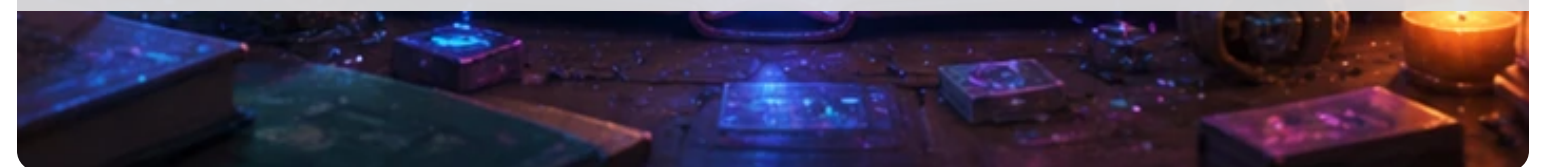




The Gentle Beginning

Nara Kim





Some beginnings arrive very quietly and softly, seeming small and insignificant at first. Yet, when these moments gather, they gently transform a life into a beautiful story. This is the special record of Ms. Simonson, a kind teacher with blonde hair tied up in a neat bun, wearing a black short-sleeved dress under a long cardigan, and two children named Aiden and Ayla.



On his very first day meeting Ms. Simonson, everything felt strange and overwhelming to young Aiden. In his green t-shirt and black pants, the dark-haired boy sat tightly in the unfamiliar room, his heart filled with nervousness and fear. Beside him stood Ms. Simonson, watching over him with a calm, steady, and comforting presence.



Every morning at exactly 10:30 AM, Ms. Simonson would stand at the end of the long hallway with a bright, welcoming smile. She would reach out her hand, and Aiden would take that warm hand to walk slowly toward the classroom together. That short daily walk became a steady source of courage that helped Aiden step into his new world.



Inside the classroom, Aiden slowly began to explore and embrace the world around him. He smiled as he dipped his hands into the ocean creature sensory bin, enjoying the cool textures and colorful toy sea animals. Curiosity and joy quickly replaced his fears, making the classroom a place of laughter.



Years passed, and a sweet letter arrived for Aiden's mother, announcing it was now time for his little sister, Ayla, to start kindergarten. Remembering how wonderfully Aiden had grown, Mother secretly hoped that Ayla could also begin her journey with such a gentle teacher. On school visit day, they were greeted at the door by the familiar, warmest smile of Ms. Simonson.



Seeing Ayla look a bit nervous in her pink dress, her dark-haired brother Aiden leaned down and whispered comforting words. He told her not to worry because Ms. Simonson was wonderfully fun, always laughed happily, and would always be there to help her. With her big brother's encouragement, Ayla felt her worries melt away.



One day, Ayla looked up at Ms. Simonson and softly admitted that she felt like someone who did everything too slowly. Ms. Simonson knelt down, met Ayla's eyes, and gently explained that it wasn't being slow, but rather being wonderfully careful and thoughtful. Those kind words instantly changed how Ayla saw herself.



Soon, whenever Ayla made a little mistake, she learned to lift her head, tap her forehead with her hand, and laughingly say 'Oops!' Out of all the lessons, the warm humor passed down by Ms. Simonson became Ayla's favorite tool to turn mistakes into moments of joy.



During the Student-Led Conference, Aiden returned to the classroom where he had spent his own kindergarten days four years ago. While Ayla showed their mother around, Aiden happily found the old ocean creature sensory bin and began to play just like he used to. Watching him, Mother and Ms. Simonson shed tears of joy, realizing that growing up means carrying precious memories forward.



When June arrived, it was time for Ayla to say goodbye to Ms. Simonson's classroom, a place where she had learned to express herself freely. This tender journey of a teacher and two children showed that under the wings of love, everyone can learn to shine brightly at their very own pace.