

Mima puts on her yellow helmet while looking at her reflection in the mirror. Yesterday was another slow day for the café, so she thought about making a visit to her grandparents in Baroque City at the Rococo Islands. *Maybe they have some good ideas about what to do*, she thinks as she tightens the strap under her chin, *and I need a break anyway*. She grabs the keys on her desk, walks down the stairs, takes one last look around to make sure nothing is out of place, locks the doors behind her, and revs up the scooter.

And she takes off.

The sun still isn't up yet, so the white cubic houses Mima's so familiar with remain covered in turquoise blue. Clouds are scattered in the horizon. In the distance, seagulls are flying above the waters. The crashing of the waves and the humming of the scooter are the only things that are making a sound this early in the morning.

Mima sometimes wonders if the world has stopped around her. It's hard to imagine that these lonely streets become the busiest places in Cadence City in the afternoon. In a few hours, many people will walk and drive on these streets to popular restaurants and street markets with exotic fruits. Tourists are encouraged to check out the Holiday Steps for example and look into the windows of shops selling unique trinkets not found elsewhere.

*I wonder if that Yayue girl has been to those steps yet.*

She has no idea why she thought of that international student who appeared in front of her café. Yesterday seemed to fly by so fast and yet, that girl's the only thing she can think of. She's quite pretty after all. Mima can't help but wonder if it would be fun to pick out clothes for her. Of course, they'll have to go to the ice cream shop on the base of the steps too. The milk they use comes from Sonatina, not too far from Cadence City, and that's why the ice cream has a rich creamy texture. After that, the two of them can go and check out the outdoor fruit market nearby. And oh, eating some fruits while sitting down on a bench overlooking the ocean will be wonderful! Cherries, she has heard, are just in season. Those are always lovely to have on a nice hot day.

*Um, why am I thinking about this?*

She catches herself grinning about dating a person she has barely met. It's just in time too because if she kept daydreaming about her, she may have passed the docks and driven out of Cadence City.

Mima sighs and swerves left to the docks. The boat to Rococo Islands has just arrived at the docks and she can see the dockworkers carrying crates up to the boat. She disembarks from her scooter and walks it to the queue of people ready to show their tickets or membership cards. She's a tax-paying resident of Cadence City, so Mima searches her pockets for her membership card and show it to the ticket checker. This allows her to take a free ride to any of the islands in the Nouveau Islands, including Cadence Isle itself. This offer also works for people whose families live on the Rococo Islands.

As she queues, she ponders about that elegant Yayue student. Has the student grown accustomed to the customs and schedules in Celeste Academy yet? Mima remembers when she felt overwhelmed by the millions of classes you can take during a semester. The school itself is huge too. It's too easy to get lost in the gardens. And if you have to go from one end to the other, it is best to run or you'll be late for your classes.

"Your ticket please."

"Ah." Mima is taken aback. "Sorry!"

She's been daydreaming again and the ticket checker is waiting to see her card. She shows them the card and hurries up to the boat with her scooter.

*Why did I just think about her again...*

Mima buries her face into her hands. She can't stop thinking about that Yayue student in her silk dress. Her awkward smile and her accented Celestian make Mima's heart jump. Mima wants to hug her and that's why she finds it so embarrassing.

But she begins thinking about how nice it would be if the student returns to the cafe again. Mima remembers how entranced she was when she saw the thoughtfulness behind how the student picked up the cup of coffee and sipped it very slowly. That's a good reason to keep the cafe up and working. Mima wants to someday welcome that student back again and give her the chocolate latte her mother used to make.

It's a nice daydream to have...

Mima takes her hands off her face. The sailors are lifting the ramp away from the boat and untying the ropes that are anchoring it. Streaks of orange light are now tinting the white

buildings. The sun has risen far enough that she can make out the Hartnell Memorial Building Library poking out from the top of the hill.

*I wonder if she's studying in the library there. She's probably a hard worker if she wants to study in another country...*

The idea of the Yayue international student reading a book in the library is stuck in her head.

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The morning after orientation is a daze. Cherry finds herself leafing through dictionaries in the library because she has never seen words like "faculty" and "dissertation" before. And yet, these words are there in the handbook given out during yesterday's orientation as if they are ordinary words used by everyday people. In fact, these words aren't available in the Celestian-Yayue dictionary she currently has. But since these words are in the handbook, Cherry fears the school expects her to know them like friends.

And unfortunately for her, most of the Celestian-Yayue dictionaries are just too specialized for her. It seems the Hartnell Memorial Building Library is meant for people who are already deep into their research because many pages reference obscure and technical aspects of Attunements. What she needs right now is a simple dictionary. Cherry sighs. The language barrier she has to climb over seems almost impossible.

*Should I even be here if I cannot read the language?*

"Ah, so you're here!"

Cherry looks to her left and sees a girl peeking out from the shelves. The girl reveals herself

and lets out a loud exhale as if she's encountered a big problem.

"My intuitions were right after all."

Cherry tilts her head in confusion before saying, "You are...?"

The girl pouts. "Lexa. I'm your roommate."

Cherry smiles to hide her shock. In Yayue, that experience is only available in the cities. Since she is from the outskirts, she has only read about roommates in fiction. This is a first for her and she wants to make a good impression.

She bows her head and says, “My Celestian name is Cherry. My Yayue name is Huiyin. Nice to meet you.”

“You have two names, huh?” Lexa glances at the shelves of encyclopedias as if looking for something. “What do you want me to call you by?”

“Cherry.” Huiyin is apparently hard to pronounce for many people living in Cadence Isle and her mentors have asked her to pick a simple name in the Celestian language. She likes cherries and that’s why she has picked Cherry for her name.

“Hmph, I prefer the other name.” Lexa tries to say her name, but she keeps getting the intonation wrong. “I’ll figure it out.”

Cherry is unsure why she is taking the trouble, but she smiles again. Lexa’s earnest attitude is quite cute. Maybe she will make a good roommate.

“Anyway,” Lexa says, her cheeks flushing. “I am tasked by the principal to look after you. I am also the librarian here and will help you seek resources that may be helpful for your one year school term at Celeste Academy. Do you have any questions?”

Cherry wants to say something, but she doesn’t know the words to say it. Instead, she eyes the open handbook on the desk beside her. Lexa looks over and Cherry hears a small groan from her.

“They really need to simplify the language in the handbook,” Lexa says as she picks it up. She flips through the pages and seems dismayed by the many red marks Cherry has made on it. “What are those admins thinking? Even a native Celestian would have difficulty reading through this.”

Cherry bows her head again. “My dictionary is not good. Is there a good dictionary?”

“I can help you look around. That should be easy.” Lexa pauses a bit as if she has realized something. “Well, only if you can, um, help me.” She blushes and then looks to the side. “I don’t really have anyone to help me with this and it’s honestly embarrassing... You’re my roommate, so I thought maybe you could help me out here. But it’s honestly quite silly to tell you what I want you to do. So...”

Cherry grins. Lexa seems like she’s a really nice person. Just a bit shy about stuff.

“Okay,” Cherry says, “how can I help?”

“I-I need someone to take a picture of me” — Lexa clenches her fists — “so I can use a dating app!”

###

No matter how many times she’s seen the boat reach the ports of Baroque City, Mima always feels a tinge of exhilaration. When she was younger, she told her grandparents that one day she would be a sailor working on the docks. It’s a silly dream, but silly dreams are what people should strive for in life.

*Like the dream of having a cafe for students who love chocolate, of course.*

After she walks her scooter off the boat, she starts it up and looks toward the downtown area. It looks like the festival to celebrate the Harvest Goddess has just recently ended since lines of striped flags are still dangling between the buildings. Mima straps on her helmet and drives off.

Baroque City is well-known for attracting tourists around the world because it is filled with some of the most inspiring and grand buildings one will ever see. There are usually tour groups led by amateur architecture enthusiasts marveling at the exteriors of the City Council. Mima passes by it every time she makes the trip to her grandparents, but she will always remain impressed by the concave façade that towers above the tour leaders’ heads. It’s especially difficult to distinguish where the façade begins and ends because the building’s arches just meld together. And tourists are always trying to snap a picture of the Harvest Goddess statue perched between two rectangular windows in the middle.

When Mima takes a left, she can hear the sweet music of the famous outdoor orchestra from the University of Baroque City. Funded by donations from residents who appreciate music, the orchestra plays everyday on a stage in the marketplace. Tourists and residents can have their lunch there while listening to classical masterpieces that adorn the rich cultural history of Baroque City. The orchestra is playing a childhood favorite of Mima’s: Symphonia in C Major is so harmonic; the way the violinist's bow so successively and smoothly without interruption is so pleasing to her ears. She knows very little about music, but hearing this just calms her down.

The music's still playing when Mima reaches her grandparents' apartment. She wonders if they are listening to the music too: they live on the third floor and their windows are open. Mima presses their doorbell button and a small *bing-bong* sound comes from the speaker.

A few seconds later, a pleasant, lyrical voice speaks through it: "Mima, is that you?"

"Yes, Grannie Ivy. It's me." It has been a while since Mima last met them and she is a bit excited. "I want to get some advice."

"Come up, dear."

The automatic door slides open. Mima walks up the stairs before being greeted by Ivy and Lily, her two grandparents, at the lobby.

"Welcome back, Mima!" Lily says, their smile developing small wrinkles, "I feel like you've grown an inch taller!"

"Us grandparents are always excited for our grandchildren to visit us," Ivy says. "Come on in!"

Mima walks into the apartment first while her two grandparents hold hands and smile at each other. She sits on the red sofa chair that she used to play on when she was a kid. Ivy sits on a rocking chair while Lily places their teacup set on the coffee table and goes for the brown sofa chair. The empty dining table chair is for Mima's mom and it's always out to remind everybody that she remains deeply missed.

"What would you like help with?" Ivy says while picking up her knitting needles to resume working on a blue sweater. "We two have experience in everything you could possibly imagine."

"You've always been a showoff." Lily covers their giggles with their left hand. "But it's true, so what can we do for you?"

Mima's always amused by how smug they can be, but they do know what they're talking about. Ivy was a famous opera singer back in the day. Even to this day, her international fans still go to the theater she used to sing at and ask for her autograph. She sings for charity drives and participates in a mentorship program to teach up-and-coming opera singers. It's hard to imagine her slowing down anytime soon. Lily, on the other hand, is a watercolor painter and poet. Whenever they are struck with an idea, their approach is to paint and write it down at the same time. It's always impressive to see them pen something down and then go back to the easel. They

once said that this was the only way they can work. Both Ivy and Lily haven't retired yet, even if they're in their sixties. They are truly the most amazing people Mima has ever met.

"It's the cafe — it's getting bad lately." Mima fiddles with her fingers. "And meanwhile, I've been trying to figure out Mom's recipe. Not making any headway with that either."

Ivy: "Are you discouraged?" Lily: "You must be really stressed."

"Well, not really..." Mima leans forward to get her teacup and sips from it. "But it'd be nice if things take a turn for the better, of course."

"Have you considered getting a partner?" Ivy stops knitting and ponders together with Mima. "A business partner to sort things out? I recall that you came to us worried about having too much on your plate the other month, too."

"And who knows," Lily says with a smirk, "maybe you'll catch a date too!"

Ivy lets out a little laugh and says, "Oh, you're such a tease!"

According to her mom, Mima's two lovely grandparents had met while collaborating in a charity drive. Ivy sang the poems that Lily wrote. Both of them respected each other's efforts and this started a long mutual partnership that later fostered into love.

Their love story just sounds like a modern fairytale.

"You know I don't have the time to search for someone like that, even if I want to," Mima says. "And besides, I'm not *that* interested."

"My observations suggest that you are overworked and you need a break," Lily says while slowly rocking their chair, "and a partner would be beneficial for your business."

"You have employees, but you need someone else to manage the cafe," Ivy says. "Especially since you're trying to replicate your mother's recipe and create more drinks too."

"I suppose, but I've always seen myself as the entrepreneur of the family." Mima knows that even her mom would agree. "A partner also requires some contracts to be filled, et cetera, et cetera."

"Then, you should get a date." Ivy grins and stops knitting. She takes out her smartphone from her pocket and unlocks it with a swipe. "Have you ever heard of this Wondr dating service? The students in my classes were talking about it and it sounds marvelous. You get to pick beautiful people to date."

"Wha -- wait, what are you talking about?"

"Ivy and I were talking about how maybe that creative exhaustion you have comes from loneliness." Lily stands up to refill the teacups. "Both of us were like that, unsure of our abilities and worried about the future. But since we found each other, we knew exactly what to do."

Ivy shows the Wondr app to Mima and says, “We think you’re in that situation. You can’t just be alone forever. There will be times where we won’t be able to help you and we always worry about you.”

“I have friends, you know.” Mima is confused and watches Ivy sit back on her sofa chair. “I’m not that lonely.”

“But what if?” Lily says, sitting on the side of Ivy’s sofa chair. “What if you find someone you love and you want to do everything for her?”

*A flash of the Yayue international student appears in Mima’s mind.*

Ivy looks into Lily’s eyes and says, “Love will make your work better.”

*Her black hair, her silk dress, her lovely smile...*

Lily looks back and says, “And your efforts will be more meaningful.”

*Mima feels her cheeks reddening from the thought of her.*

Ivy says with a tune, “That’s why love makes us wonderful --”

“-- and it also turns us hopelessly gay,” ends Lily with a grin.

Mima sighs. “Grandparents pushing their granddaughter to check out a dating service is a new one for me,” she says, “But I’ll consider it.”

“Good,” Ivy says, “I think you’ll like this person here. You might even meet someone like my student, Carida. You two would be cute together. The profile says she cooks --”

“Maybe our granddaughter has someone in mind.” Lily gives off a mischievous smile. “I’ve been getting that feeling since she walked in.”

“No, I don’t! I just, um...”

Her two grandparents are snickering very audibly and her mind’s going crazy. She keeps thinking about the Yayue student and her hands start fidgeting. Her face flushes with warmth. And she feels more flustered by the second. Has Mima overreacted? She’s supposed to be the professional here!

“Aaaahhh, okay, okay, I’ll look into this dating app thing. Please stop laughing at me.”

“We aren’t,” Lily says, “we’re happy you are becoming a fine lady.”

“Yes,” says Ivy, “you will make your mother proud.”

Lily leans their head onto Ivy’s shoulder and both of them gaze at her mother’s empty chair.

“We are proud of you too,” Lily says without turning back to her. “Just remember that.”

###

After the three of them have brunch together, Mima says goodbye and rides her scooter back to the docks. She thinks about business partners, about Wondr, and ... about *her*. It *would* be nice if she gets to see her pretty face on that app, even though it's unlikely.

*But what if she's on there?*

*Will I contact her?*

*Will she accept me?*

*Will we get a date together somewhere nice and calm?*

*What if...?*

The boat arrives and the dockworkers are transporting goods again. Mima shows her card and walks her scooter up the ramp while her mind is all about that Yayue girl.

*What if I get to meet her again?*

She thinks about these what-ifs. They are like the silly but important dreams she had of working on the docks.