

TOUGHEST JOB IN THE UNIVERSE

I'm Clara McKenzie, a History teacher at the British School of Beijing. My husband, Kai is also a teacher at the British School of Beijing, but he teaches Mandarin. We've been married for a year already. Now, I'm carrying our child. It has been 2 weeks since we both got stable jobs. My husband is a lot happier than me at his new workplace where everything is new. New boss, new office, new colleagues, new students and more. However, it is very stressful and difficult for me to adapt since I'm not familiar with the new environment and language.

The day has finally arrived, I gave birth to Liam. Both me and Kai agreed not to send Liam to childcare, so we ask help from Kai's mum to come here to take care of Liam for a few weeks as both of us are busy with our new jobs. My mother-in-law moved to Beijing from Guangzhou just after the day Liam was born. We have never met before and we don't share the same culture, so unlike other families we don't have a very close relationship.

I thought that having a baby would be a big hassle for me, but I don't have to worry about anything because my mother-in-law takes responsibility for all those less-stressful jobs. However, I still have to take care of Liam by breastfeeding him. But having a new job is worse, familiarising myself with new colleagues and the strict curriculum has taken up so much of my time that I don't even get the chance to enjoy my own quality time.

When I get home from work, my chatty mother-in-law would talk to me about Liam, before I go to work, she cooks those smelly curries that could even be poisonous when you smell it and while I'm at work, SHE ORGANISES ALL MY STUFF WITHOUT MY PERMISSION. Seriously? This woman is really making my life so miserable.

"Liam very naughty today" "You go work with that dress?" "Why your room so messy?" "Eat more, you very thin"

I'm so sick of hearing these daily. I'm already 28, I'm old enough to know how to take care of myself, I don't need someone else constantly looking over my shoulder besides she's not even my mother. She acts like she's tired every day and won't stop complaining. I just don't get it, is she trying to avoid taking care of Liam? I mean, it's not even that hard to feed and play with a child. I wonder how she would act like if she was a foreign history teacher, forced to memorise pages and pages of books, in 2 different languages; Chinese and English.

"Clara, your son has a high fever!" Mother-in-law shouted
"Can you please take care of him? I'm writing report for my students." I replied hastily to her

"You only care work, no care your child." Mother-in-law irritated

"Why are you so talkative, can't you see that I'm busy?" I questioned

"You are mother, you take care your child" Mother-in-law bellowed

"Oh my god. Why can't you just look after him?" I said

After I say that, I see the tears of disappointment and sadness combined in my mother-in-law's eyes. I don't feel good, but I can't do anything about it as well. She angrily into her room.

I finish writing my report, I think I should go to my room and have a conversation with Kai about his mum. I see Kai focusing on writing report for his students. Anyway, I sit down on the chair beside him.

"Kai, I know this may be upsetting, but I don't have a choice. Your mum thinks that my job is unimportant, she's always judging and telling me what I should do even when I'm working. She's getting old and starting to have elderly problems, I think we should send her back home" I explained

"But she's my mum, I can't just let her go" Kai advocated

"I am sorry, you might have to choose between me and Liam or her" I replied sternly

"Can we go upstairs and have a talk with her please?" Kai requested

We walk into my mother-in-law's room and she's not there but there's a letter on the bed that says:

"Dear Clara,

I am sorry I caused trouble for the family. The reason why I cooked traditional food every morning is because it was Kai's favourite food since he was little, and he'd ask me to cook that every day so I couldn't just say no. The reason why I talked about Liam to you after work is because I thought you wanted to hear some news about your son after a long day at work. The reason why I organised your stuff is that I'm worried you would be mad if I didn't clean the house also, I wanted to take care of your family because Kai is my only child and I want to treat you like my real daughter. I'm going back to Guangzhou today. It's almost holidays so, I request both you and Kai to take a break from work and spend more time with Liam.

With love,
Your mother-in-law"

Reading this makes me feel like I just made a big mistake. A mistake that cannot be forgiven. I throw the letter from my hand, grab the car keys and rush to the airport as fast as possible as I can, faster than the speed of light, I'm not even joking. I finally get to the airport, but mother-in-law is nowhere to be found. I guess changing diapers, washing clothes and sleepless nights, all me now. "What have I done?" I sobbed.

Suddenly, a familiar voice came across my ears, it's mother-in-law. I run towards her a hug her like there is nobody around. I cry and apologize to her to come back. "Alright, but you have to give me a promise, promise me that you will put family as your first priority" mother-in-law comforted. "I promise, I promise" I sniffed. From this experience, I have come to learn that family comes first and discovered that being a mother is not easy at all.