

A Shotgun Marriage

Chapter 21

At night, glimmers of light shone through the window into the pitch-black room, and inside, Tia lay stiffly on her side, right at the edge of the bed. She was lying so far away from Lewis that another person could practically fit between them.

Right then, the room was so quiet that only the newlywed's even breathing could be heard.

Thud!

The second after something landed with a heavy thud in the middle of the night, a cry of pain came. "Ow..."

Click!

The light was switched on, illuminating the room and also revealing someone's discomfited figure.

Tia was sitting on the floor with her hand wrapped around her head. She looked to be in so much pain that she could barely speak and was even tearing up a little.

After switching the lights on, Lewis got out of bed and walked around it to her side. "You okay?" he asked after squatting down when he saw that she looked to be in immense pain.

Tia hurt so bad that she teared up, but at the same time, she felt somewhat humiliated.

Thus, she nodded while continuing to hug her head. "Yeah..."

She wasn't sure if she got a goose egg on her head from that fall, but her bottom and head sure hurt.

Lewis sighed in response, then picked her up and put her back in bed. After that, he sat on the edge of the bed and gently rubbed the back of her head while saying helplessly, "Am I really that scary to you? You'd rather fall off the bed than sleep closer to me?"

"... I'm just not used to it..." No matter how she thought about it, it just felt uncomfortable to her that a stranger was lying next to her so suddenly.

On the other hand, Lewis said nothing and just rubbed her head for some time.

Sure, the pain in her head had alleviated, but her backside was still hurting. The spot on her backside where she hit made it hard for her to sit comfortably.

Of course, Lewis noticed it. How could he not when she was wriggling around, trying to find a more comfortable position? "Do you want me to give it a rub?" he finally asked when she failed again and again.

She was stumped at first, but when she saw him staring at her backside, she reacted immediately and hurriedly shook her head. "No, it's fine! I can manage."

How could I let him do something so intimate, like rubbing my bottom?!

Lewis said nothing more since she had already said so, and he went back around to his side of the bed. While he got inside, Tia reflexively shuffled toward the edge again.

In actuality, her bed wasn't big. Though it wasn't a single bed, it was still only about five feet wide. She'd definitely bump into Lewis if she turned.

"You want to experience another fall again?" he asked as he turned to his side.

Hearing that, Tia smiled embarrassingly and propped her hand to shuffle a little closer to the center of the bed.

At that, Lewis said nothing but a goodnight before switching off the light. The room returned to darkness once again, and Tia's eyes had difficulty adjusting to the sudden darkness when they had just gotten used to the light. Finally, after some time had passed, Tia could finally see in the dark, and she could see the silhouette of . the person lying next to her when she turned her head.

With that, she propped her hand up to help find a more comfortable sleeping position. It was a pretty bad fall, and her backside already hurt at the slightest pressure. With a wince and a turn, she lay on her side.

However, just as she lay down, she sensed that Lewis was shifting over to her, and before she knew it, he had already pulled her into his arms and even flipped her around at that, causing her face to press against his firm chest.

Reflexively, Tia tried to push him away, but her waist was shackled, and a deep voice came from the top of her head. "Don't move."

"But I—" Just as she spoke up, Lewis cut her off.

"You'll never get used to sleeping in one bed with me if you keep sleeping on the edge." As soft as his voice was, the deepness imparted volume.

Tia no longer dared move another inch, listening to his even heartbeats as she leaned in his arms. "I'm just having trouble adapting now," she repeated in a muffled voice. Everything happened so quickly and suddenly, and she had clearly overestimated her receptivity. But she would force herself to adapt quickly and swiftly enter her role as his wife.

"Then I'll help you adapt to it faster by hugging you to sleep. I don't want to have to get up every night to carry you back into bed."

The corner of Tia's lips twitched upon his words. Why did it feel like there was a hint of ridicule in his voice? Like he was gloating.

While she was still wondering if he was gloating, his voice came from above her again. "Is it here?"

"What?" It took her a second to register what he meant, and when she did, her face flushed bright red in an instant, sensing that it was scorching hot.

How can he put his hand there?! And is he rubbing my backside?!

"Is it this spot?" Lewis repeated his question as he rubbed her backside.

Instantly, Tia shoved him away, and she glared daggers at his silhouette while stuttering, "Y-Y-You..."

"What about me?" She couldn't see his face in the dark, but he sounded monotonous as usual.

"H-How... How can you..." Nothing came out of Tia's stutters for a long time, and the imposing manner she had, in the beginning, had also diminished along with it. Her voice grew less and less audible.

Lewis sighed in response, then pulled her back into his arms. "What's there to be ashamed of? Isn't it normal for married couples to do this?" he cooed while rubbing her butt.

However, Tia remained silent. But her face was as red as a baboon's bum.

"Is it here?" he asked again, seeing that she didn't reply.

Tia nodded this time. She had to admit, if she overlooked the fact that he was doing something intimate, he controlled his pressure super well, and the pain was alleviated in no time.

She had no idea how long Lewis hugged her and rubbed her bottom. All she knew was that she stiffened her body and kept her eyes wide open, not daring to sleep in the beginning. But alas, she grew weary with time, and slowly, she drifted to sleep. By the time she woke up the following morning, he was long gone, and she didn't know how to describe her feeling as she fixed her eyes on the spot where a certain someone had spent the night in.

After that, she continued to lie in bed for some time. Then, what happened last night popped into her head when she stared at the ceiling, and she couldn't help feeling exasperated.

It wasn't until her alarm went off that she turned it off and got out of bed. When she went out to wash up after changing, she found Elizabeth already up, checking the almanac with her reading glasses in the living room.

Curious, Tia went up to her and asked, "What are you doing, Grandma?"

"I'm checking to see when is a good day for you to move over to Lewis," Elizabeth answered soberly.

Tia sighed inwardly at that, saying nothing when she was aware of Elizabeth's persistence.

When Tia was done washing up, Elizabeth was still looking through the almanac.

"Grandma, what would you like for breakfast? I'll head down and buy."

"Don't bother. Lewis made us breakfast before he left."

With that, Tia looked toward the dining table, and sure enough, there was breakfast on the table.

Chapter 22

While Tia was having breakfast, the middle-aged retired caretaker Lewis had contacted the night before had arrived.

Her name was Cynthia Zeigler, and she was in her fifties. Her all-white outfit made her look clean and made others feel comfortable being around her.

Tia was quite satisfied with Cynthia after asking her a few general questions. With that, she asked, "Will you be able to start work today?"

"I can. In fact, I was told I'll be working immediately on the call last night."

Tia nodded in response and looked at her. "Is it okay if I call you Miss Cynthia?"

"Sure." Cynthia nodded.

With that, Tia smiled and stood up to shake hands with Cynthia. "Great. I really appreciate you looking after Grandma while we're away."

"No problem at all." Cynthia nodded.

Tia checked the time and found that it was almost time for her to head to work. Thus, she bid Elizabeth goodbye but then remembered Lewis said he'd take her to meet one of his bosses. So she told Elizabeth she'd be home late as well.

After Elizabeth's medical emergency, Tia felt as though half a year had passed when she returned to the company, like everything in the office had changed while she was gone.

When she entered the office, a crowd gathered and chatted away at the desk in the corner, which was unoccupied before she was on break. Only Lydia and Ysabel were sitting at their desks. Lydia, engrossed in the file she was reading, while Ysabel grumbled at the crowd in the corner.

After putting her handbag into the drawer of her seat, Tia switched her computer on and asked Ysabel, who sat across from her. "What's going on? Why is everyone crowding there?"

Tia's voice pulled Ysabel to reality, and she exclaimed when she realized who was talking to her. "Tia, you're finally back!"

Her screech was so sharp that it was near deafening.

While screeching, Ysabel went around the desks toward Tia and hugged her colleague tightly, exaggerating, "Oh, Tia, thank heavens you're back. I've missed you so much!"

Ysabel's expression and voice were over the top, and so was her genuineness

Tia thought she was going to choke to death if Ysabel didn't let her go any second soon.

At that, she patted Ysabel's hand, telling her to let go. "So your way of showing me you miss me is by choking me to death?" asked Tia while rubbing her neck after she finally managed to pry Ysabel away from her.

In response, Ysabel stuck her tongue out playfully.

Then again, Ysabel's screaming caught everyone's attention, and those huddled in the corner reflexively looked toward the duo. Upon seeing Tia, they all went up to her, asking, "Tia, how's your grandmother? Is she feeling better?"

"Yeah, she's doing a lot better." Tia nodded with a smile. "The doctor said she'll be fine after plenty of rest."

"That's good to hear. Everyone here is quite worried about you. Happy to have you back."

"Thanks, guys," Tia thanked with a smile and only then noticed a fresh face amongst the group. She looked rather young, and she looked like a porcelain doll, pretty and adorable, with her long wavy hair and straight bangs.

At that, Tia looked toward Ysabel, her gaze saying, 'Who's this girl?'

However, Ysabel snorted and returned to her table, only to come back to Tia with a folder in her hand. "Tia, I have a business plan that needs to be submitted ASAP. Why don't you help me out?"

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Instantly, Tia sensed that the atmosphere was off, and she wondered what beef Ysabel had with this porcelain doll.

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But before Tia could turn around, the porcelain doll had approached Tia and extended her hand with a smile. "You must be Tia. Everyone has been telling me so much about you. I'm Yvette Trenowyth. I just joined the planning department a week ago. I'm looking forward to working with you."

Her voice was soft and sweet like cotton candy, so sweet that it would soften any, if not most, men's hearts.

Likewise, Tia returned the handshake with a smile. "You too."

Pissed for some reason, Ysabel separated the two by pulling on Tia's arms as she said, "Tia, help me check if—" While speaking, something caught Ysabel's eyes, and she gushed, "Tia Carter, you're married?!"

It was only then Tia remembered the wedding band Lewis had put on her the night before. "Yeah, I'm married." She nodded with a graceful smile.

"Blind date?" Ysabel asked.

"Yeah, one of my dates."

“Goodness, Carter, you’re really mad! I thought you were joking about it. You actually married a guy you knew through a blind date?! How long have you guys known each other?” Ysabel exclaimed with incredulity, having trouble understanding what Tia was thinking

On the other hand, their colleagues began causing a ruckus. “C’mon, Tia, forget that we didn’t even get an invitation, but are you not going to give us any wedding favors?”

“Yeah, you have to treat us to dinner, Tia.” Wallace, a colleague known for his pettiness, took the opportunity to rip Tia off.

Just then, Lydia, who had been focusing on her work, got up from her seat and approached Tia. “You’ve really gotten yourself married?” Lydia sighed while shaking her head when she saw the ring in Tia’s hand.

“I have.” Tia nodded.

Lydia shook her head again and said no more.

“Tia, what does your husband do for a living? You should introduce him to us,” someone effused.

“Yeah, Tia. You should at least treat us to a meal even if you’re not going to hold a wedding. We’ve been colleagues for so long. Besides-”

“Did the company hire you guys to chat?”

Someone roared from a distance. The voice was so cold that it could frost someone over.

Everyone looked over reflexively to find Lance standing by the door for who knew just how long. The point was that his gaze was razor-sharp.

Everyone here was astute. So no one dared say another word, scrambling back to their seats and getting busy when they saw Lance’s gaze.

Tia, on the other hand, nodded at Lance as a greeting.

However, he looked to be in an awful mood, for he looked away coldly and said to Yvette, “Trenowyth, come with me.”

With that, he walked away.

“Yes, Mr. Garrett,” Yvette answered sweetly and followed Lance.

Tia knew he was still upset about the fact that she chose Lewis over him. But instead of giving him empty promises, making him wait forever, she’d rather give him the cruel truth that they would never work. She wouldn’t give him a chance, even if he wanted to be her rebound guy.

At that, she sat back down on her seat only to find Ysabel snorting disdainfully in her seat. “Cloying.”

Tia followed her line of sight to find her looking at Yvette, who was following behind Lance, then shifted her gaze back at Ysabel, wondering what in the world happened while she was gone.

Chapter 23

It turned out that Yvette joined the company with barely much credibility at her job.

While Tia was taking care of her grandmother in the hospital, the company organized a minor recruiting event.

On the other hand, Ysabel’s younger sister would be graduating from college later in the year and happened to be looking for an internship. So, naturally, Ysabel told her sister to apply here when she heard the company was hiring.

And for this, Ysabel had treated the head of HR for a few meals and had even let that pig take advantage of her only because it was tough to find a job nowadays.

Ysabel's sister did outstandingly on her written test, for she had gotten the interview questions in advance. During her face-to-face interview, the panel also thought she was excellent. But just when Ysabel and her sister thought they practically got it in the bag, the company announced internally that the spot had been secured, and the person was none other than the porcelain doll—Yvette Trenowyth.

It wasn't until Yvette showed up in the planning department that Ysabel realized that pig of an HR director had fooled her. The recruiting event was just a mere formality so that Yvette could justifiably join the planning department.

Moreover, after Yvette came, all the guys in the office would constantly go up to her, causing Ysabel, who stood out, to suddenly fall out of favor with them. Adding this to the previous grudge, Ysabel's hatred and resentment toward Yvette grew increasingly intense, and it finally blew one morning meeting.

Lance handed a case to Ysabel and had her take Yvette under her wing. But with how much she hated Yvette, she said on the spot, 'Since Yvette joined the company with the number one spot in her written test, surely she can handle a case on her own. There's no reason for her to learn from me. You should let her take on this case as a practice! But everyone knew how Yvette joined the company and was even more aware that she couldn't even sort through the most basic files and data. What Ysabel was doing was merely to have her make a fool of herself.

To be honest, what Ysabel did wasn't disproportionate, for those who came out of nowhere with zero abilities were most often criticized. However, Ysabel underestimated Yvette's identity. She had thought the porcelain doll managed to enter the company thanks to HR. But who'd have thought Lance stuck up for Yvette on the spot, questioning Ysabel if she couldn't even take a rookie under her wing. He even went as far as saying, 'If you can't even guide a rookie, then you can tell me. I'll have someone else do it!

His words rendered Ysabel livid and humiliated, yet there was nothing she could do. Naturally, someone else instead of her became Yvette's mentor in the end. Because of Lance's attitude toward Yvette, everyone naturally didn't dare snub her. If anything, they would even butter up to her.

Thus, if it were to say Ysabel's resentment toward Yvette was a secret before this, then now, she wasn't afraid of anyone finding out her hatred toward Yvette at all.

"You think it's maddening too, don't you, Tia? I've never met someone as shameless as her. She has zero work competence. The only thing she can do is whine and pout," Ysabel ranted as she angrily shoved a mouthful of food into her mouth, chomping it like it was Yvette.

"Chill out. We're all colleagues here and in the same department at that. You shouldn't make such a big fuss." Lydia tried to dissuade her.

"Hmph, she only gets to work here because of her family's connections. She's nothing without it, I'm telling you!" Ysabel snapped.

Tia, on the other hand, was just a listener, eating away. Suddenly, the dinner Lewis made the night before popped into her mind. She had to admit that it was decent. It might not be chef-quality, but it was so much better than cafeteria food.

While Ysabel was still rambling on about Yvette and her incompetence, Lydia noticed

Tia was spacing out while picking on her food. At that, she nudged Ysabel and gestured with her mouth, telling her to look over at Tia. "Earth to Tia. Were you even listening to what I said?!" Ysabel wasn't happy that Tia spaced out.

Tia looked up in response, only to realize she had spaced out. At that, she smiled and said, "Yeah, I was."

Lydia, on the other hand, had something else in mind. "Tia, you and,"

However, before she could finish her words, Tia's phone, which she left on the table, rang untimely. It was a call from Lewis.

To that, Tia smiled apologetically at them and answered the call. "Hello?"

"It's me." As usual, Lewis' voice was monotonous.

"I know." She even remembered how he attached his name to this number.

"Have you had lunch?"

"I'm in the middle of it," Tia answered while stabbing her plate of pasta, which seemed to be undercooked that day.

"Okay," Lewis replied under his breath, then asked, "What time do you get off work? I'll pick you up."

"Five-thirty." But then she suddenly remembered about the birthday dinner he wanted to bring her to. They still needed to buy a present. Thus, she asked, "Will it be too late? Why don't I get off work half an hour early?"

"It's fine. Don't delay your work. I'll pick you up at five-thirty." Just then, something hit him, and he asked, "That reminds me. Did the caretaker show up this morning?"

"Yeah, we've met." Tia nodded. "I asked her to start working today and take care of Grandma."

"Good to hear," Lewis replied, then ended the chat. "I'll let you get back to your food. See you at five-thirty."

"Alright." Tia nodded before hanging up.

After putting her phone back on the table, Tia looked up to find Lydia and Ysabel staring right at her, no longer eating. Ysabel even looked all gossipy, all the anger and indignation totally gone.

"Your man?" Ysabel asked bluntly.

"Yeah." Tia nodded as a tinge of redness laced her ears.

"Tia, does he love you?" Lydia asked. She was more concerned about this than learning that Tia had married herself off. If a woman couldn't marry someone she loved, she should at least marry someone who loved her.

Tia shook her head in response. "Probably not."

"He doesn't love you?!" Ysabel exclaimed. "What are you, an idiot? What did you see in him, if not love?!"

No love. Tia thought.

Lydia sighed at that. "Tia, how can you be so muddle-headed?!" This girl sees marriage as nothing but child's play! Surely she'll regret it one day when she still has such a long life ahead.

However, Tia smiled and shook her head. "It's cool. I don't love him either. So no one lost."

Lydia and Ysabel exchanged a glance in response, and Lydia shook her head while

sighing with resignation. Ysabel, too, shook her head while mumbling, "This girl has gone absolutely, completely mad."

Chapter 24

Right as Tia switched off her computer to get off work, Lewis' call came; right on time. At that, Tia answered and asked directly, "Hey, have you already arrived?"

"Yeah, I'm right downstairs. Are you ready to leave?" Lewis' voice was as monotonous as ever, even on the phone.

"Alright, I'll be down in a minute. Let me pack up." And with that, Tia hung up.

After making sure the computer was switched off, Tia took her handbag out of the drawer and dropped her personal belongings in.

Noticing Tia was leaving, Ysabel, who was sitting across from Tia, deliberately leaned over and teased, "Let me guess, your hubby has come to pick you up?"

Tia nodded in reply. "Yeah, he has to attend his boss' birthday dinner later. We're going to buy some stuff." While speaking, she carried her handbag, getting ready to leave.

But Ysabel stopped her, saying as she hurriedly switched her computer off, "Wait, wait up. I'm coming with you."

Tia shook her head in response, knowing this woman's gossip mode had been turned on.

Seconds later, Ysabel grabbed her bag and went up to Tia, giggling as she wrapped her arms around her newly married colleague. "Let's go." She was dying to see what kind of man could have Tia marry herself off to him so hastily.

As the two reached the exit, they bumped into Yvette and Lance, who were entering. Yvette smiled upon seeing Tia. "Tia, are you clocking off?" The young woman didn't even spare a glance at Ysabel, and the disdain was self-evident.

"Yeah." Tia nodded with a smile. "I have something to get to later, so I'm leaving a little earlier today." While speaking, she shifted her gaze to Lance and dipped her head. "Mr. Garrett."

However, Lance looked away and walked past her the next second, heading straight into his office.

Seeing so, Yvette hurriedly followed after him while bidding Tia goodbye. "Um, I'll head in first."

On the other hand, Ysabel snorted disdainfully and mumbled, "B*tches be hokey."

"Alright, cut it out." No doubt Yvette would fight Ysabel if she heard it. Anyone would, wouldn't they? But there was really no need to cause such conflicts when they were all working in the same department. With that, Tia patted Ysabel's arm and urged, "C'mon, let's go."

Lewis parked his luxury SUV by the entrance when the duo reached the lobby, and upon seeing Tia, he instantly got out of the car. The suit he wore made him look upright, and his expressionless face made him look somewhat aloof. Then again, it matched his stern temperament.

Meanwhile, Ysabel fixed her gaze on Lewis and subconsciously gave Tia a tug. "Hey, Tia, is that your husband?"

"Yeah." Tia nodded in affirmation. But honestly, she still wasn't used to the term 'husband'.

"Shoot." Ysabel marveled, then looked at Tia, exclaiming, "No wonder you said yes. I

would if I were you!”

In her mind, the man was probably the boorish type, but seeing him for herself now, she realized she couldn't be any more wrong. Who'd have thought he was a hunk?! And the masculinity he exuded from years of working out made him even manlier than the guys in their office.

At that, Tia chuckled disapprovingly and teased, “I thought you're a celibatarian? Didn't you say you only want to indulge in their bodies and not have to take care of them when you two grow?”

The words were actually from a female character's line in the movie 'I Do', starring Joaquin Phoenix. Around that time, Ysabel was swooned by Phoenix's gaze, and she dragged Tia to watch the movie with her as soon as it was released. In the movie, a character named Lisa was practically Ysabel's double. The two were celibatarians and even believed in living in the moment, dating, and getting laid with whoever they saw eye-to-eye with. If things worked out, then great; if not, see you later.

Ysabel stuck her tongue out in response, then leaned over to Tia's ear. “Say, how is he in that?”

Baffled, Tia asked, “In what?”

“In bed, of course!” Ysabel then smiled at Tia suggestively, saying, “I heard guys who work out regularly last super long and are a lot hornier. Is it really true?”

Tia blushed instantly and glared daggers at her colleague. “As if I'm going to entertain your bullsh*t. I'm leaving.”

With that, she went over to Lewis.

“Hey, wait up. You haven't introduced your husband.” Ysabel hurriedly chased after her. Meanwhile, Lewis was walking toward the two, and when he got to Tia, he very naturally took her handbag from her, then looked over at the woman behind Tia. “Is this your colleague?”

Before Tia could answer, Ysabel extended her hand and introduced herself. “Hi, I'm Ysabel Litton. Tia's colleague and good friend.”

Lewis returned the handshake out of courtesy but withdrew as soon as he touched her hand. “Lewis Harvey. Tia's husband,” he said plainly.

Short and straight to the point. Very Lewis of him.

“I heard you work in a research institute. What level are you at? What do you guys research on?”

“I'm just a regular employee. As for what we do, I'm sorry. It's classified information,” Lewis answered politely.

“I see.” After nodding, Ysabel leaned toward Tia and whispered when she realized the man's face was practically deadpan, “Is your husband always this stern? Does he ever smile?”

Amused, Tia smiled, then pushed her a little further away. “Alright, we have to go. See you.”

With that, she turned to Lewis and said, “C'mon.”

Lewis nodded in response, then dipped his head toward Ysabel as a farewell. But as he turned around to leave, Ysabel called out to the newlyweds. “Hey, wait up!”

“The guys in the office were pretty upset, Mr. Harvey, when they heard you've taken our office beauty for yourself.”

Vexed, Tia shot a glance at Ysabel and said, “Cut it out, Ysabel. We really have to go.”

“C’mon, Tia, I haven’t even said anything, and you already feel bad for him?” Ysabel ribbed.

“...” Speechless, Tia turned her head away as embarrassment flashed across her face. Lewis, on the other hand, patted her, then looked over at Ysabel. “So what do you propose I do, Miss Litton?”

“We’ve been working with Tia for years, and we’re happy to see her get married. But who’d have thought you guys got married without a word? Shouldn’t you at least give us a chance to give you two our blessings?” Ysabel said with a smile, hinting that Lewis should treat everyone in the office to a meal.

Lewis nodded without a second thought, agreeing, “You’re right. How about this? If you guys are available tomorrow, Tia and I will treat everyone to a meal.”

“Well, for Tia’s happiness, we will definitely make ourselves available no matter how busy we are!” Ysabel chirped. “Everyone’s still in the office. I’ll go and tell them to clear their schedule tomorrow!” While announcing, she headed back up to the office.

On the other hand, Tia sighed as she watched her dotty colleague leave before turning to Lewis. “Don’t mind her. It’s who she is. She likes to gossip and exaggerate things,” she said apologetically.

However, Lewis didn’t say anything about it, nodding as he said to her, “Let’s go.”

Tia nodded in agreement, then followed him to the car.

After buckling the seat belt, Tia looked over at Lewis. “Are you really going to treat them tomorrow?”

While she was asking, Lewis started the car. With that, he nodded with affirmation after glancing at her. “Of course. Your colleague is right. It’s only right that we treat everyone to a meal since we’re not going to have a wedding. Or do you actually not want to introduce me to them?”

“Of course not.” Tia shook her head. “I just don’t want to trouble you.”

“It’s what we should do,” Lewis said with a smile before driving away.

Chapter 25

Lewis took Tia to an antique market, but as an ‘uncultured swine’, or so Lewis said, he knew nothing about these things.

Tia was actually just as clueless as he was. After all, she wasn’t into collecting antiques. Then again, she loved drawing, so she still knew a thing or two about fine art.

While shopping, a watercolor painting of water lilies caught Tia’s attention. It was simple, yet it outlined a water lily’s signature and charm.

With that, she turned to Lewis and asked, “Will this do?”

“You should call the shots,” Lewis answered without a second thought after taking a glance at it.

After receiving his acknowledgment, she nodded with a smile and asked the shopkeeper to wrap the painting up.

However, during their journey to the home of Lewis’ boss, Tia began regretting her decision. “This isn’t by ‘some famous artist. Will it really be fine if we give this as a present?” she asked while hugging the painting.

Hearing that, Lewis took a gander at her while keeping his hands on the wheel. “Don’t worry. He won’t mind.”

Tia finally relaxed after getting his affirmation, and she nodded, remaining silent for the

rest of the journey.

Later, they arrived at a compound and finally pulled over in front of a manor with guards standing upright at the entrance. Upon seeing the couple exit the Jeep, they saluted them.

Tia suddenly grew fearful when she saw the large red double door, and she looked to her side at Lewis. "Um, is your boss stern?"

"No," Lewis shook his head, reassuring her.

However, Tia continued to stare at him, having trouble believing his words. Well, look at the guards' faces. She wouldn't be surprised if she was told the only face they could pull was an emotionless one.

"What's wrong? Scared?" Lewis seemed to have noticed her uneasiness.

"Nervous." Tia smiled embarrassingly as she used a more indirect word to describe her feeling right then.

Lewis smiled in response, and his rare expression softened his normally stern face.

"Let's go in," he said while holding her hand.

What else could she do but nod? Then again, her nervousness seemed to have lessened when he held her hand.

After entering the building, they came to the living room to find a man in a dress shirt, looking to be in his fifties or sixties. He was sitting on a couch, staring at the chessboard while frowning, seemingly deep in thought.

"Boss," Lewis called out.

The man looked up reflexively. "Ha! Lewis, right on time." He beamed while approaching Lewis. "Come. Take a look at this for me. How can I win this game?"

At that, he tried to drag Lewis to the couch.

However, Lewis stood still and grabbed his hand instead. Then, he took a gander at Tia before introducing her, "Boss, this is my wife, Tia Carter."

It was only then Lewis' boss noticed the young woman next to Lewis. "She's really your wife?" He looked back at Lewis with a smile after fixing his gaze on Tia for quite some time.

"I never joke about this," Lewis replied gravely. Even in front of his mentor, his face was still deadpan.

And the man seemed to have long gotten used to Lewis' expressionless face, for he looked over at Tia and ignored Lewis. "What's your name, child?"

Tia was still nervous, but she tried to calm herself down, answering, "Tia."

"Are you really his wife?" the man asked while pointing at Lewis.

"I am." Tia nodded and smiled.

"Haha!" The man guffawed as he patted Lewis approvingly, saying, "You move fast, kid. I have to hand it to you." At that, he shouted at the back of the house. "Wendy Dear, come quick. Lewis has brought his wife over."

Then, he looked back at Tia. "Come, child, sit." Of course, he didn't forget to order Lewis around. "What are you doing just standing there, Lewis? Go and get your wife something to drink. Who's going to look after your wife if you don't?"

Lewis rubbed his nose in response, then headed into the kitchen without a word.

Tia, on the other hand, was somewhat reserved. But she thought the man was really as Lewis said, or at least from what she could tell, the smile on his face made him look less stern than Lewis.

“What do you have there, child?” the man asked, curious about the tube box Tia was hugging

His voice jolted Tia back to reality, and she remembered they still hadn’t given the man his present. With that, she hurriedly opened the tube box and pulled the art toward him. “Lewis and I got a watercolor painting for you, sir. Why don’t you take a look, see if you like it.”

However, the man guffawed upon seeing what it was. “Haha! Where did you guys buy this?”

“S-Sorry, is there something wrong with it?” Tia asked, utterly baffled as to why Lewis’ boss would laugh.

“Haha. You’ll find out soon enough.” He wanted to keep her in the dark for a little while. Naturally, the suspense got Tia frowning in bafflement.

At that, he took another look at the painting in his hand and nodded. “But it’s a good gift, indeed. I really like it. You’ve got good taste, child.”

His approval brought a smile to Tia’s face.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, instead of pouring a glass of water for Tia, Lewis helped Wendy serve the dishes.

Tia looked over reflexively to find a woman near her fifties coming out of the kitchen with a dish in her hands. After putting the plate down, she looked up and happened to meet Tia’s eyes. With that, she smiled and walked toward the living room. She . moved so elegantly that it looked like it was in her nature.

Tia stood up and looked over to Lewis, who was behind this woman, thinking she was probably the matriarch of the house. “Ma’am,” she greeted.

Wendy beamed upon hearing Tia’s greeting and turned to Lewis. “Lewis, you didn’t tell her I’m your aunt?”

Lewis, too, smiled and walked over to Tia, introducing them, “Tia, this is my aunt. Aunt, Tia, my wife.”

“I’d prefer if you could call me Wendy.” Wendy smiled warmly at Tia.

Mortified, Tia blushed and changed her greeting. “Ms. Wendy.” She thought it would be impolite of her to call Wendy by her name straight.

Wendy then nodded and hummed a reply with a smile.

Just then, Mr. Aloysius Luther, who had been sitting on the couch, handed the watercolor painting to his wife. “Wendy Dear, this girl here is brilliant. She has really good taste.”

Wendy beamed upon seeing the painting, and she looked up at Tia. “Where did you buy this?”

“Sorry?” Tia looked toward Lewis reflexively, unsure what was exactly wrong with the painting and why they had such baffling expressions.

“We got this in an art gallery,” Lewis explained. “Why? Is something wrong with it?”

Wendy and Aloysius exchanged a glance before Wendy explained, smiling, “I put this up in an art gallery some time ago. I wanted to see if someone would actually buy it.”

Tia and Lewis were stumped for a good while before they burst into laughter. What a coincidence!