

## CHAPTER 11

Lau Seng heard a buzz of annoying girly giggling sounds. When he made into the family room, his brows shot up in surprise. “What are you two doing here with Wei Wen?” he barked, his fists at waist.

The cacophony waned out as the girls turned at him.

He crossed his arms over his chest as they got up from the floor. “She’s not allowed to step out of her room and pollute the house with her bad luck,” he spat, finger jabbing at Wei Wen.

“Shut up, you good-for-nothing boy,” retorted Kah Wan, standing fearlessly. Lau Seng couldn’t deny that this girl had got some guts. “Wei Wen is not an omen. She’s an angel.”

“*You* shut up, useless idiot.” He poked a finger at the doorway where he had come in from. “Now get your asses out of here or I am going to tell everyone what you have done.”

Pursed lips, Kah Wan and Man Sin held onto one of Wei Wen’s hands and started to walk out. As Kah Wan passed Lau Seng, she crooned, “Lousy Lau Seng.”

“Stop,” bellowed Lau Seng, holding his palm up.

The three girls stopped and turned at him. Annoyance clear in their eyes.

“What did you just say? Never mind.” Lau Seng waved dismissively. “Did I ask you to take Wei Wen out too? No, I didn’t. Now get out and leave Wei Wen here.”

“What are you going to do with *my* sister?” Kah Wan stepped forward. “Are you going to do something bad to her? Don’t you dare!”

“I don’t see what you can do about it.” Lau Seng laughed a mirthless chuckle. “What you gonna do, huh?”

Kah Wan wanted to say something when he raised his arm, made her stumble back.

“Now get out of here before I smack you on your face.”

Both of them had the same disapproving look on their faces before Man Sin tugged Kah Wan at the arm. “Come on, Kah Wan. Leave it.”

Then, they turned on their heels and stalked out of the family room submissively.

At the doorway, Kah Wan threw one last glimpse at them, then left the baby at Lau Seng’s mercy.

Lau Seng smirked proudly to himself. *Who are they to go against Lau Seng, now the only male grandson in the family?* He made sure that the twins had gone out of earshot before he turned and looked down at the little girl at his feet.

“Stupid girl,” he snorted, then strode over to the sofa where he plopped in. There, he glared at Wei Wen, who was standing a few feet away. His mind began to work, generating ideas to make the baby girl’s life worse. After all, she was sister of Shun Nin, his evil late cousin who had caused much misery to his life.

Wei Wen suddenly snapped her head up and glared Lau Seng square in the eye. “You freak,” she growled, loudly and fearlessly.

Lau Seng flinched in his seat. Sudden fear flared in him, forming a lump in his throat. As he gazed into the baby’s eyes, he began to see something growing, something familiar yet terrifying. *What is it?* After a while, he found his voice. “What—what did you just say?”

“I called you a freak and now I’m calling you a jerk,” said Wei Wen stridently. Not a single hint of fear in her voice.

This time, Lau Seng scoffed, bursting into contemptuous cackle. The fear disappeared as suddenly as it had come. “You are just a baby. What is there to be scared of?”

“A baby, eh?” A smirk grew across her face as Wei Wen folded her short arms. “Everything about me is to be scared of, coward.”

Terror gripped Lau Seng anew. Wei Wen behaved and sounded just like Shun Nin. That was before shock morphed into irritation. He leaped forward and made for Wei Wen’s now long and tousled hair.

But the baby was quicker. She sidestepped his grasp and the next moment, her fingers balled into fist that connected to Lau Seng’s stomach.

He fell over, clutching his stomach tightly as pain exploded and shot through him. “You...”

Wei Wen laughed loudly, evil dripping from her voice. Pleasure evident and blooming in her face as she stared down at Lau Seng’s curled up body at her feet. She kicked him on the side and strutted away. “Who’s the baby now? Ha!”

## CHAPTER 12

### THREE WEEKS LATER

Alone again. Like every other day. Mom did not come in today. In fact, Shun Nin hadn't seen her since the day Mom and Dad fought. He figured Mom might need some time being alone. After all, he was the cause of the fight.

In his previous room, he would lie on his bedroom floor and stare up at the ceiling. At the hand painted pictures that told a different story every time. Most of the time that wouldn't happen as he had the freedom of the world to do anything and go anywhere he pleased. His old days were rarely spent unentertained.

Now, all he had to stare at was a cracked, peeling ceiling that threatened to collapse at any unexpected moment. When the grand mansion was being renovated before, this room had been locked up and left out of the project. It was one of the few parts that had remained the same since the forties.

Since late afternoon, Shun Nin had been lying on his hard, lumpy bed and counting on every different crack on the ceiling. "One hundred twenty one, one hundred twenty two, one hundred twenty three, one hundred twenty four..."

A half hour later, he had counted up to a thousand. "Argh, screw this," he snarled, feeling extremely bored and annoyed.

He flipped in his bed and screamed into his pillow, then hopped off to look at himself in the mirror on the wall. "Whoa, I look almost the same as me before," he said, pulling himself on

the cheeks to form a smile. "At least, that's something to be happy about."

He went to sit on the floor. There, he pulled out his box of stationery and the new drawing block Mom had secretly given him and started stretching. It was one of the few things he could do these days. The only way he could travel places and escape the confines of the mansion. The only adventures he could have.

He got his supplies from his sisters. Only once he had asked Lau Seng.

"How dare you talk to me, you little dark omen?" Lau Seng had barked. Before Shun Nin knew what happened, his hand was in the air and connected to his face with a smack.

Shun Nin staggered a few steps and fell down on the hard floor. The pain still burned deep in his mind. Enraged, he wanted to jump on Lau Seng and send his fist to his ugly face. But he couldn't do anything.

Grandpa had been there and witnessed the entire act without a word.

Wei Wen's door was open in welcome. Man Sin saw her little sister and was surprised at how a three years old baby could sit so still and concentrate on doing something for longer than a few minutes.

Curious, she slipped in like a shadow and dropped into a crouch behind Wei Wen. The baby, so engrossed with what she was doing, had not noticed that she was there, Man Sin smiled mischievously at herself.

"Aha, it's done!" Wei Wen suddenly announced, holding up her masterpiece in the air.

Man Sin was flabbergasted. She sucked in a breath and jumped up so fast, she nearly doubled over.

There was no denying it was a sketch of Soh Man and it looked similar to the one Shun Nin drew few days before the dreadful night. Everything from the top to the bottom, save for

what Soh Man wore and the pose she took.

The sudden commotion from behind jolted Shun Nin. He leaped to his feet and spun around to meet Man Sin. Anger surged in him. “Don’t you know how to knock? Don’t you have any brain?”

“How did you do that?” said Man Sin, her voice laced with urgency. She pointed at the painting that Shun Nin quickly hid behind him. Her eyes riveted to his face. “Are you Shun Nin?”

His stomach lurched. He wasn’t ready to come out with his true identity yet.

What would Man Sin think of him?

Would she laugh and celebrate his misfortune?

He waved dismissively instead. “Don’t be silly. Of course I’m not Shun Nin. Use your brain and you’ll know that reincarnation is not possible—” *Dang*. He wasn’t supposed to know who Shun Nin was and what happened to him.

“Oh my god. You even talk like him,” cried Man Sin. Shun Nin stumbled back when she squatted down and peered into his eyes. “It’s really you. Stop fencing with me, okay. You have been reincarnated into Wei Wen, haven’t you?”

Shun Nin stayed silent, lost for words.

Man Sin leaped up and went to close the door. Grinning, she dropped to sit in front of Shun Nin. Excitement blossomed all over her face. “Tell me everything, Brother. What happened? What was it like to die? How were you reincarnated? Was it painful?” Questions came in a flood. Like she could not stop thinking of things to ask.

Shun Nin only stared her dumbly.

“Okay, okay. I am sorry.” Man Sin let out a relieved sigh. “Just tell me everything. Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone. Not even Kah Wan, well, unless you ask me to.”

A tired sigh exploded from Shun Nin's chest. "Okay, okay. I am Shun Nin. Happy? I don't remember what happened or how I had died. I only remember someone shouting and screaming. A girl." He reproduced his painting and gazed sadly at it. At the drawing of Soh Man. His one and only love that he had not seen for a long, long time. "I think it was Soh Man. Then suddenly, I blacked out and found myself in a place that was pitch black..."

Shun Nin finished telling the story five minutes later when tears had beaded in Man Sin's eyes.

"Man Sin, don't cry please." He pulled out a used tissue from his pocket and gave it to her. "Look, I'm sorry okay. For being mean and hurting you last time."

"It's okay, Brother. I forgot everything already." She wiped her tears and beamed. "All I care about now is that you are back. I love you, Brother." Her arms were in the air, then around him, squeezing him tightly.

"Okay, okay. You can let go now," said Shun Nin hoarsely after a while.

"Oh, sorry, Brother," said Man Sin, releasing him. "Do you need anything? Or do you want me to do something for you?"

"Not really." These three empty years had trained him into minimalism. Plus, there were only so many things Man Sin could do. She was powerless, like him. He thought hard, then made up his mind after a couple of seconds. "Uh, okay. There's this one thing. I want to see my sweetheart, Soh Man."

"What? Why?"

"I need to tell her who I really am. There's nothing left in this world for me. If there's one thing I want now, it is to see her again," said Shun Nin, his voice serious. "I miss her a lot."

Man Sin shifted to sit next to Shun Nin and wrapped her arms around his shoulders.

“Don’t be sad, Brother. But you of all people should know that we can’t go out of this house. And anyway, you’re a girl now. I mean, even if she believes in you, are you sure she would still want to be with you, now that you are a girl?”

“Man Sin, we truly love each other,” said Shun Nin defensively. “True love can never be broken.”

“Relax, okay? Just accept your fate. Forget about her.”

Shun Nin sighed after a beat. “If only I could go back in time and stop myself from dying.”



## CHAPTER 13

The top executives of Chong Advertising Enterprise were in the majestic conference room that had turned into a pressure cooker, all experiencing Grandpa's wrath.

"We have lost a million dollars in the course of only a few days," Grandpa's voice boomed across the room. His fist pounded onto the mahogany conference table that stretched long across the room.

His eyes scanned his audience. At the straight faced men and women in business suit. Dad, Mom, and Aunt Cheslydia were among the assembly.

When no one made a move to speak, Grandpa grew angrier and continued his venting. "There has been a large sum of money lost and I demand an explanation." His knuckles connected to the table with another loud thump.

Again, there was silence. Grandpa's anger blazed into fury. His face turned a deep maroon.

"Don't worry, Father," Dad said quickly, saving the rest in the room from his shouting. "I will see what I can do to attract new customers."

"You'd better," Grandpa said grimly. "Because if this condition persists, we will have to resort to unfavorable decisions. You know what that means."

Some men gulped, others hung their heads low.

As the conference continued long into the evening, the door suddenly flung open. All eyes turned, every head pivoted to the direction of the door, where Wei Wen had barged in.

Mom gasped quietly as her heart leaped up to the ceiling. “What are you doing here, Wei Wen?” she whispered to herself. Her eyes swerved in Grandpa’s direction.

His eyes scarlet with rage, wrath overflowed his face. Something told her Wei Wen was going to be punished severely. Dad’s face was an exact duplicate of Grandpa’s.

The silence was so deafening in the conference room as if it had turned into a vacuum.

Wei Wen veered around, her innocent eyes wandered around the room, oblivious to the tension that was building up. Then, she found her mother and started to run at her, screaming, “Mommy, Mommy!” Her voice exceptionally loud and ringing in the quiet room.

Mom was wide eyed. She glanced at Grandpa and Dad’s angry faces in turn, then pivoted toward Wei Wen, who was still hurrying toward her.

All eyes were affixed at the little girl. Everybody seemed to be holding their breath as Grandpa’s face turned purple.

*So innocent. Like she doesn’t even know she’s wrong.* Mom tightened her lips.

“Mommy, I want to go to the park now,” little Wei Wen demanded stridently as she held Mom’s hands tightly.

Instead of answering, Mom slowly turned toward Grandpa, fear raging through her mind.

What was he going to do next?

What would he do to Wei Wen?

These questions and many more raced through her head like angry hornets. Her heart pounded faster and louder at every passing second until she was sure that everyone in the room could hear it.

Suddenly, Grandpa jumped up so violently, his chair fell backward. All eyes riveted at him instead. “Who on earth gave you permission to come in here, Wei Wen?” His voice roared

like thunder, drowning the quick beating of Mom's heart. "You've brought enough misfortune to the family and even the company." His finger jabbed in Wei Wen and Mom's direction. "GET OUTTA HERE NOW!!!"

It had come so abruptly, Shun Nin's head snapped at Grandpa with a shudder. Everyone had jumped. One or two, the weak ones as Shun Nin called them had fallen out of their chairs and were slowly getting back up.

"I—I am sorry, Father." Mom finally found her voice.

The next second, Shun Nin's feet were off the ground. Mom had lifted him in her arms and hurried for the door. He turned back into the conference room and saw Dad whisper to Grandpa, "I am sorry, Father. She's just a three years old baby. Forgive her please." He couldn't help but to be pleased that Dad had stood up for him for the first time. After he had become Wei Wen. When he thought back, he could be doing it for Mom or just to calm the storm.

"Shun Nin was a genius at three," spat Grandpa. "Boys are usually smarter than girls." That was the last thing Shun Nin heard before the door slammed in his face. Every single voice was shut out. Together with the tension that vibrated in the air.

Once in the family room, when he was with Mom alone, peace settled over and within Shun Nin. Mom sat down on the sofa with him on her lap, then a sigh escaped her chest. "Wei Wen, you must never do that again. You are not going into the conference room again even if no one is there," said Mom sternly. Her face reflected her weariness.

"But—"

"My darling Wei Wen." She put a finger at Shun Nin's lips. Kissing him on the cheek, she hugged him close and tight. "I want you to know that Grandpa and Daddy think you're a dark omen. They think that you brought the bad luck that has plagued the family and company

when you were born.”

Shun Nin looked down unhappily at his feet, then into Mom’s eyes. “Do you hate me too, Mommy?”

Mom beamed and passed her hand over Shun Nin’s back. “Why would I hate you, darling? Mommy will always love you no matter what.”

“I love you too, Mommy.” Shun Nin threw his arms over Mom’s neck and held her tightly.

She hugged back.

In her embrace, he asked again, “Mom, why is Grandpa so sexist? Why he’s so patriarchal? Isn’t this the modern world, the democratic era? Why is he still stuck in the Dark Ages?”

Another gasp escaped Mom as she pulled back to look at Shun Nin. She stared dumbly at him for a couple of seconds. “Where did you learn such big words?” When Shun Nin shrugged, Mom shook her head. “Don’t worry yourself about Grandpa. He’s just close minded. I have to go back to the conference now.” She pecked him on the cheek again before she got up and left him on the sofa.

Shun Nin watched with heavy heart as Mom disappeared into the horizon. A sigh left him when the door closed after her. “If only she would stay for a little longer.”

Again, the family room fell into the spell of silence.