

The Flareon sat down, taking a deep breath. Work had been hard as of late, and she had to pick up the pace. Running the company along with her husband was one thing, but being a mother on top of that... she tried hard to spend time with her kids, but she was certainly grateful for the maids around the house.

That is, if they managed to wrangle her kids properly. Ashley always seemed to be interrupted right around the time they come home from school for a short while, precious minutes spent with her kids before having to get right back to work. Stratos and Stella were in high school by now, they didn't need as much maintenance, but the others were in elementary. One cannot shrug them off and let work take the lead.

As was the case today, not even five minutes after her break, one of her children came in crying.

She turned to face him, wondering why the Sylveon was distraught before he ran in and hugged her tight, bawling his eyes out. She gently pet his head, waiting for her son to calm down, the tears subsiding as he slumped into her lap.

"Sweetie, what's wrong?" she asked, giving a gentle smile as he looked up, lip still quivering.

"Mom, the kids in my new class were mean to me and called me names like last year. I don't wanna go to school anymore, I hate it there! Please don't make me go back, Mom!" his eyes started to well up once again as she sighed, frowning.

"What was it this time, Sylvan? Crybaby, coward, or pansy?"

"Uh... it was a word I didn't really know well. Fairy... um, bag?" She gritted her teeth, baring them as the sound of what he had tried to say.

"Sweetie, grab a seat." The Sylveon tilted his head before grabbing another of the rolling chairs. Often called the "talk chair" by his siblings, he knew he was going to be here a while.

"Sylvan, what they called you was very wrong. Now, I'm going to call your principal about this. It's not your fault, do you understand me?" He nods. "Good. Now, you know how I tell you

to keep those wrapped around your neck so you don't hurt anyone on accident?"

He unfurls his ribbons from around his neck and ears, letting them droop and touch the floor. Having evolved in the womb, his feelers were much longer than a normal Sylveon, and he'd often had trouble tripping over them.

"Listen to me, very carefully." They lean in close to each other, voices hushed. "I don't often say this, but if they try and touch or hurt you, you use these to toss them somewhere else, or to tie them up and shout for a teacher. If you have to hit back, do it. Do you understand me?"

He frowned, tapping the arm of his chair nervously. "But I don't think they're really strong enough to stop them, Mom. I can't do anything like that like Stratos can, he's all big and stuff."

"Well, I don't think he'd mind you asking for help on getting these string beans a little more durable. Can you ask him when we're done?" Another nod. "Good. Now, since it's the first day, you should have too much homework. Come sit in my lap for a bit while I work."

Sylvan got up from his seat, putting it back before jumping in Ashley's lap, causing her to give out a loud groan.

"S-sweetheart, I need a little bit more warning, you know I'm sensitive in my legs..." He nodded, saying sorry before laying back against her, closing his eyes as he breathed softly. She moved her arms carefully to keep him held there, moving her hands to the laptop as getting back to work. The call could wait for later. For now, she stayed with her son, humming softly and reassuring him things would be okay.

She would be a good mother for her kids above all else. She swore this to herself with her first, and she has kept that promise, even now. As she opened each and every card she received next to her husband, a tear rolled down her cheek. Ashley had done the best she could loving her children, even if they weren't always around. And that was enough.