

The Wife He Forgot to Marry (Winona and Yule)

Chapter 21

When Winona returned to the hospital room, Helena and Greta were already there. Helena was helping Nikita, combing her hair and gently wiping her face and hands. Eight-year-old Greta, chatting with her grandmother, leaned over her injury and said, “Grandma, let me blow on it for you. It'll make the boo-boo go away.”

Nikita chuckled, amused. “Look at you, all grown up and taking care of your grandma already.”

Greta puffed out her chest confidently. “Grandma, when I grow up and get a job like Mom, I'll earn money and take care of you too.”

Nikita sighed. “Why would you want to be like your mother? The most important thing for a woman is to take care of her family...”

Helena wanted to retort that her mother was old-fashioned, but seeing her sick, she held her tongue.

The weather outside was lovely, so Winona rented a wheelchair to take Nikita out for some sunshine.

Nikita was still rambling. “You know, I asked Helena how things were with Matteo. It's clear from her stubborn silence that she refuses to be the one to back down and make up. What does she gain from a divorce? Isn't marriage all about give and take?”

Winona wrapped a scarf around Nikita's neck and couldn't help but defend Helena. “But in this marriage, it's always been Helena giving in to Matteo. Now that he's made an unforgivable mistake, you still want her to keep yielding? Helena is your daughter too. Does it not bother you to see her so unhappy?”

“What woman doesn't make sacrifices in a marriage? Sometimes you have to compromise for the sake of the family. And after a divorce, who's going to be there for her? She brought some of this on herself too. Why couldn't she just have a son?”

Winona's thoughts immediately went to Yulen. In that moment, she understood Helena completely. The excuse of needing a son to justify an affair was truly disgusting.

Nikita then asked her, “By the way, is Yulen busy? I haven't seen him come to visit me these past couple of days.”

Seeing Winona's hesitation, Nikita grew uneasy. "You two haven't been fighting, have you? Winona, you shouldn't be running to the hospital all the time. I don't need you here constantly. You should be spending more time on Yulen. You have to keep a close eye on your own husband."

Because her granddaughter had married into a much wealthier family, she was always worried Winona would be looked down upon by her in-laws.

Winona gave a bitter laugh. With Tallulah by his side, why would he ever think of her?

Not wanting to worry Nikita, she reassured her, "It's fine. Yulen's just been busy lately. He'll come see you as soon as he has a free moment."

She planned to tell Nikita about the divorce, but only after Nikita had recovered.

But Nikita still felt a sense of dread. With her daughter's marriage falling apart, she was now on high alert about her granddaughter's.

She said to Winona, "Call Yulen. Ask him if he's busy. If not, can he spare a moment to come see me?"

To ease Nikita's anxiety, Winona had no choice but to take out her phone and call Yulen.

This time, the call connected.

Last night, Yulen had been out drinking with friends, his phone turned off. He only saw Winona's missed call when he woke up this morning. He was about to call her back when he received a call from the bank, informing him that Winona had inquired about her credit card.

Tallulah, who was right beside him, reminded him, "Winona's calling you because of the money, for sure. See? This method is working. Just keep giving her the cold shoulder, and she'll stop causing trouble."

Yulen thought Tallulah had a point. So when he answered, his tone was frosty. "What is it?"

Winona clutched the phone. "My grandmother was asking if you have time to come see her."

Before she could even mention that her grandmother was sick, Yulen cut her off. "I'm very busy right now. Maybe some other time."

Because of Winona's previous attitude toward Willow, Yulen now felt no warmth toward her family. He hung up as soon as he finished speaking.

Winona's heart sank. But meeting Nikita's expectant gaze, she forced a casual smile. "Yulen had to go on a sudden business trip," she explained. "He said he'll come see you with me as soon as he gets back."

Nikita's eyes filled with deeper worry, but she said nothing more.

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The next day, Winona went to pick up Nikita's test results. In the hospital corridor, she unexpectedly saw Yulen and Tallulah.

Tallulah looked frantic. "My brother was injured in a car race. I don't know if this surgery will be successful..."

Yulen comforted her, "It's going to be okay. I've flown in a renowned surgeon from abroad to lead the operation. Your brother will be fine. I'll stay at the hospital with you for the next couple of days until his surgery is over."

Tallulah nodded. The two walked away, their figures slowly disappearing down the hall.

Passing nurses were whispering to each other. "That Mr. Locke is so good to his wife. Her brother gets into an accident, and he not only flies in an expert from overseas but also reserves an entire VIP floor. He's been here since early this morning."

"You can always tell when a man really loves a woman. He goes all out for the people she cares about too."

Winona's expression darkened. Even as she told herself to slowly let go of her feelings for him, a sharp, aching pain still twisted in her heart.

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At the Goddard family villa.

Violet watched her grandson preparing to leave for the capital, her displeasure evident. "I told you to go check on that girl these past few days. Why didn't you?"

Stefan glanced at his watch, his expression unchanged. "Grandma, I'm about to miss my flight. If you need anything, just send me a message. As for Ms. Jowett, I've already made arrangements for her. There's no need to keep disturbing her."

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Chapter 22

Violet was getting fed up with how often he checked the time. What was so important that it mattered more than finding a wife?

The more she thought about it, the angrier she got, until she finally unclasped the watch from his wrist and snatched it away.

Stefan saw her action and gave a helpless smile. “Grandma...”

Violet stuffed the watch into her pocket and huffed, “I can’t stand how you, your father, and your grandfather are all like precise instruments, working around the clock! Can't you be more like those boys from the Langley and Zeller families? Settle down, get married, and have some kids.”

Stefan instinctively went to check his wrist again to see if he was late. But the watch was gone. He pulled out his phone instead to check the time. “Grandma, young people today have different priorities. Marriage isn't a requirement anymore.”

He was far more interested in the rising numbers on a financial statement than in romance or marriage.

“Are you saying I’m obsolete, that I can’t keep up with you young people?” Violet grumbled.

Stefan, who was cold to everyone else, showed a rare warmth toward Violet. He gently stroked her white hair. “Grandma, I won't force you to come back to the capital, but please remember, make sure Wynn and Wade are with you when you go out. Alright, I really have to go. Take care of yourself.”

Violet knew she couldn't keep her workaholic grandson, so she watched him leave in a huff.

After Stefan left, Violet couldn't sit still at home and had the driver take her to the hospital.

Winona was on her way to a nearby fruit stand to buy something for Nikita when she ran into Violet.

Violet’s eyes lit up when she saw her. “Winona...”

Winona’s face was full of gratitude. “Violet, thank you for sending Mr. Goddard to help me. I'll find a way to repay this kindness.”

Violet smiled warmly. “Don't talk about repaying anything. You helped me before, so it was only right for me to have Stefan help you.”

She had already had someone look into Winona's background these past two days and knew she was unmarried. Not wanting to miss out on such a perfect granddaughter-in-law, she pulled a watch from her pocket and placed it in Winona's palm. "This is a betrothal gift from my grandson. You should keep it."

"A betrothal gift?" Winona stared at the expensive watch in her hand, completely stunned.

Violet explained, "My grandson is handsome, successful, and decent to the core. If you think he's a little unromantic, that's something the two of you can work on later."

But Winona returned the watch to Violet with a serious expression. "I know you mean well, but I can't accept this."

The man's bearing and attire were far from ordinary; he was even more distinguished than Yulen. She knew that if she married Stefan, she could live a much more affluent life. But she didn't want to lose herself in a marriage again! She had already decided: first, she would build a career, then she would think about love. She wouldn't get married again until she was financially independent.

"Don't you believe me?" Violet asked, growing anxious.

Winona patted Violet's hand reassuringly. "Violet, I missed the chance to grow because of a past relationship. Now, I won't let myself be in that passive position again. I want to focus on my career first, so I'm not looking to get married right now. I hope you can understand."

Violet looked puzzled. "But getting married doesn't have to get in the way of a career. Our family isn't that old-fashioned. We don't expect women to quit working and become housewives. That kind of thinking is tacky."

She pressed the watch back into Winona's hand, her eyes full of affection. "In our family, the women are always in charge. You'll see. It's getting late, and I don't want to keep you. I'll be on my way, but I hope you'll seriously reconsider marrying my grandson."

Afraid Winona would refuse her grandson's gift again, Violet turned and quickly slipped into the black car behind her.

Winona stood there, holding the expensive men's watch as the car sped away, a headache already forming. She finally understood why Stefan had said what he did at the hospital. He really did know his grandmother all too well.

She decided she would just have to return the watch to Violet the next time she saw her.

Helena took two days off to stay with Nikita at the hospital, so Winona went back to work. Just as she reached the company elevators, Winona saw Yulen.

Yulen had been buried in a stressful project for days and was in a foul mood. The stress had even given him a sore throat.

In the past, whenever he got this stressed, Winona would make him something warm to soothe his throat and help him relax. But with her gone, there was no one to do that for him.

He walked over to her. “Winona, are you done with this tantrum? If you are, come home with me tonight.”

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He felt he had offered her an olive branch, and if she had any sense, she would make up with him.

Winona merely glanced at him and said nothing.

Just then, the elevator doors opened, and Tallulah walked out, holding a file. “Hi, Yulen, Winona.”

Winona’s pupils contracted when she saw the diamond necklace around Tallulah’s neck.

It was the birthday gift Yulen had given her five years ago. He had told her he designed it himself as a symbol of his unchanging love for her. Winona had always cherished it, keeping it safely in her jewelry box and rarely wearing it.

She strode over and violently ripped the necklace from Tallulah's neck.

A red welt immediately appeared on Tallulah’s skin. She cried out in pain, looking at Winona with feigned terror.

Yulen frowned and stepped forward. “Winona, what are you doing?”

Winona held up the necklace. “Did you give this to her?”

Yulen recognized the necklace and understood why Winona was so furious.

But it was just a necklace. He had given her so much jewelry over the years; she had no reason to be this angry.

“Winona, even if Tallulah was wrong, you shouldn't have done that! Look, you've hurt her neck.”

Tallulah tearfully apologized to Winona. “I’m so sorry, Winona. I just thought the necklace was beautiful and wanted to try it on. I didn’t know it was so important to you.”

Yulen pressed a handkerchief to the cut on her neck. Seeing it was still bleeding, he said worriedly, “I’m taking you to the hospital.”

With that, he swept Tallulah into his arms and left.

Winona stared at the blood-streaked necklace, suddenly feeling it was filthy. She walked over to the nearest trash can and threw it in.

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That evening, Winona went to the hospital to visit Nikita.

Nikita was recovering well, wearing her reading glasses as she watched a drama on her tablet.

Winona smiled and went to get a basin of fresh water. As she passed through the corridor, she saw Blythe and Tallulah. All three of them froze.

When Winona was six, Helena had told her about her mother, Blythe. Her father had died in an accident when she was two, and her mother had remarried shortly after into a wealthy family, cutting off all contact.

In college, Winona had secretly sought Blythe out. Blythe had given her five thousand dollars and told her never to contact her again or interfere with her new life.

Winona had longed for a mother’s love, but she had obeyed and never tried to find her again. She never expected to run into her at the hospital, nor did she ever imagine that Tallulah was the daughter from that new marriage.

Blythe had only learned of the connection after Tallulah married Yulen. Now, she looked at Winona with a complex expression.

Winona had no intention of greeting them and started to walk away.

Suddenly, Blythe grabbed her arm, her eyes pleading. “Winona, can I ask you for a favor?”

Winona looked at her, confused.

Blythe said urgently, “My son has aplastic anemia. His car accident caused severe anemia, infection, and unstoppable bleeding. He needs a bone marrow transplant to rebuild his hematopoietic function and save his life. Can you please get tested to see if you’re a match?”

Tallulah, who had only recently learned that Winona was her half-sister, cut in. “Winona, if I were a match, I’d do it without hesitation. He’s your half-brother too. You can’t just stand there and do nothing while he dies!”

Winona looked at them coldly. Putting aside the fact that she was pregnant and couldn't undergo the procedure, she wouldn't have agreed even if she weren't.

She could understand, and even forgive, Blythe for abandoning her all those years ago. But there were no secrets in their wealthy social circles; she refused to believe Blythe didn't know about her relationship with Yulen. And yet, she had still allowed Tallulah to steal him away.

Her expression was placid. “I'm not feeling well myself, so I can't be a donor. I'm sorry. You'll have to find someone else.”

She tried to leave, but Blythe’s grip tightened on her arm, squeezing so hard that it left a red mark on her wrist.

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Chapter 24

“Winona, I may not have raised you, but I gave birth to you! Don't you owe me for that? He's your brother. Are you really going to turn your back on him?”

Winona’s face paled from the pain. She tried to pull away, but Blythe’s grip was like iron.

Just then, Yulen arrived. Seeing Winona’s pained expression, he stepped in. “Blythe, let go of Winona.”

Blythe had to release her, but for her son's sake, she couldn't stop herself from pleading with Yulen. “Yulen, we can't wait any longer. Zayden’s body can’t take much more. I’m begging you, please convince Winona.”

Yulen looked at Winona, a struggle in his eyes.

Winona just watched him silently, waiting for his decision. She wanted to see what he would choose. Would he hurt her again for Tallulah's sake?

Yulen said reluctantly, "Winona, just do the compatibility test. Zayden is very badly injured..."

Winona's expression turned to ice. "Yulen, you know I'm anemic."

"It's only mild anemia," he said. "The procedure won't do any real harm, and I'll make sure you have the best post-op care afterward."

Winona found the suggestion absurd. "I refuse. Find someone else."

She couldn't possibly harm her own child for someone else's sake. Winona turned to leave.

Yulen grabbed her arm. "Winona, do you have to be so cold? A life is on the line."

He thought she was being completely unreasonable.

Tallulah also dropped to her knees, begging, "Winona, please, save my brother!"

In the end, Yulen dragged Winona into the testing lab. As she was forced into a chair and the cold needle was about to pierce her vein, Winona closed her eyes.

Just then, an assistant's voice cut through the tension. "Mr. Locke, we found a match! We have a suitable donor."

The nurse paused mid-motion, the needle hovering inches from Winona's arm.

Winona opened her eyes and watched as Yulen, smiling, left the room with Blythe and Tallulah. She numbly untied the tourniquet from her arm and walked out.

Yulen gave the donor a generous sum of money. After handling the paperwork, he finally thought of Winona.

It suddenly occurred to him to wonder why she had been at the hospital. Was she sick?

He turned and went to find her.

After asking a nurse, he learned that Nikita had been hospitalized for two or three days. He froze. Winona must have called him about the surgery fees, and he had frozen her credit card. A wave of guilt washed over him.

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When Winona came out of the restroom, she saw Yulen sitting by the bed, talking with Nikita. She didn't understand why he was suddenly there, but not wanting Nikita to sense their conflict, she said nothing.

Yulen trimmed Nikita's nails and wiped her hands before saying, "I was busy with work, so I couldn't visit sooner. I'm free tonight, so I'll stay and look after her." He then turned to Winona. "You must be exhausted after the last couple of days. You should go home and rest."

Seeing Nikita's happy smile, Winona didn't expose his lie. "I'm not comfortable leaving. You go home. I'll stay."

Yulen suggested, "Then get a room at the hotel next door, how about that? You don't trust me to take care of her?"

Winona knew Nikita hadn't been sleeping well because of her, so to put her grandmother at ease, she agreed. She was genuinely exhausted, so she went to a nearby hotel to get a room.

At the hotel's front desk, she realized she'd left her phone at the hospital and went back to get it. But as she entered the hospital room, she heard Nikita cry out in alarm.

Winona rushed in. Yulen was nowhere to be seen. Nikita had knocked over a thermos of hot water, and her hand was scalded red.

Winona's eyes welled with tears as she rushed to soak a towel in cold water and apply it to the burn. "Where's Yulen?" she asked Nikita.

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Nikita explained, "Don't blame him. He just stepped out to take a call. It must be for work. I understand."

Winona pressed her lips together, saying nothing.

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That night, Winona stayed in the hospital room instead of going to the hotel.

The next morning, Yulen returned with breakfast. “Winona, I'm sorry,” he said. “Something urgent came up last night. I told my assistant to find a caregiver to look after Nikita. Didn't they show up?”

His assistant, standing behind him, felt a chill run down his spine. He had been about to hire a caregiver the night before, but Tallulah had insisted she knew someone reliable and would take care of it herself. He had never expected her to do nothing.

Winona ignored him and walked into the room.

Yulen shot his assistant a cold glare and followed with the breakfast.

Yulen was a master at charming the elderly. Nikita didn't blame him at all; in fact, she was more worried about his health and told him to get more rest.

Later, a caregiver arrived to look after Nikita, and Winona and Yulen left for the office together.

Winona was silent the entire car ride.

Yulen finally broke the silence. “Winona, I was wrong. Please forgive me. I'll do anything to make it up to you.”

Winona looked up at him. “Anything?”

Yulen nodded.

Back at the office, they went into his suite. “I want two percent of your company's shares!”

Her sudden demand for company stock stunned Yulen. In his mind, Winona had never cared about the company or about money. He never imagined she would make such a request.

Winona watched him with a calm gaze. “Are you unwilling?”

Yulen thought about all the pain she had endured recently and genuinely wanted to compensate her. But transferring shares was no small matter. He assumed she didn't understand the implications and was just being willful.

He sighed and tried to reason with her. “I can't give you company shares, but I can transfer ownership of my two jewelry stores in Harmony Arcade to you.”

The two stores were very profitable, bringing in substantial revenue each year.

Winona hadn't really expected him to give up company shares so easily, but getting two jewelry stores was a good consolation. She had Nikita and a child to support in the future; there was no point in acting proud and aloof.

Yulen had betrayed her, and it was only right that he compensate her financially.

Seeing her nod, Yulen felt a wave of relief.

After the transfer agreement was signed, he squeezed her hand gently and asked, “Winona, does this mean you can move back home tonight?”

Winona didn't give him a straight answer. “I have to be at the hospital with my grandmother at night. If it gets too late, I won't come back.”

After Winona left, Tallulah entered the office. When she saw the transfer agreement for the stores, her smile vanished. “Yulen, why did you suddenly transfer the jewelry stores to Winona?”

She was Yulen's legal wife. All his assets should belong to her and the child in her belly.

Yulen was reviewing a proposal from the project director. Hearing her question, he explained, “I cut off her bank card before, which almost caused a problem for her grandmother. This is to make it up to her.”

Tallulah was still resentful. If it was just for compensation, couldn't he just give Winona a larger monthly allowance? Why give away two profitable jewelry stores?

Seeing Yulen's silence, Tallulah felt deeply wronged.

Since becoming pregnant, Yulen had spoiled her rotten, and she had been slowly testing his limits, wanting to see just how much he would compromise for her.

So, she resorted to her usual tactic, sitting on the sofa and dabbing at her tears.

Yulen, unable to focus on his work with her crying, walked over, wrapped an arm around her waist, and sighed. “What's wrong now?”

Tallulah sobbed, “I'm just upset. I feel like you don't really care about me.”

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Chapter 26

“How could you think that?” Yulen said, trying to soothe her. Knowing she was carrying his child, he decided it was best to placate her. “We’re married. Of course, you’re important to me.”

“I agreed to a secret marriage for you,” Tallulah pressed on, “gave up my graduate studies abroad to be your secretary here, and now I’m having your baby. Don’t you think my sacrifices are worth just as much as what you gave Winona?”

Yulen looked at her. “What do you want as compensation, then?”

Sensing him yielding again, Tallulah felt a secret thrill of victory. “You gave Winona two jewelry stores. What about me? I’m carrying your baby.”

Yulen considered for a moment. “Aren't all my assets marital property anyway? Why are you competing with her? Fine. I'll give you all the shops in Harmony Arcade. Is that enough?”

That finally appeased her. “I knew it,” she cooed. “You love me most.”

After they'd shared a tender moment, Tallulah added thoughtfully, “Yulen, aren’t you worried about that project with the Goddard Group? I heard that their liaison is one of Winona’s old university classmates. If you have her handle the negotiations, it might give you an edge, don’t you think?”

Yulen thought she had a point. A personal connection could be exactly what they needed to secure the project, especially since the Locke Group’s chances weren’t great against the stiff competition.

“Alright. We’ll do it your way.”

Back at her desk, Winona received an email from the CEO’s office assigning her to a new project. She found it almost laughable. She was the director of R&D; why was she being asked to do the project department's job? She logged into her work account and messaged Yulen to ask what was going on.

His reply was strictly professional: “This project involves many technical product details. As the director of R&D, you understand the products better than anyone. You’re the most suitable person for the job.”

Since he had put it that way, she had little choice but to agree. After adding the project liaison's assistant on a messaging app, she scheduled a meeting to discuss the details at eight that evening.

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At seven o'clock, she was getting ready to leave the office. She stopped by the restroom first, where she overheard Tallulah and Daphne talking.

“Tallulah, did Mr. Locke really give you all those storefronts in Harmony Arcade? He spoils you so much.”

Tallulah gently caressed her belly and smiled smugly. “Of course. I’m willing to give him a child, so of course, he’s willing to give me anything.”

Winona stood in the stall, a chill running through her. The things she had to leverage Yulen's guilt to get, Tallulah received with effortless ease.

As Winona was leaving the company building, she got a call from Yulen's eldest sister, Paige Locke. Paige’s voice was sharp and commanding. “My mother’s headache is acting up again. No one at the estate can handle her, so you need to get over here right now.”

Willow had a chronic migraine problem, and whenever it flared up, she would fly into a rage, lashing out at anyone who came near. Winona knew acupuncture, which could alleviate the pain, but every time she went to care for Willow, she ended up covered in bruises from the woman's violent outbursts. To make matters worse, no one in the Locke family ever gave her credit; they simply saw it as her duty.

Winona’s voice was flat. “I’m working at the Locke Group now, and I have a business dinner tonight. I can’t make it.”

Paige was taken aback. For the past five years, Winona had lived a comfortable life as a housewife; she was surprised to hear she was now working. Still, she didn't think Winona had any real skills and was probably just wasting time in a token position.

“What dinner could possibly be more important than my mother’s health?” she scoffed. “You’re her daughter-in-law, and you should be taking care of her. Cancel your plans and get to the estate. Now.”

Winona let out a weary laugh, finally unleashing the words she had held back for so long. “I’m Yulen’s wife, not your family’s live-in nurse. Besides, she’s your mother. You and Yulen should be taking care of her yourselves instead of dumping it on me.”

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With that, she decisively ended the call. She could just imagine Paige fuming on the other end, but what did that have to do with her?

Paige was, in fact, so furious she nearly smashed her phone. Yulen's second-eldest sister, Yvettea Locke, who was sitting beside her, asked, "What's wrong? Won't that woman come over?"

Paige gritted her teeth. "That woman is getting way too full of herself. Who does she think she is, acting superior when she hasn't even given Yulen a child? I'm calling him right now and telling him to leave her. They're not even legally married, so it'll be easy to kick her out with nothing."

She dialed Yulen's number, but he was in a meeting. "I'm busy at the office right now," he said curtly. "I'll call you back in half an hour." He hung up before Paige could protest.

Paige couldn't bring herself to be angry with her brother, but her concern for his well-being quickly soured into resentment for his wife. That little tramp Winona should be at home taking care of her husband, not gallivanting around at an office. She fumed, vowing to deal with her later.

The sound of a shattering glass came from Willow's room. The maids exchanged fearful glances, none daring to enter. Yvettea, too, stayed put.

Just then, Tallulah arrived at the estate. She made a point of visiting whenever she was free, hoping to win Willow over and get her on her side in the battle to oust Winona. Seeing her, Paige had an idea and asked Tallulah to go in and look after Willow. Not knowing what Willow was like during one of her episodes, Tallulah nodded obediently, eager to appear dutiful.

But as soon as she entered the room, she realized she had been naive. This was far beyond her ability to handle. She wanted to retreat, but she had already come this far. If she left now, she would surely lose favor with her sisters-in-law. Gritting her teeth, she forced herself to stay.

Less than half an hour later, she couldn't take it anymore. She called Yulen, her voice trembling with grievance as she described the situation. Yulen had just finished his meeting and was exhausted. Listening to her complaints only added to his irritation. After all, Winona had never once complained when she went to care for his mother.

When Tallulah sensed his disbelief, she sent him a selfie. The red handprint on her cheek and the tears streaming down her face were all the proof he needed. He realized Tallulah was too young and inexperienced to handle this. He would have to get Winona to go after all.

He called Winona, who had just arrived at the private room for her client dinner. When he asked her to go to the estate, her expression hardened. "Yulen, have you forgotten?" she

reminded him. “You’re the one who assigned me to the Goddard Group project. I’m meeting the client tonight to discuss the details. How could I possibly have time to take care of your mother?”

Yulen was speechless. He had completely forgotten. As important as his mother’s health was, the project was more critical.

“I understand,” he said, his tone softening into an appealing one. “Focus on the project for now. I’ll find someone else to look after Mom.”

“Okay,” Winona replied before hanging up.

Yulen stared at his phone, a strange sense of unease creeping over him. A moment later, he realized why. In the past, whenever his mother was sick, Winona had been more worried than he was, rushing to the estate without him even having to ask. Now, she hadn’t even bothered to ask how his mother was doing. Wasn’t that a bit cold?

But he quickly dismissed the thought. She was busy with company business, after all. Her refusal to go to the estate this time was understandable.

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Chapter 28

Yulen stared at the urgent project files on his desk, a headache building behind his eyes. He could only try to placate Tallulah. “You take care of Mom for now. I’ll be there as soon as I finish up my work.”

Tallulah’s face fell. So, he was just going to leave her alone to deal with a raving Willow? Yulen felt a pang of guilt, but business always came before family matters. He offered a few more soothing words and then hung up.

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Winona waited in the private dining room for about fifteen minutes before the client arrived. When the man in a crisp suit walked in, her mind went blank.

“Winona, long time no see,” the man said with a warm, elegant smile, extending his hand.

Winona forced a laugh, fighting back the fear rising in her throat. “Micah. I wasn’t expecting it to be you.”

Micah Linden had been a senior in her university club. He had also sexually harassed her on multiple occasions. As the son of a wealthy and influential family, her complaints to the university administration had gone nowhere. Her only recourse had been to avoid him, but he was persistent, and she'd had several close calls. Micah had likely planned to wait until after she graduated to make his move, but shortly after, she married Yulen, and Micah disappeared from her life.

Seeing the tension in her expression, Micah's smile deepened. "Relax. We're just here to talk business. I know you're married. I'm not about to hit on a married woman."

After the meeting, Winona quickly left the restaurant. She hailed a cab home, but a persistent feeling that a car was following her made her uneasy. Worried it was Micah, she told the driver to head to the Locke family's villa first. Once they arrived, the car that had been tailing her finally drove away.

Winona let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding. She asked the driver to turn around and take her to her own apartment, but her car was suddenly blocked by a figure stepping into the road. It was Yulen.

Winona got out of the car. Yulen stepped forward, his eyes scanning her face. "What's wrong? You look pale." In his mind, his previous compensation had settled their dispute, and they were back on good terms.

Not wanting to ever see Micah again, Winona said bluntly, "That Goddard Group project—have someone else handle it."

Yulen assumed she was trying to shirk the hard work and felt a prickle of annoyance. "Fine," he said peevishly. "Hand off the project to Conrad. Starting tomorrow, don't bother coming into the office. Go to the estate and take care of my mother instead."

An even deeper chill settled over Winona's heart. To Yulen, she wasn't a partner at all—just someone to keep at home and order around whenever he pleased.

This time, however, she didn't back down. "This project was never part of my job description to begin with. I have every right to refuse. And isn't taking care of your mother your responsibility?"

Seeing her defiance, so different from her usual compliance, Yulen's face darkened with anger. "We're husband and wife. Why are you drawing such clear lines between us? My mother is your mother. We've always had an understanding: I handle the business, you handle the home. I make the money, you take care of the family and the elders. What's wrong with that?"

Winona gave a scornful smile, tempted to ask him if they were really husband and wife at all.

“Yulen, I’m tired from work. I don’t want to fight with you,” she said, turning and walking toward the villa.

Yulen stared after her, a storm of emotions churning in his eyes.

The Wife He Forgot to Marry (Winona and Yule)

Chapter 29

Back in the bedroom, Winona showered and was settling into bed with a book when Yulen walked in. He went into the walk-in closet to get his pajamas and then headed into the bathroom.

Winona ignored him and continued to read.

After his shower, Yulen’s phone rang. It was Paige.

“Yulen, if you’re done with work, you should come see Mom. She adores you; seeing you might make her headache go away. And bring Winona. Tallulah has no idea how to take care of her.”

Yulen, wanting to have a serious talk with Winona and hoping she would stop being so difficult, gave his sister a dismissive answer. “I have to work late tonight, and Winona isn’t off yet either. You’ll have to manage Mom on your own.”

Paige wouldn’t dare criticize her brother, but she had no such reservations about Winona. “It makes sense for you to be busy with work, but what could that freeloader possibly be doing? She actually dared to hang up on me earlier! You can’t let her get away with that. A man has to be firm, or his woman will walk all over him. If she gets too out of line, you need to put her in her place!”

“Mm,” Yulen grunted and hung up. He walked out of the bathroom and saw Winona sitting quietly in bed, the line of her profile serene and gentle in the soft light. An impulse stirred within him.

His approach made Winona’s stomach turn. She shifted away, rejecting his touch. Seeing her reluctance, Yulen didn’t press the issue. Ever since that incident, she had been distant in their intimacy. Over time, his own desire had faded as well.

“How are you settling in at the company?” he asked, his voice heavy.

“It’s fine,” Winona replied coolly.

Yulen frowned, about to say more when his phone rang again. It was Paige.

“Yulen, Tallulah fainted! She’s pregnant, and we were worried about the baby, so we sent her to the hospital. You need to get here now!”

Without a second thought, Yulen changed his clothes and rushed out.

Watching him leave again, Winona let out a self-deprecating laugh. It seemed Tallulah was truly important to him.

She got up, took a jar of ointment from a cabinet, and lifted the leg of her pajama pants to begin applying it. A jagged scar ran from her left thigh all the way down to her instep, a remnant from three years ago when she had pulled Yulen from a fire. Despite numerous restorative treatments, the scar remained. Yulen claimed it didn't bother him, but she could feel him deliberately avoiding her left leg whenever they were intimate. Being sensitive, she couldn't miss his underlying aversion. Gradually, their physical relationship had withered until he barely touched her, except for a few obligatory nights each month.

It was for the best, she thought. Until she got her compensation and left, she wanted nothing to do with him anyway.

*

Yulen sped to the hospital, arriving to the sound of shouting near the hospital room. Tallulah's mother, Blythe, was shrieking, “My daughter was raised in comfort, and now she's carrying your family's child! You make her wait on her mother-in-law, and when she collapses, you barely get her to the hospital! Are you trying to kill her?”

Paige’s voice was laced with impatience. “She’s just weak. It's not our fault she fainted. What daughter-in-law doesn't serve her mother-in-law? She's the only one being dramatic. Besides, my mother is sick. She hardly has the strength to hurt anyone. For all we know, she faked that mark on her face herself.”

The accusation only made Blythe angrier. Their argument halted when Yulen arrived. He ignored them both and went straight into the room to see Tallulah.

In truth, Tallulah had only pretended to faint. It was the first time in her life she’d had to serve anyone, but since it was her mother-in-law, she couldn’t refuse. Faking a collapse was her only way out.

Seeing Yulen, she immediately adopted a fragile expression and fell into his arms. Worried by how pale she was, he pulled her close and tried to soothe her.

Paige, annoyed at seeing her brother stoop to placate a woman, pulled him up. “Alright, they’ve already checked. The baby’s fine. Let’s go home and check on Mom.”

As the Locke siblings prepared to leave, Blythe stared in disbelief. She moved to stop them, but Tallulah grabbed her hand. “What are you doing?” Blythe hissed at her daughter. “They treat you like this, and you just take it? I’m standing up for you!”

“Mom,” Tallulah whispered, “Yulen still has feelings for Winona. I have to appear generous and understanding. If I act selfishly now, I’ll just push him back to her. That would be a huge mistake.”

Blythe pressed her lips together, saying nothing more. As much as she found the Locke family cold and heartless, she also thought Winona was pathetic. If she had any sense, she would have left Yulen long ago.

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On Saturday, Winona went to the hospital to visit Nikita. To her surprise, Yulen was there too. He took the plate of sliced apples Helena had prepared and began feeding them to Nikita himself. Both Nikita and Helena praised him for being so attentive and thoughtful.

Winona stood silently to the side, enduring his presence for Nikita’s sake.

The Wife He Forgot to Marry (Winona and Yule)

Chapter 30

After visiting with Nikita, Yulen and Winona left the hospital room together.

His phone vibrated. Winona caught a glimpse of Tallulah’s name on the screen. A sarcastic smile touched her lips. She felt a surge of resentment for how she'd been treated and decided it was time to score a point of her own.

“You promised to buy me a car to make commuting easier,” she said. “I happen to have some time today. Why don’t you come with me to pick one out?”

Feeling guilty over Nikita’s situation, Yulen silenced his phone and agreed to accompany her to the dealership.

A sales manager greeted Yulen warmly as they entered. “Mr. Locke, the car you pre-ordered has just been flown in. Would you like to see it?” Seeing Winona, he added with a broad smile, “And this must be Mrs. Locke! Mr. Locke specifically told us you love pink, so we had it custom painted for you. He loves you so much!”

Of course, Yulen hadn't ordered the car for Winona. He had promised it to Tallulah as a reward after she told him she was pregnant. He had forgotten all about it before coming here and now tried to signal the manager to stop talking, but the man was oblivious, continuing to gush about their deep love for each other.

Winona knew perfectly well the car wasn't for her. For one, her favorite color wasn't pink. For another, a custom paint job takes at least a month. It had been less than two weeks since she'd even mentioned wanting a car to Yulen.

But she didn't expose the lie. Instead, she smiled sweetly. "Is that so? I had no idea he had such a big surprise for me. Let's go take a look."

When Winona saw the luxury car and glanced at the description plaque, she had to suppress a cold laugh. It was the latest limited-edition Phantom Dentelle, with a price tag of over a million dollars.

Winona put down the plaque and beamed at Yulen. "Yulen, I love it. Thank you for the gift."

Yulen forced a smile. He was about to point out some flaw to discourage her, but Winona was already urging him on. "Why don't you pay the remaining balance? I'll drive it home today. And since it's a gift for me, it should be registered in my name, right?"

Yulen had no choice but to sign the bill.

When they drove back to the villa, Tallulah's car was just pulling through the gates. Yulen's expression instinctively tensed. Winona followed Tallulah into the garage and parked the new pink car right next to hers. She got out and walked straight over to Tallulah.

"Tallulah," she said in a gentle, grateful tone, "I heard you were taking care of my mother-in-law while she was ill. You're so kind. Thank you so much."

The mention of the incident brought back the memory of Willow's frantic state, and a wave of frustration washed over Tallulah. "You're too kind," she said stiffly. "Our families have been close for years, and everyone at the Locke estate is so good to me. Of course, I had to look after Willow."

Just then, her eyes fell on the pink luxury car behind Winona, and her pupils constricted. It was the exact car she had pestered Yulen to buy for her, right down to the custom color. Why was Winona driving it?

Feigning innocence, she asked, "Winona, is that car from Yulen?"

Yulen walked over just in time for Winona to loop her arm through his. "It's a gift from him," she said with a dazzling smile.

Tallulah almost exploded with rage. She wanted to scream at Winona for being so shameless, but with Yulen standing right there, she managed to restrain herself.

Winona released Yulen's arm. "Well, we should get inside. Cora should be home. I'll go ask her to start dinner." With that, she went into the house.

Tallulah looked at Yulen, her eyes instantly welling up with tears.

"She happened to be with me when I went to pick up the car," Yulen explained hastily. "I'd forgotten about the order, and the sales manager thought it was for her. She saw it and liked it, so I had to let her have it for now."

His excuse only made Tallulah angrier. She had suffered so much at Willow's hands while Winona was out enjoying a romantic day with Yulen and stealing her car. The injustice of it all was suffocating. But she knew her position wasn't secure enough to throw a tantrum.

She swallowed her anger and said plaintively, "I understand your difficult position. But for me, this car had a special meaning." She placed a hand on her stomach. "It was a gift for me and our baby. Now that you've given it to Winona, the baby and I are both very sad."

Yulen's gaze fell to her belly, and a wave of guilt washed over him. He felt he had wronged both her and their child. "I know," he soothed. "I'll buy you another one, something even more expensive. Okay?"

Tallulah nodded obediently. "Thank you, Yulen."