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It's Gonna Be All Right

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She lost her job.

After ten years, they told Marie they had to let her go. "The economy is bad," they said. "We'll compensate you for the rest of the month. We're really sorry."

My God. What was she going to do now?

The hospital's sterile staircase ascended above her, leading to the gray door of the third floor. She held on to the cold railing so tightly that her knuckles were white. Panic clutched the strings of her heart, yanking them hard. Her husband died two years ago in a construction accident, leaving her a mourning single mother of one. She tried her best, but no matter what she did, fate continued to mercilessly shove her down onto her knees.

And now she had failed her son.

She climbed the stairs and finally entered into the bright décor of the children's unit. Drawings hung in picture frames – ferocious tigers, fire-breathing dragons, and princesses in pretty dresses. Christmas decorations covered the hallways, lights glowing and tinsel glittering as "Frosty the Snowman" hummed through the air. Conversation was abound, adults chatting and children laughing. The snake of dread constricted Marie's throat as tears burned the back of her eyes.

Everything was falling apart.

Forcing herself onward, she winded through the lively hallways, feeling like a black shadow amidst the vibrant energy. Siblings chased each other as the staff dodged them, grinning in delight. As doctors and nurses passed her, their jovial faces faltered, recognizing that something was wrong. She wanted them to stop looking at her, to stop proving that she was weak and helpless, especially now that she had nothing left to give.

Especially now that there was nothing more she could do for the most precious person in her life.

Her hands began to shake. She clenched them into fists. She plowed onward towards room 309, ignoring the greetings and the smiles. Her eyes filled, and she lifted her head up in a vain attempt to prevent them from spilling. When she finally arrived, she opened the door to her five-year-old son's room.

He sat there, a beacon of light in the dark, wearing a Santa hat and playing with a fire truck. Machines surrounded him, sending out a cacophony of noise that had kept her up many nights. Joey looked up at her and his face lit like a ray of sunshine, for she had arrived earlier than usual. He wore his favorite pajamas, the ones with fire trucks all over them. He wanted to be a fireman when he grew up.

And all Marie could think of was how his future had disappeared before her eyes,

chased away like chalk paintings in the rain.

“Mommy!” Joey exclaimed, his fragile face filled with happiness. “You’re here!”

“Yes, baby, I’m here,” Her voice cracked and she loathed the sound. She moved over to his bedside, trembling, regretting that she hadn’t picked up a gift for him, even if it was just a Hershey’s bar.

Joey’s smile faded when he noticed her tears. “Mommy, what’s wrong?”

She shook her head, managing a smile through the blur of misery. “Oh, nothing. Mommy is just being a silly girl.”

He didn’t believe her. Like any child who knew far more than he should, she couldn’t fool him. He lifted the fire truck and placed it in her hands, his beautiful dark eyes filled with sympathy. “Here, mommy, you can have my truck. It’ll make you feel better.”

Her walls came crashing down, crumbling apart at the sight of his favorite toy in her hand. “I’m sorry, honey,” she murmured hoarsely, apologizing for losing her job, for losing all hope of continued treatment, and for losing the battle against his cancer. “I’m so sorry.”

Joey stood up, wobbly on his feet, and he wrapped his frail arms around her, showing her courage and strength beyond anything she could imagine. “It’s gonna be all right, mommy. It’s gonna be all right.”