

told me you loved each other.” This was five years after the Little Mermaid incident, but I still remembered.

“I was a fool.” She lay her chopsticks on the table. “We are still together for only one reason: you. I can’t let you live in a single-parent home. What would others say? The entire society would shame you.”

Her words punched me in the stomach. It was the first time she told me she wasn’t happy with her marriage. And she stayed unhappy because of me.

My mother scooted her chair away from the table and pushed down the front of her pants. Under her belly button ran a vertical scar. Spreading out in both directions from the middle, a hard ridge of thick, overgrown scar tissue.

“Remember this?” She pointed to her abdomen.

Of course. I remembered. The scar was from her emergency C-section. I used to see it when we went to the public bath together before we acquired our own shower a few years ago.

“A father can’t measure up to a mother. He wasn’t even there when —”

“Mom, please don’t.” I knew what she was about to say. Right before my birth, my father volunteered to go on a long business trip to impress his bosses. He wasn’t there for the C-section. It made my heart ache to think we didn’t matter to him as much as his career. Was it true? I didn’t know, but I wished she’d never told me the story of my birth.

But she continued telling it. “I, your mother, would do many things for you that nobody else would, including your father.” She talked at length not only of how she sacrificed her delicate figure to birth me, but also how she ruined her eyesight while healing from the C-section and forewent a more advanced degree to take care of me. Finally, my mother pulled up her pants and scooted back to the table. “Only a mother can love a child like this. Remember: marriages don’t operate on love. Don’t repeat my mistake.”

I wasn’t ready to give up yet. “But what about my father’s parents?”

“They had an arranged marriage. Love wasn’t even a consideration.”

“What about your parents then? Did they have an arranged marriage, too?”