

Chapter 541 - White Lotus

Xu Fangyang almost choked on her drink out of shock. She coughed for a while and Lanni panicked. Had she gone too far? When the latter stopped coughing, she offered the bottle of water that she had bought but was yet to drink from. "I'm so sorry. Are you alright?"

Xu Fangyang nodded and drank a few sips before she managed to stop her cough. "Thank you." Her voice was still hoarse for a while.

When she was alright, she glared at Lanni. "What nonsense are you insinuating? There is nothing between Storm and me! He has been married for years and that only ended a few days ago, and I'm nothing but his lawyer."

Lanni made sure the latter was not about to drink her cappuccino, not ready to make her choke again. She looked indifferent about it. "The private investigators I just mentioned found it out. I'm sorry that he invaded your privacy but he didn't mean to. He only wanted to find something that we could use to prove Storm's innocence and accidentally stumbled upon the information." She bluffed and kept things vague.

There was no freaking investigator who had uncovered anything. She had done so herself within the few minutes that she saw Xu Fangyang. The woman looked like she wanted to get away from what she felt was bullshit but at the same time, her eyes held a ray of hope that this media agency could really help her prove Storm's innocence.

She clearly didn't trust anyone but was willing to try for him. Only a woman in love would act like that and have the kind of horrified expressions that Xu Fangyang did when Lanni talked about a star's career potentially ending because the truth was found out too late.

Her reaction to the news that her feelings had been found out was enough evidence to prove that Lanni was right, and it was too late to keep pretending.

Luckily, the woman didn't probe about the investigation. She might have given herself away, considering the latter was a lawyer.

Xu Fangyang looked into her cup. "He doesn't know."

Lanni was relieved that she had only talked about feelings, not a relationship.

"Do you prefer to talk about it somewhere else?" She offered.

The latter shook her head. They had booked a private booth whose walls were sound proof and no one would come in unnecessarily.

She sipped her drink. "Storm didn't do any of the things that the media claims he did. But you know how slow the police are in our country. They keep promising to investigate further and although they do, they rarely ever find anything new. I couldn't find a private investigator that I could trust."

Lanni nodded, understanding that it was not because it was difficult to find one. Xu Fangyang was just more worried because this was a case that involved the man she loved.

"It may be difficult for me to represent him in court if anyone found out about my feelings. Someone could use it against us so I hope you will keep it secret. Besides, it is not the right time for him to be involved with another woman." She said to Lanni, who understood and nodded.

"It's your secret to tell or keep."

They went ahead to discuss the tidbits that Lin, Star and Skylar had found out, all of which Xu Fangyang knew. In fact, she knew everything about the case which was why Lanni had sought her in the first place.

"I always found Anna suspicious." Xu Fangyang spoke, making Lanni relieved that she finally believed her. "She was too good to be true. No one is perfect but she was. I don't believe that it's possible for a woman to be beautiful, smart, innocent, kind and have a good temper."

"What are you trying to say?" Lanni narrowed her eyes slightly. She had met a few women who could check all those boxes. Although it was rare, it was not impossible.

Xu Fangyang slapped her forehead. "It's not what you are thinking. There has to be a limit to kindness even for saints. No one is perfect, Lanni. There has to be a flaw no matter how slight it is. That woman was..." She looked infuriated as well as baffled. As if she could not find the right word to describe it, she sighed and changed her approach. "What would you do if you met a woman who loved your husband and spent more time with him than you did?"

"I would..." Lanni felt furious just imagining the situation even though there was no such woman in hers and Xiehan's lives. She decided to be truthful. "I'm not usually one to cause trouble. I would not confront her unless she is trying to seduce him or ruin our marriage but that doesn't mean I will not be awfully jealous."

"Exactly." Xu Fangyang almost raised her voice as though she had finally met someone with whom she was on the same page. "I was jealous of her even though she was the legal wife. I know of women who accepted their husbands' mistresses just to save their marriages but that doesn't mean those women were not jealous."

But Anna...she was friendly to me in a way that was over the top. At first I was guilty and thought that she didn't know how I felt but later, I was shocked out of my wits. One day, she told me that she would be happy for us if Storm were to reciprocate my feelings for him. She said that she would abort the baby she was carrying and divorce him, or give birth to the baby and give me its custody so we would be a complete family."

"What?" Lanni was shocked. That was ridiculous. Was giving out one's child part of being kind? It was suspicious.

Xu Fangyang finished her drink with a smirk. "The next day, she put up a white lotus show and cried to Storm to tell him that I threatened to have her kicked out of her house and promised to replace her."

Lanni had the urge to roll her eyes. "You said she was kind and I thought that she really was a real life angel. Why didn't you mention that she was a white lotus?" She shook her head, and Xu Fangyang laughed.

"That's because I thought she was kind too." She looked like she was having fun after making Lanni go through an emotional roller coaster.

"What happened? Did Storm believe her?" She asked.

"That has been my point from the start. She was a woman who didn't ever complain about anything. Even when Storm had to stay out late because of concerts that happened one after another or be away from home for weeks, she would always give him the perfect smile and wish him the best. The first time she ever complained about anything was on that day and she cried while at it."

"That's tragic." Lanni rapped her finger against the surface of the table. "Why does it sound like she had been planning to get you out of his life from the start?"

"Bingo." Xu Fangyang was completely out of her professional mode as she explained the events that followed. "She was trying to get away everyone who knew Storm and could be helpful in preparation for the grand scheme. It was too late when I realized that she was Axel's sister and her marriage to him had been part of Axel's plan."

It was Lanni's turn to choke.

"Are you okay?" Xu Fangyang looked concerned.

"I'm not! Can you not drop such bombs without a warning?" She exaggerated even though she was indeed shocked out of her wits.

Xu Fangyang laughed. "Did you know that the order in which events are presented in court may impact the verdict? It depends on which order is more convincing."

"Now I do." Lanni had to agree. "Do you think it's possible to meet him?"

"If he agrees. I'll need to talk to him first." The latter said.

Lanni's phone rang but she took one glance and ignored the call.

"Do you need to pick that?" Xu Fangyang asked.

"I'll call them back later." She set her phone on silent mode and the two of them made their way to the detention centre.

Chapter 542 - Set Up

"All you want is a headline."

It was not surprising that Storm's reaction was identical to Xu Fangyang's earlier when he learnt about Lanni and the reason why she had sought to visit him. He glared at Xu Fangyang who had been the one to convince the police that Lanni was here because she could help out with the case.

Before it could escalate into an argument, she cleared her throat with a smile. "Yes. I'm not going to deny wanting a headline but that's part of my job. On a personal level, I just enjoy uncovering the truth behind conspiracies. That should be allowed, right?"

Storm snorted. "Whatever."

He no longer cared, probably because he had given up on any hope he previously had of proving his innocence.

Lanni offered a smile. "I will not publish anything without evidence, if it makes you feel better."

He didn't say a word but she knew that it did make him feel better. The last thing he wanted was for crazy headlines that would further tarnish his reputation. When Xu Fangyang convinced him that she trusted Lin Media Group, he was finally willing to speak.

"Do you know anything about Annie's relationship with her brother?" She asked, because some of the details didn't make sense.

"A win-win relationship." He shrugged, playing with the cuffs around his wrists. "I would never let my sister marry my enemy if I loved her in the slightest. Those two were just using each other and it was unfortunate for them that I found out the truth."

Lanni listened carefully. "What did you do?"

"I didn't kill her, if that's what you are asking." He said, making her let out a sigh of relief even though they were not close. It would have all been useless because he would have been convicted nonetheless. He looked at her and pondered whether to tell her or not. In the end, he decided to say it in the simplest terms. "I confronted Axel about everything he had done to me. We ended up in a fight and when I returned home, Annie and the baby were both dead."

The baby. Lanni took note of the term he had used. He had neither said 'our baby' nor 'my baby'. When she glanced at Xu Fangyang, the latter nodded as though she was confirming what Lanni had just said.

Annie's child was not Storm's. It was irrelevant in the case but it might be used alongside other tidbits to prove that Annie's character was questionable and she could not be trusted. The only downside was that it might do the opposite by appearing to be a good reason for Storm to want them dead.

"We have to prove that your marriage was a set up by Axel. I'm starting to think that he was also the one who had someone murder Annie to cover his tracks because you had found out the truth." She groaned.

"Good luck trying to battle Axel. You should just save the world already."

He was being sarcastic but she nodded like she was considering it. "Good idea."

Her phone rang again and she was puzzled when she took a look. Why was Luna calling at such an odd hour? The call had ended before she could answer it and when she tried to call back, it went to voicemail.

Hence, she waved at Storm and Xu Fangyang to bid them. "I have to go. I'll be sure to let you know once I make any progress."

Storm took her promise with a grain of salt and that served to pump her up. She would be sure to prove his innocence even if it would be to simply prove him wrong. Well, that and to get the headline she had promised Lin Jian.

Once she was in her car, she checked the previous call that she had missed and called back. It turned out to be from the store where she had ordered a pair of shoes. They had run out of the color she wanted and forgot to update that on the shopping site, and wanted to know whether she would like to choose a different color or get a refund. Unable to think with her muddled state, she promised to call back once she decided and called Luna.

She was relieved when the latter picked up.

"You scared me! How could you call me during working hours then disappear?" She scolded as soon as she heard Luna's voice.

The latter laughed as though it was supposed to be funny. "I'm sorry. My phone went off as soon as I called you. I just connected it to the charger."

Lanni rolled her eyes even though the latter couldn't see it. Since her mind was finally at ease, she put the phone on hands free mode and drove off the parking lot. "Where is the fire?"

"At my house! I just discovered a huge scoop and couldn't hold it so I called you on a whim. Why don't you drop by my place this evening? I'll give you all the juicy details if you bring fried chicken with you."

"Are you sure it's not the fried chicken that you want?" She asked suspiciously. Everyone around Luna discouraged her from having too much fried food and lectured her about its effects on her health.

Lanni wouldn't put it past her to make up an excuse for her to bring it so it would look like she had no choice but to eat it because her sister brought it.

"That's not it!" Luna responded too fast, making it apparent that it was exactly what she was thinking about.

When Lanni laughed, she grumbled. "Fine. Forget the fried chicken. Bring a serving of anything."

Lanni chuckled and promised to get something delicious.

Although she was anxious to hear the gossip, she managed to focus on work for most of the day. By the time she left her office, she had several incriminating call recordings in her hands. Star had managed to retrieve the recordings of the calls between Axel and Annie, which mostly involved the former telling the latter how to set traps for her husband. It might not be enough but it would help, so she saved them on her cloud storage and only sighed in relief when she was certain that there was no way she would lose them. Deciding to have someone prove their authenticity later, she grabbed her bag and made her way to Jiang Xingyu's villa.

Xiaomu was at the door as soon as Lanni arrived. "Aunty!"

Her heart melted as she picked up the bundle of joy. "How cute! I missed you so much." She kissed her cheeks, and Linhou grudgingly ran over for kisses.

When she put them down, Xiaomu grabbed the hem of her dress in anticipation.

Luna came downstairs to the adorable scene and glanced at her daughter. "Aunty isn't going anywhere. We will keep her here for as long as possible and if your uncle has anything to say about it, we will kidnap him too."

Lanni laughed and shook her head. "Spill the gossip."

"Hello to you too." Luna deliberately stalled. "Would you like something to drink?"

Sensing Lanni's glare, she chuckled and took a seat. "Well, here is the thing. I went to the hospital today and..." She deliberately let Lanni's imagination run wild before she dropped it as her palm rubbed her flat stomach. "My babies are going to have a sibling."

Chapter 546 - The Ship Finally Docks Home

The following day, she found Storm and Xu Fangyang. The former was in cuffs and sat opposite them.

"You look like you found something out." Storm was the first to remark, and he sounded surprised. He had not expected her to find anything.

She didn't waste a second because their visiting time was limited. "Axel doesn't hate you. At least not in the kind of way we thought."

"What makes you think that?" Storm asked.

"I met him last night." She explained, even though it sounded crazy. "I made a few observations. One of them is that his edited pictures look a little like you. It must be because he didn't want it to be obvious but you two could be thought of as brothers. Maybe that's why fans used to joke about you being bros in the past."

"That's not related to anything." Storm dismissed her words but Xu Fangyang continued to listen.

"His dressing style is similar to yours too. I checked his pictures from years ago before NV came to life and that wasn't the case. His lyrics style mimics yours. Storm, he is trying to replace you. He is obsessed with you."

Xu Fangyang dropped her face in her palm as if she had heard the worst news, which made Lanni blink in confusion.

"You have no idea how many fugitives use mental disorders as a way to get away with a slap on their wrists. They are checked into mental asylums then show good recovery progress which is obviously fake, but they are allowed to leave within a year or six months. It's heaven compared to the number of years they should have stayed in prison."

Lanni tapped her chin. "I know it sounds like he has some psychological problems. If we prove that the urge to kill is not a symptom of whatever mental health issues he has, he will not get away."

"You're a lawyer, Fangyang." Storm grumbled to remind her of what she was good at.

"I have never done this kind of case." She had always dealt with white collar crimes, so she was nervous.

"It will be okay." Lanni patted her shoulder.

"Right. Star found some chat records between Axel and Annie, as well as the large sums of money he had been sending her. There was also a transaction of a hefty sum that was sent to someone else, a man with a fake identity. We believe that was who was sent to finish off Annie. It might take a few days but as long as there is another suspect who has not been investigated, you will not be convicted. I have already submitted the records to the police."

Storm and Xu Fangyang exchanged shocked glances before the latter hugged her. "Thank you, Lanni. Thank your investigator for me too."

"It's our job." She smiled.

"At this point, you can publish your explosive headline." Storm added.

Lanni's eyes went wide like a kid who had just seen a mountain of candy. "Really?"

"I owe you." He smiled. "I don't care if other reporters start swarming around me like bees or if the rest of my life will be under scrutiny. It doesn't matter anymore."

"I don't know what to say." She was conflicted after thinking about it. "Will it really be okay?"

"It could have been worse." He smiled. "Actually, I was preparing to go into retirement before all this happened. I wanted to leave the music industry and take care of my wife and child but all that disappeared like a puff of smoke. So, I'll just silently retire and spend the next several weeks or months courting my lawyer and when I finally entice her..."

"What?" Xu Fangyang was so shocked that she almost broke into tears.

"Are you going to pretend you don't love me? I've been watching you." He laughed.

"Then why didn't you say a thing?" She would have smacked him if it wouldn't be alarming.

He chuckled then his expression turned serious. "I knew you loved me, Fangyang. But I was married to Annie. At the time I had already figured out her motives and hated her but I was still married to her. I couldn't have feelings for another woman."

Even now, I'm sure it seems too early for me to move on. So I'll take it slow. I can't promise to fall in love with you but I promise to respect you, to dote on you like you deserve and to be loyal to you for the rest of my life. I will give you my body and when my heart pieces itself back together, it's all yours."

"You said when." She tears spilled. He was certain that with time, he would be able to give her his heart. It was not a love confession but it felt like one.

Lanni's eyes almost watered as she watched them. This was the most heartwarming scene she had ever seen.

....

Lanni couldn't wait to write the article so she did so on her phone on her way to Lin Media Group.

When she got back to her office, Lin was waiting with news.

"About Skylar..."

"Oh no!" She slapped her forehead.

Lin laughed and placed the files in her hands on Lanni's desk. "It's not what you think."

Lanni heaved a sigh of relief. "What is it?"

"She had to go home for a family emergency and may not be back soon. CEO Lin said to choose another teammate." Lin reported.

"It's okay. The three of us can handle what's left. The difficult tasks are done. It's mostly thanks to Star. Can you call him on your way?"

"Sure." Lin still looked conflicted.

"What is it?" Lanni had a bad feeling.

As expected, Lin dropped a bummer. "Tian Yu Media found out about Storm's case and posted an article about it. They don't have as much details as we do but it will no longer be explosive."

Lanni rubbed her forehead. "It wouldn't make sense if we were the only ones who knew that the previous news was fake, right?"

"Sadly, you're right."

She turned to glance at the article she had transferred to her computer. "On the bright side, we do have a piece of news that will be more explosive than the case in itself."

"Tell me about it." Lin inched an ear.

"No can do." Lanni chuckled. "Wait for the explosion."

"You are so mean!" She complained. Curiosity was killing her.

....

Lanni was right. In fact, the turn up was much better than she thought. Fans cared about their idols' love life more than they cared about crime.

As soon as she posted the article titled [Storm X Fangyang ship finally docks home] and explained the roller-coaster they had undergone before finally finding their way to each other in the visitation room of the city detention centre, the views, likes and shares skyrocketed.

Axel had been arrested while preparing to go into hiding but no one cared about that, all the attention having been grabbed by Storm and his lawyer who was now his girlfriend.

The question on the fans' minds was whether Storm would be proven innocent and leave the courtroom hand in hand with his lawyer or if he would be imprisoned and she would wait for years before they finally go home together. Either way, it would be a happy ending.

With such a juicy piece as the icing of the cake, the article she had written about the case also gained millions of views and surpasses Tian Yu as well as all of Lin Media Group's competitors.

"Phew. Mission accomplished." She stretched her limbs in her office. Someone knocked on the door and she glanced over. "Come in."

It turned out to be Lin Jian and he was carrying a humongous bouquet. "Great job. Everyone is talking about Lin Media Group. I don't know how to reward you."

She chuckled as she accepted the reward. "How about an hour to catch on some sleep?"

"You can take the afternoon off. Cool off some steam before you get back to work."

She glanced at the pile of files on her desk and shook her head. "I wish. A ton of articles need my verification. Some of them have to be posted on tomorrow's issue of Oracle Daily. One hour is enough." She had postponed some of them and now she had to catch up.

"You get one hour then.. I'll help you tell your assistant not to let anyone in."

The rest of the day was a blur as Lanni finished up the work on her desk before starting to scout for another headline. There was no such thing as too soon for a new task in her dictionary and certainly not on her calendar.

There was nothing much happening in the country at the moment. Most of the articles submitted on her desk these days were of celebrities catching their partners cheating, getting fans talking for days then later reporting that it was a misunderstanding and getting back together. That, or the artists that had most fans shipping them coupling up. That was as old as hell and most of it was scripted for publicity, which she knew from a diary she had once stumbled upon while searching for a new novel to read.

It wasn't that she wished for bad things to happen so she would get something to write about but it would be nice if there was more news—both good and bad.

Hence, she wrote an email with a suggestion to Lin Jian.

On Saturday, she woke up with a smile on her face. She was so excited for her cake tasting that the realization that her husband was not in bed or anywhere in the house didn't dull her enthusiasm.

She checked the time and frowned when she saw that it was almost midday. No wonder she was so hungry. She rubbed her empty stomach and strolled downstairs to make herself something to eat, only to find a covered tray on the kitchen island. Beside it was a note held in place by an empty coffee cup.

She lifted the coffee cup and took the note, reading it with a smile.

[Good afternoon, Sleepyhead. At least I think you won't wake up until noon. Replace the second word with 'morning' if you do wake up before noon.

I set the coffee for 11:30 and brunch is on me. Now feed your lazy ass before the cake tasting. Remember to leave some space for the samples! Love, Xiehan.]

She chuckled. Who the hell wrote 'feed your lazy ass' on a sweet good morning note? But coming from him, it sent a kaleidoscope of butterflies fluttering in her stomach. Her attraction for him hadn't dulled in the slightest. She devoured her food before giving Luna a call.

The latter picked up on the first ring.

"Luna, are you coming for the cake tasting?" She asked.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world!" Luna was excited.

She smiled. This was really happening. "I'll send you the location. Meet you there in half an hour." She looked down at what she was wearing—Xiehan's t-shirt and nothing underneath it. "Make that an hour."

....

She and Luna arrived at the bakery within minutes of each other and they wouldn't stop chattering.

"You are really preparing for your wedding!" Luna chirped. She was more excited than she was about her own wedding.

"I am." Lanni couldn't tame her excitement. "My dress is ready too. I should try it out after the cake tasting. Right. What about Xiehan's suit? I should call to check."

She didn't need to call because Xiehan had arrived. He had overheard what she had just asked. "It will be ready for me to try in a few days." He said and pulled her to his side. Although they had spent the night in each other's arms, he kissed her lips when he saw her.

"Get a room, you two. You are blinding my baby." Luna grumbled at them.

Lanni pulled away and laughed, wanting to tell her that her baby's eyes hadn't even developed yet, and even if they had, it couldn't see from inside her womb.

The three of them entered the bakery. It was a grand bakery with a large hall specifically meant for cake tasting. The manager had already been notified of their arrival so he showed them to the table that had

been reserved for them. To avoid ridiculous situations of patrons taking hours trying to decide on their flavor and design and then ending up picking none, the bakery only allowed a maximum of three people, which is why they had not called their friends to help them decide.

"There had to be a reason why this is the best bakery in town and now I know why." Luna hummed through a piece of strawberry cake. It was exceptionally soft and the sweetness exploded in her mouth in a way that made her want to devour the entire sample. But, she had to save space to taste other flavors so she restrained herself.

"Is it weird that I want all of them?" Lanni grumbled.

"We can have all of them." Stated Xiehan and they both looked at him like he was out of his mind.

"What? My wife wants all of them so why not?" He asked matter-of-factly.

Lanni shook her head through a smile and gave up asking for his help choosing. He only had one solution for any options that were conflicting—take all of them.

In the end, she chose a gold and burgundy themed cake, which would be the major colors at her wedding, and the three layers would be vanilla, lemon and mint flavored. She liked the taste of lemon and mint but something about the green color on the frosting just didn't sit well with her. The bakery had warranted that she could change the flavors before the last week of her wedding. She wasn't planning to change it but it made her feel at ease.

When they left the bakery, she breathed out a sigh of relief every two seconds.

"How are you feeling?" He asked her.

"I could use a hug." She raised her arms as though she had been waiting for his question.

He pulled her into his arms for a tight hug and kissed the top of her head. "Why are you so anxious anyway?"

"I don't know." She purred against his chest. "There's just this gnawing feeling in me. I guess I'm just not used to being watched by everyone walking down the aisle in a wedding gown?"

"No one is ever used to talking down the aisle in a wedding gown. It's a new feeling no matter how many times you get married and it's okay to be nervous." He comforted her.

Luna was making a call, notifying the bridal gown store that they were ready for Lanni to try out her wedding gown and that they would be there in a few minutes.

He rubbed her back and suggested, "how about we skip the live broadcast part of the wedding? It would ease the pressure and you will have fewer eyes on you."

"Sounds perfect." She agreed. The live broadcast had been Lin Jian's idea and the thought of many people watching it on their phones and televisions made her nervous.

He nodded when he saw her significantly calm down. "I just received a message from the planners. The invitations are ready but they want us to take a look and approve of them before we send them out."

Chapter 548 - Premonition (2)

"It's time. Let's go and try out your gown." Luna chirped.

Lanni pulled away from her husband. "Yeah. We should get going. I can't wait to see it."

"Me either." Xiehan added, wincing at the fact that he would not be allowed to see her in her gown before the wedding. He could only imagine how lovely his wife would look walking down the aisle for weeks!

"Are you sure the rule about not seeing the wedding gown before the wedding was not put in place by women to torture men?" He asked, and the women burst out laughing.

"See you later, my love." She pecked his lips to placate him and disappeared with Luna.

The store had already been notified of their arrival so they were shown to their VIP section as soon as they went in.

After scouring through all the magazines they could find and not finding anything that was perfect for her, Lanni decided to have a custom gown made. She had contacted the owner of the brand who was also the head designer. The latter had required her to fill in a form with her hobbies, likes and dislikes and pretty much everything she didn't think had anything to do with the kind of gown she wanted. However, everyone said she was the best designer in the country so Lanni gave her the benefit of the doubt.

When they arrived in the VIP section, she and Luna sat on the velvet couches and declined the drinks as they waited for their designer.

"I'm sorry I'm late." They finally heard a female voice after a few minutes. They both turned to see a woman older than them. She was beautiful and was wearing a simple business outfit but paired with the matching shoes and jewelry on her body, it screamed 'fashionista'.

"I'm wearing anything designed by her even if it's crap." Luna muttered.

Lanni chuckled under her breath. There was no way one could rock a simple outfit like that and design crap.

"I'm Wan Jia." She extended a hand.

Luan was the first to shake it. "Xia Luna."

"Li Lanni." Lanni extended a hand too.

Wan Jia looked at the two of them and made a guess, looking at Lanni. "You must be Mrs. Ji."

Lanni looked surprised. She had only submitted a surname. "How did you know?"

"Well, the who looks like she has wedding jitters." Wan Jia joked. "Just kidding. I had my assistant do some research. I hope you don't mind. It's the only way to know who really wants a wedding gown made and who is wasting time."

"It's alright." Lanni nodded.

Wan Jia had her assistants bring in a mannequin with a gown for her to try.

She frowned slightly. "This..."

"Why don't you try it before commenting?" Wan Jia urged. She nodded and entered the dressing room. Well, she would not be forced to take it if she didn't like it so there was no harm in trying it out.

When she looked at her reflection in the dressing room mirror, her eyes welled up. She was yet to zip it up and may need help with that but from what she could see, no wedding gown could suit her better than this. It was just impossible.

It had a sweetheart neckline but the feathers on the left side of the chest covered her left shoulder and appeared like a false, short sleeve from the front. The material was soft and comfortable and hugged her curves before flowing out at her hip, like a mermaid.

She opened the door of the dressing room. "Luna, could you help me with the zipper?"

Luna looked up and gasped. "You look so beautiful!"

"Thank you." Lanni's eyes stung.

"How is it? Do you like it?" Wan Jia asked from the couch.

"I'm taking it." Lanni fought back her tears. She didn't want to ruin the dress before the special day.

Luna retreated into the dressing room with her.

"Oh, I have something for you." She announced, then she scratched her head. "I'll have it sent to your house later."

"You did that on purpose." Lanni smacked her playfully.

"Hey! Your nephew or niece is making me forgetful." She pouted.

...

After trying out and paying for the wedding gown, they left it in the store so Wan Jia could finish up working on the final details. Lanni then went back home, where Xiehan was placing the invitations in envelopes with the corresponding names.

She slumped beside him. "Why do we have to do this? Can't we simply create a group of all our guests and send an ecard?" She groaned.

"Some things have to be done traditionally." He swiftly placed the next card in its envelope.

She took a card and looked for its envelope, shaking her head. Weddings were a lot of work. They had a planner but many things still had to be done by them.

"These will be sent out tomorrow." He showed her the successfully sealed invites before holding up an envelope without an address. "I don't know Flynn's address."

She thought about it and made a call to Luna, who picked on the second ring. "Luna, do you know Flynn's address?" She asked.

"No. I can hack it up for you. Hold on." She promised. Lanni waited and heard her turn on her laptop before the soft sounds of her tapping the keys filled the air. A few minutes later, Luna spoke again.

"There is no permanent address. The last place he was seen was a hotel in Italy."

Lanni frowned. "How can he not have a place to live?"

"Are you meeting Flynn for the first time?" Luna chuckled. "Hold on. He came to B City after that. Give me a minute."

She hung up and Lanni waited on edge. Luna called ten minutes later and sounded out of breath. "Lanni."

"Did you find it?" She asked.

"What are you doing right now?" Luna responded with a question of her own.

"Uhm...waiting for your news?" She frowned. Was Luna high?

"Do you mind taking a seat?" Luna asked.

"Why?"

"Just sit." The latter insisted.

She could have pretended to sit but she had a nagging feeling that she needed it so she took her seat next to Xiehan. "Okay, you crazy woman. Can you tell me what's going on?"

"I found news about Flynn." Luna announced. "Before he came to B City, he was chatting with his girlfriend. He told her that he was coming to see his sisters."

"Okay?" Lanni probed.

"But soon after he arrived in B City, he passed out on his way to us. He was taken to hospital a week ago. He is yet to leave the hospital."

"What?" Lanni muttered. Her heart thumped against her chest. Flynn had been in hospital for a week? How come no one contacted her or Luna? Didn't he have any emergency contacts?

She gasped, feeling suffocated when she recalled the last time they saw each other. She had followed Xiehan on a business trip after their marriage and bumped into him on her way to the bathroom.

He had instructed her and Luna to take care of themselves, and that she should say hello to Linhou and Xiaomu. At the time, she had scoffed and told him to pay them a visit if he wanted to.

But now that she thought about it, he had sounded like... he was saying goodbye.

Lanni ran a hand through her hair. The hope she had left in her heart evaporated in a puff. "He must have known that he was unwell. Why didn't he say a word of it?"

"I don't know, Lanni." Luna sounded exasperated. "I'm going to the hospital. Are you coming with me?"

"Hell yes I am. I'm going to give him an earful of scolding for doing this to us." She grabbed a bag and made to leave even though she was only wearing his oversized t-shirt.

He grabbed her and pulled her back to his side. "I'll get you something to wear."

She nodded and waited for him to bring her a pair of pants and a blouse to wear. She changed into them at record speed and grabbed her bag, at the same time as he took his car keys. She rushed into the car and fumbled with the safety belt before ignoring it and looking up at him so he would drive faster.

...

When they arrived at the hospital, she jumped out of the car and rushed for the reception within the shortest time.

Luna was already at the reception.

"Where's he?" She demanded impatiently. Luna grabbed her hand and led her down the hallways to Flynn's ward.

"Flynn?" She pushed the door open and rushed to his side. She covered her mouth with her hands as her eyes watered.

It was unbelievable that the carefree man who couldn't wait to make fun of her was currently lying helplessly on the bed, with his life hanging precariously on a thin thread.

His eyes were open but they looked lifeless against his pale face. Now that she realized it, he looked haggard when they last met in Italy but it was much worse now; it was as if life had been sucked out of him.

"Flynn." She whispered his name.

"You asshole!" Luna wanted to punch the hell out of him and would have done it if she didn't run the risk of sending him to heaven with one blow.

"Look who's here. Both of my sisters." He smiled as if the whole situation was anything to smile about. Lanni wanted nothing but to beat the crap out of him. She couldn't hold her tears back anymore. "Why didn't you tell me anything? Didn't we agree not to keep things from each other anymore?"

He looked away in shame. "I didn't want to worry you."

"Don't give me that crap. I'm more worried. I don't believe in any of that nonsense of keeping secrets about your health from your family to protect them from the truth." Lanni glared down at him and would have landed a slap across his face if she didn't forcefully ball her hands into fists. "Do you know what hurts more? It's thinking that someone you love is alright only for it to turn out that he has been feeding you a lie."

Flynn smiled gently. However, it looked like he was using up so much strength just to smile. "Someone you love. You love me, sis? You never admitted that." He joked.

"You idiot!" This time, she couldn't stop herself from hitting him.

Luna pulled her back. "Lanni, he's still a patient."

"And I still hate him." She rolled her eyes.

"Oh please. I know you love me." He scoffed and laughed at her reaction.

When he saw both of them staring at him like they actually wanted him dead, he sighed and stopped messing around. "I didn't want you to spend your lives taking care of me. I wanted you to enjoy yours."

"We've enjoyed it alright." Luna scoffed sarcastically.

He forced a smile. "Don't be like that."

They both ignored him but sat by his side. Xiehan dropped by to check if everything was alright, then he went to find them something to eat.

"I hope I can contact Veruschka. At least once before I die." Flynn spoke after what felt like hours of cold silence.

"Who the hell is Veruschka?" Lanni asked about the unfamiliar name.

"His girlfriend. The one he tried to dump when he realized that she was pregnant." Luna explained and turned to glare at Flynn for what he did.

Lanni looked at him for confirmation and when he didn't say anything to deny Luna's claim, she gasped in shock.

"What?"

"How could you? If you didn't want a child then why did you get her pregnant?" She stood up as if that would help her get the point across easily. "If you are not going to tell me that you dumped her because she had a child with another man, then you are the worst jerk on earth!" She snapped, not caring that he was unwell.

"Don't put it like that, sis." He chuckled at Luna before looking at Lanni. "Could you help me up?"

She scoffed and wanted to ignore him but helped him up anyway. "Speak."

"Why don't I do that once you sit?" He pleaded and she had no choice but to sit.

If he was going to say that the woman got herself pregnant by tricking him and he was not ready for a child when it happened, she would suggest adopting the baby once it was born. At least she was certain that she wanted a child.

"Stop letting your mind run wild, jeez." He laughed. "I love her so much, Lanni." He looked at her then at Luna. "But you know what's going on with me. I can't live for even a week longer. I know that I'm going to die soon. How can I let her have a child who will end up as an orphan anyway? I don't want her to have to bring the child up on her own, which is why I tried to talk her into having an abortion. At least that way, she will move on after my death. She will not have a baby to keep reminding her of the man who is no longer alive."

Luna wiped the tears she didn't know were rolling from her eyes.

"Why didn't you consider what she wanted? Do you realize that by suggesting what you told her to do, you hurt her feelings even more?"

"What if she didn't mind having your child in your absence?"

"But I will not even be there when the child is born. What kind of father will that make me? She doesn't have a family so who will take care of her?" He argued.

Lanni held his hand. "That's what you think. But maybe in her opinion, it's much better to have this child who will be her only family. They will be there for each other. Besides, how can you be so certain that she will move on if she doesn't have your child with her? It will be much worse. Not only will she have to move on from you leaving her, but she will also be grieving the loss of her baby. Are you implying that just because she hasn't given birth yet, the baby isn't important to her?"

He looked away in shame. "I didn't mean it that way."

She continued patting her hand and swallowed past the lump in her throat. She had always thought that death was painful but that was until she thought about Flynn's situation. How must it feel to live the rest

of your life knowing that it was short? He must have felt life slipping out of him every day and couldn't do anything about it. How painful must it have been?

Wait. How could they be so certain that nothing could be done? She wanted to ask about the treatment he had been receiving since he came to the hospital.

Before she could open her mouth, the door was pushed open in the slightest as though whoever was outside it was asking for permission to come in.

"Come in." Luna called.

Xiehan walked in with food flasks and arranged the food on the table. He also poured a glass of milk each for Lanni and Luna.

"Can I not drink it?" Luna groaned.

"If your husband says you can skip it." He deadpanned, knowing that Xingyu wouldn't say yes to that.

He then went to Lanni's side and looked at Flynn. "Do you mind letting my friend check on you? He is a doctor."

"There's no need." Flynn dismissed and opened his mouth to eat the food that Lanni was feeding him.

Lanni pursed her lips as her hand weakened. Was it a terminal illness?

Flynn looked at his sisters then at Xiehan who was wondering why he wouldn't let Han Xichen check on him. "Can I have a word with my sisters?"

"I'll be outside." He nodded and pressed a reassuring kiss on Lanni's cheek before leaving.

"Are you okay, Luna?" Flynn asked. "It might be triggering to you."

"Nothing is more triggering than you hiding such news from us." She glared at him.

He reclined back on the pillows. "Han Xichen poisoned me." He sighed.

"What?" Lanni muttered under her breath, finally understanding things she thought didn't make sense in the past. Why would Flynn be so obedient to Han Xichen if he hated him so much?

"He would give me an antidote every week to weaken the poison. He is the only one who had it so if I ever disobeyed him, he would let the poison take effect. It was agonising." He swallowed.

She shut her eyes when she thought about it. "We should have killed him in a more painful way. Wait. You knew that if he died, you would die from the poison. Why did you agree to kill him?"

"I met Veruschka." He smiled, his face not holding any regret. "She is a doctor. She spent months studying the poison in my body and managed to develop an antidote for me. It was in the final stage of development but she wasn't certain about its effectiveness. Then I learnt of the things Han Xichen had done to the two of you in secret."

Lanni facepalmed. "Why would you put your life on the line for our revenge?"

Since he was in this state, it was obvious that the antidote had not been as effective as they hoped.

"I had wanted him dead for too long. It didn't matter if I died for killing him." He forced a smile. He never would have thought that not only would he and Veruschka fall in love, but he would also ruin her life by knocking her up.

Luna stood and blinked away her tears. "I'm going to contact Veruschka."

"You don't need to."

She didn't hear him because she had already left the ward.

Lanni stayed with him for a little longer until he fell asleep, then she joined Luna in her car.

The latter had already found a way to contact Veruschka.

"She agreed to meet up with us." Luna stretched out her limbs and reclined against the backrest.

"Will she come over, or should we go to Germany?" Lanni asked.

"She agreed to come over. She is four months along and can still travel around. On the other hand, Xingyu will not let me go overseas in his absence and I don't want to make him leave his work for me."

Lanni nodded. "I'm glad she is not mad at the whole family because of what Flynn told her to do."

"She will take the first flight here. Poor girl, she didn't even know that he was unwell. He didn't leave her as an emergency contact and didn't tell her when he woke up either. She almost fainted in shock when I told her."

Lanni once again wanted to beat the crap out of Flynn. It was already bad enough that she had to watch the man she loved as he lived the final months of his life. If she fell in love with him even while knowing that he was his patient and she would probably lose him, it must be true love.

...

Although Flynn had insisted that there was no cure to the poison, Xiehan still called Han Xichen over to check if there was anything that could be done. Unfortunately, it would take at least a month for Han Xichen to improve the antidote that Veruschka had developed and at least three to create a new one. Either way, there was no way to be certain that it would work.

Although there was medication that could be used to slow down the symptoms, Flynn decided against taking them. He preferred not to prolong his life which would consequently increase his agony.

Veruschka arrived two days later and she was nothing like Lanni and Luna thought. Unfortunately, she was too late to have a glimpse of Flynn before he breathed his last.

"How could he do this to me?" She broke down in Lanni's arms when the news was broken to her. "How could he leave us? How are we supposed to live without him?"

Lanni hugged her and patted her back in solace. "It's alright."

Veruschka's mood was constantly changing. She would be stable for a while and explain to her and Luna that Flynn was better off not feeling the pain he had to go through whenever the effects of the poison acted up. The next moment, she would break down and blame Flynn for not caring about her and their son by dying and leaving them on their own.

"You're a strong woman, Veruschka. You can..." Lanni stopped speaking when the woman pushed her away.

"I'm tired of hearing that! Just because I'm strong, I'm expected to endure everything?"

"That's not what I meant." Lanni panicked when the latter caught the wrong meaning to her words.

"When my father died, I was expected to be strong enough to move on. When my mother left me, of course, Veruschka is strong. And now when the love of my life is gone, can't I cry for a bit?" She sniffled.

"It's okay to cry." Lanni wiped her own tears away. They were standing outside the hospital morgue. She was still in denial and part of her would cling to the thought that Flynn had been mistaken to be dead. Perhaps if she waited for long enough, she would see him flail his arms and help him up, then it would be revealed that he was in fact still alive. Every time she went back for confirmation, she would caress his face only to be met with icy coldness. In the end, the staff at the morgue had to drag her out and wouldn't let her back in anymore.

Veruschka and Luna couldn't be allowed in and could only wait for the wake.

Flynn had written a will which was yet to be read officially, but the attorney who had verified it had revealed that Flynn wanted to be laid to rest the same way his mother was laid to rest, but in his sister's hometown.