puff of smoke and wiped his running nose. “Gosh, it sure is cold. You chose a swell time to move to America (hearing it’s quite warm where you’re going).” He chuckled darkly and blew out another cloud of smog.

I gagged.

He proceeded to rant something along the lines of, “can’t believe job opportunities are so rare” and “escorting lousy citizens from China.” Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a battered plane slowly wheeling into the port.

“Well, it was nice talking to you,” I snarled hastily, “good day.” The man gave a slight tip of his hat and sauntered away. Scooping up my meager possessions, I made a mad dash for the plane. I abruptly paused in my tracks, and turned to longingly gaze at my homeland. I saw my old primary school in the distance, kids bustling around like ants. My eyes wandered over to a run-down apartment building in the shade of a baby blue. I silently counted the floor levels to five, and looked to the first compartment to the right. Home.

Feeling something warm trickle down my face, I never looked back.

My cramping limbs buckled, as I attempted to exit the plane. I pushed my loopy glasses up, hoping they would cover my puffy, pink eyelids. Taking a shaky inhale, I stepped into the overwhelming airport of New York. People bustled to and fro, businessmen in black tuxes argued on their phones, and tired mothers tried in vain to coax their deafening children.

“Excuse me ma’am, are you one of the foster children from China?” I whipped around to see a middle-aged white woman with a shiny badge on the lapel of her coat. The woman’s

blond wavy bob-cut complemented her stunning stature, and her sapphire eyes narrowed to reveal soft wrinkles. I blankly stared at her.

“He-er-rl-l-o,” I awkwardly fumbled, stammering to her in my god-awful English. I dared not to make eye contact, as I quickly handed over my identification pass.

I blushed at how stupid I sounded.

She scanned my pass. After a few seconds, she gave me a strange smile, and beckoned me to follow her. Praying that she was one of the foster program sponsors, I desperately scrambled to follow the lady. Glancing at my lousy flip phone, I noticed this woman, who was rapidly glancing at me, was taking me to the garage where the families should be waiting. The woman and I stepped into a retracting elevator, which already had a young boy and a tall man arguing in it. Strangely, the little boy was holding a thin cane, and had dinosaur sunglasses lining his nose. *Weird. Anyways, this is it*, I thought. Some family is waiting to bring me in downstairs; I can feel it. My clammy hands stretched and clenched. Anxiety was starting to well up inside me, and I began making second guesses about meeting new people. *What if they don't like me? Will I be sent back to China? My life could be ruined if I'm sent back!* Time seemed frozen in the midst of my raging heart rate.

The elevator doors slid open as my breath hitched in my throat. I stepped out and scanned the vast parking garage.

Wait.

I narrowed my eyes.

There was no one?

Suddenly, the woman who had been leading me, seized me into a lung-crushing hug.

“Excuse m-”

“Welcome home!” The woman delightfully squealed. The man who had been standing in the elevator lead the boy to me and warmly smiled. I was dazed.

“Adaline, welcome to the Wilson family,” He exclaimed. “My name is Greg, and she (pointing to the woman who had escorted me) is Leah.”

Thankful for Mr. Wilson's use of basic English, I grasped his outstretched hand and shook it cautiously. The man who called himself Greg, had curly bronze hair and a matching jolly beard. Mrs. Wilson released me from her bear hug and walked to her husband's side.

“I am Adaline. Nice to meet you.” I spoke, mustering my brain-power into this dingy greeting. “I am looking forward to housing with you Mr. Wilson, Mrs. Wilson, and-,” my robotic voice trailed off, as I stared at a curious boy's face peeking from behind his father. His neat auburn clipped hair caressed his small head, and dorky overalls sagged on his chubby figure. He would have looked nice, even cute if it weren't for his impenetrable sunglasses and cane.

“Adaline, meet Adam, your little brother!” Mrs. Wilson beamed. As I reached out to shake his hand, the woman stopped me, and shook her head. “How about you let him feel your face?” She spoke gingerly. With a realization hitting me like tidal waves, I quickly bent down and let this boy place his hand on my face. He grazed his palm over my glasses and announced:

“I don't like her.”

“Adam!”

"It's okay," I mumbled, still in the initial trance from all the past events. "I wouldn't like me either." My hand automatically reached for my jade locket, while I commanded my nerves to silence.

"Since Adaline's paperwork has been filled, it's clear we must head home," snapped Mrs. Wilson. Disappointingly glancing at her son, she quickly lead us to their minivan.

"Welcome to your new room, Adaline!" Mrs. Wilson chirped. I eyed the room with an indescribable awe; my jaw dropped to the floor. Fresh pink paint lined the lofty walls, and a Hollywood movie chandelier clung to the roof. *My own room*. The words echoed in my head, and I could feel tears swelling. I began to inspect every inch of the princess like room down to the crevice, and felt my heart swell.

Woahhh.

My foster mother pointed out the dresser, washroom, desk and more, highlighting that these were all at my disposal. While she blabbered more about the "mechanics of the room", I found myself opening a small white shelf in my dresser. Expecting to find somewhere to place my belongings in, I instead found a shiny picture. The picture had what seemed like Mrs. Wilson, a baby Adam, and a chocolate skinned man staring gleefully at the camera. They looked, happy.

"Mrs. Wilson-"

The photograph was hastily snatched from my grasp. Crushing the paper in disdain, the woman regained her composure, and gave me a shaky smile.

"Well, I suppose it's getting late. I'll see you first thing in the morning then. Sleep tight." Mrs. Wilson rasped.

She swiftly slipped through the door, leaving me baffled.

(One week later)

The greasy American breakfast was scrumptious. Wolfing down my massive proportion was a piece of cake, although I couldn't help glancing at my foster mother. Deciding to push aside my jumble of questions, I focused on the mouth-watering eggs and bacon. Mr. Wilson groggily plopped in the seat beside me, holding a steamy cup of coffee.

"Hey, Adaline! Did you get a good rest last night?" He inquired.

Still the coziest bed I've ever slept in, although I do have to admit the mattress cradled my back a little too well?

"Good," I replied. Noticing Adam feel his way towards the table, I quickly leaped over to guide him. Just as my callused skin brushed his, Adam abruptly flicked my arm off and scowled.

"Don't touch me you imposter," he silently snarled, not even facing where I was standing. Ouch.

I could only desperately watch the young boy, as he slowly maneuvered his way to a chair, and sat down.

"Mrs. Wilson, may I explore the house?"

Mrs. Wilson tiredly nodded, giving a heavy grin.

"Wait, Adaline. After I'm done eating, I'll show you around," Mr. Wilson called, dabbing his mouth with a napkin.

The fancy grandfather clock read 11:04 PM. My eyes drooped, my sandpaper tongue scratched my dry mouth, my arms sagged at my side. I was one hundred and one percent done with touring. Right now, the most welcoming thing in this gigantic house was the bed I stood in front of. Tired, tired, tired.

I patted my collarbone, probing for my late father's gift. Nothing.

My eyes fly open as I scramble to tear the contents out of drawers. My necklace, finditfinditfindit... *oh*.

Snapping my fingers, I realized I had left the jade locket on the dining table. Soundlessly, to not disturb my sleeping family, I maneuvered my way through the deserted dark house. I tiptoed over books sprawled the across the floor, and snuck into the kitchen like a shadow.

Pushing up my glasses, I squinted at the blurry figure sitting hunched laying on the table. My breath hitched as I saw Mrs. Wilson clutching a tear-soaked photograph, her hair matted and uneven.

I gulped, trying to swallow my anxiety. Should I help her? Maybe I should walk away from this situation...

My conscience was slowly eating away at my sanity. In a muddled conclusion, I persuaded myself that I am obligated to help Mrs. Wilson - who did so much for me. *This is not how your father raised you!*

"Mrs. Wilson-

Her head shot around, and her bloodshot eyes bore into me. An unsettling panic settled into me as the tension started to engulf me. I slowly start edging away.

"Adaline," she paused and hiccuped. "I'm sorry for you to see me like this. Shall I put you to bed?" Mrs. Wilson rasped wearily.

I quickly rushed by her side, struggling to not bolt from this awkward situation.

"Adaline, it must be so hard for you. Having a recently deceased father, being tossed into an entirely new country, forced to learn a foreign language, and never knowing what it is like to have a mother." Mrs. Wilson whispered. "Adaline, you go beyond your years. You have suffered from the grasps of poverty and depression through all these years." She shook her head, as if she couldn't believe something.

Slowly, I lowered my head at the broken woman, while gesturing towards her clenched hands - holding the paper.

"Mrs. Wilson, can you please tell me what is wrong?" I murmured. My heart sank as I watched my foster mother heave a grief-stricken sigh. She smoothed out the crumpled picture she was holding; the same picture I saw a week ago.

"My daughter, I feel so unbearably lonely. I am grateful that you choose to hear me out." I shook my head, not trusting myself to speak.

"My mental and physical health is deteriorating. My chest is constantly hurting, and I'm constantly cleaning my rapidly shedding white hair. Is it possible to die from heartbreak?"

She paused.

“Before I met Greg, I...used to be married to another man.” Mrs. Wilson sniffed. I gently placed down a box of tissues. “His name was Max, and I loved him more than anything in the world. Max was my world, he was my soulmate, he was my... husband.”

“He must have been an amazing person.”

“Yes, he was.”

“What happened to him?”

“He-,” Mrs. Wilson shut her eyes. A single tear rolled down her tired face. “He was killed in a car crash that I will never forget.”

Car crash.

Dad.

“My heart stopped when I heard of his death. I often ask myself, What did we do to deserve this? He had left me with so much heartbreak, trauma, and...” Mrs. Wilson sobbed. I gently took her trembling hand and squeezed it; gazing at her with understanding eyes.

“He was Adam’s father.”

A gasp.

Oh no.

We hesitantly swung our heads to the noise; praying that the sound we heard wasn’t what it seemed.

There stood Adam, tightly clinging his teddy bear. Adam might be a strong boy, he might be the fiercest ten year old in his grade, he might have the heart of a lion, but there he stood, paralyzed.

“M-mm-om?”

(The next morning)

You could hear a pin drop as Mr. Wilson was informed about what Adam had heard last night. The massive house had the eerie silence that reminded me of my father’s funeral. Just looking at Mr. Wilson’s expression sent chills racing down my spine. This morning, Mrs. Wilson was looking dangerously pale. She had a horrid look plastered across her face, and her eye bags looked like they weighed tons. Clutching my smooth necklace, I dared not to speak.

“Uh, Adaline, please excuse Adam, my wife, and I. We need to talk.” After a long silence, Mr. Wilson cleared his throat, “ALONE.”

I caught his intentions immediately, and hurriedly scampered into my room. After I heard the soft click of my door close, I exhaustedly flopped onto my bed, not bothering to take off my glasses. Staring at the ceiling, I recalled the current events that happened in life. Everything was happening too suddenly. My thoughts zigzagged around my brain until the tempting tendrils of sleep slowly lured me in.

“OW!” I leaped out of my bed, groggily aware of the stinging burn of a slap on my face. The sounds of sirens blasted through my open window, and the pouring rain from outside trickled onto my room’s carpet floor.

“We gotta move fast. They’re taking her! THEY’RE TAKING HER!” Adam’s exasperated cries echoed through my room as I began to panic.

“Who?”

“MOM!”

Adam snatched my hand, and hurriedly commanded me to lead him out the front door. The cold night air chilled my bones, as I saw numerous paramedics dashing across the lawn. Mr. Wilson was kneeling beside a stretcher, panic in his eyes.

“What’s happening, Adeline? Where is Mom?” Adam shook my short body violently.

“You! Children! We must bring you to the hospital with your parents. Hurry!” A man in a white suit hastily ushered us into an ambulance, almost knocking Adam over.

“Sir! My brother is blind,” I cried.

Understanding flashed across the man’s expression as he then gently hoisted Adam into the vehicle.

ZOOM! A sickening feeling bounced in my stomach, as I have never ridden in such a fast moving car in my life.

I wanna puke, I miserably thought. Adam tightly clutched the hem of my shirt with an iron grip; seeming on the brim of tears.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tic-toc...The steady ticking of the hospital clock was driving me mad with every passing second. One of my hands impatiently drummed on the hospital waiting room desk, while my other tightly held my little brother’s trembling hand. Adam’s eyes rapidly fidgeted, and his legs bounced with an uneasy pace. I nervously glanced up at Greg, anticipating his next moves. His brow was furrowed with an unsettling uneasiness, and a fresh sheen of sweat glazed his creased forehead.

The waiting room doors burst open, and we all bolted from our seats with anticipation. The doctor nervously cleared his thought and said, “To all the family members of the Wilson family,” he hesitantly paused, “Mrs. Wilson only suffered a minor concussion from her collapse. It should heal in a week or few.”

We all let a sigh of relief, Adam even went as far as to playfully poke at me. “But, the reason for her sudden collapse, is because she has been diagnosed with lung cancer.”

What?

My vision unevenly swam before me, and I leaned on Mr. Wilson for support. Adam tightly clutched his father’s leg, not understanding what was happening. With sudden haste, I violently brushed past the surprised doctor and sprinted straight to Leah’s room. I forcefully slammed the already open door and pushed up my glasses, panting.

An elegant woman sat motionless, with her hands neatly folded on her lap. As she laid on the hospital cot, her head was tilted towards the moonlight dancing through the open window. A soft layer of golden hair rested on her hidden features, and the pale light highlighted her skinny features. An unspoken tranquility filled the silent room. Mrs. Wilson turned her head to me and smiled.

I uncertainly stepped towards her, not believing my eyes. Leah held out her arms, and I fell into them without hesitation. The sounds of our weeping echoed inside the dark chamber, and I shook uncontrollably.

“Adeline, please tell Adam that even if he doesn't know who to trust, Greg will always be his true father. Tell Greg I love him just as much if not more than Max, and I want you to know I'm so sorry you have to go through this. I'm letting you know this because I will be getting weaker until the time comes,” Leah stuttered. I swiftly wiped my tears away, shaking my head ferociously.

“Mrs. Wilson, you can't give up.”

“Adeline, that's very sweet of you, but if I die-”

“YOU WON'T DIE!” I yelled with exasperation. We both stayed in our melancholy embrace until we felt like we had drowned in our own remorse. “Mrs. Wilson, don't give up. Don't give up on the chance to win this fight.” My watery eyes bore into Mrs. Wilson's azure ones, and an understanding was suddenly apparent. “You can't leave your family... we all love you dearly.” I murmured gently.

“Alright then, have it your way.” Mrs. Wilson chuckled, a confident smile forming on her lips.

“Pinky-promise on it, Mom?” My mother entwined her finger around mine and gave me a firm shake.

“Always.”

(One year later)

The grueling summer rays beat on my tan skin without remorse. My colossal school backpack sagged on my noodle like arms, as I trudged warily back home. *Ugh, literally the only thing that isn't in flames on me is my necklace. I like, soo need ice cream.* I lazily thought, fanning myself with old homework. After what seemed like centuries, I finally rammed open the front door and flopped onto our new couch.

“What's up braceface?” Adam greeted.

“Nothing much, mohawk man,” I retorted.

“Hey! I think it's very cool, unlike your cat obsession.”

“You have every right to like cats! They have soft bean toes-” My ramble was suddenly cut off by a stern, but kind voice:

“Hey kiddos, after your done horsing around, let's go see your mom.” We both looked up to see Dad at the front door, a crack of a smile on his face. It was of course now a daily ritual for us to visit Mom-who was rehabilitating quite nicely at the hospital. Today was a special occasion though, because it was my mother's birthday!

“Hey, Mom!” Adam shouted, gleefully pouncing on Mom's cot. “Can I eat your chocolate cake?”

“May I,” Dad corrected. He walked up to Mom and gave her a quick peck on the lips.

“Adaline, come here. You know you wanna hug,” Mom chirped. Once my mother was certain we had all been thoroughly embraced to death, she beamed. “Happy birthday to you-” Dad began to sing. We all joined in the jubilant chorus, singing in a joyous fashion (with jazz

hands at the end). Even though we couldn't light candles, Mom's eyes held a twinkle brighter than any flame. I made fun of Adam's chocolate drenched mouth, as Dad patiently wiped off the gooey substance. We ate scrumptious food, shared scary stories, played cards... I laughed so hard I couldn't breathe. Here, surrounded by the people I love, I truly felt that this is where I belonged.