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Chapter 1

I put the last egg tart in place on the tiered circular display, stepped back, and admired my handiwork. From a distance, if you squinted and tilted your head just right, you might actually mistake it for a wedding cake made of gold, or Jin. Fitting, since “Jin” was both my surname and the Mandarin word for “gold.” I grinned. Guess I’d been fated for this job.

Happily, I even got to rope in loved ones as other vendors. My best friend, Kelvin Love (who has the most fitting name to cater a wedding), handled the elaborate floral displays. And my godmother, Alma Paz, made the candle arrangements, including the votives for the cake table. She’d even handcrafted bowl-shaped lace holders for each votive candle.

Once the late afternoon dissolved into evening, the small candles would be lit, and the cake made of egg tarts would turn into an enchanting display. Quite literally, because my mom had used her magic to bake joy into every last bite. After all, that’s what we Jins do—pour joy into our signature recipe treats to flow out to others. Except my own brand of magic came with an extra bonus: I made special fortune cookies that provided happiness *and* accurately predicted future happenings.

I added a stash of business cards to the table. I’d been made official co-owner of Jin Bakery with my mom, and I now had business cards to attest to that exciting fact. Besides, I figured it wouldn’t hurt to have my contact info out there. If people were in the area for the wedding, maybe they’d decide to check out our local bakery, too.

Plus, many of the guests were from nearby Fresno, the bride’s hometown, though a fair share hailed from up north, where the groom’s relatives lived. It wasn’t too much of a trek from NorCal to visit Pixie, right? Not for delicious egg tarts, pineapple buns, and fortune cookies, all coated with magic.

“It’s beautiful,” someone whispered from near my shoulder. I would have startled at the interruption, but the voice was so gentle, it didn’t scare me in the least.

A bridesmaid must have snuck into the main tent without my noticing. Maybe the soft grass surrounding the tent had masked her footsteps. Or she’d minced along in those stiletto sandals.

She was a wisp of a young woman, just a few years past twenty. Even though I was twenty-eight, I couldn’t imagine having ever been so bright-eyed and hopeful as the girl before me. The twin honey-colored braids wrapped around her head only added to her youthfulness.

“Haley, was it?” I asked.

She nodded, almost bouncing on her heels. “You remembered my name.”

“It’s distinctive. Very pretty.”

She flushed a sweet shade of pink. “I like your name, too. Felicity is lovely.”

“Is that a rose tucked behind your ear?” I asked, pointing to the blossom, the full pink petals brushing up against a tiny golden ear cuff lined with diamonds.

She widened her green eyes at me. “Uh, is that okay? I mean, do you mind? Are you and Kelvin together—”

“It’s fine,” I said, waving away her concern. “Kelvin and I are just friends.” Best friends, technically. “I take it he’s still working on the flower arch outside?”

“Said he was ‘securing the petals.’” Kelvin *was* a stickler for floral quality. Guess that’s what made us good entrepreneurs in our little town of Pixie.

I glanced at Haley’s T-shirt and jeans. “What time is it? Do you need to change?”

“Four forty-five,” she said. “I better get ready.”

The wedding guests would show up at six. Right now, only us hired help and the wedding party, plus the parents of the bride and groom, were roaming the surrounding green space.

“Jada’s in our tent doing makeup, and she said she’d help me,” Haley said.

“I should get going, too.” I’d promised the bride, Leanne, that I’d check on the tea ceremony. Not that I’d be super helpful. I’m third-gen Chinese American and had had to google what the traditional tea ritual entailed.

I followed Haley’s bouncing steps out of the larger main tent into the lush green of Pixie Park. Our town’s biggest park definitely had enough space for the Lum-Wu ceremony. The bride and groom had asked to pitch four tents for the event: a reception tent for food, his and her tents for wedding prep, and a tent for the traditional tea serving ritual.

Pixie Park also boasted a large hill, and it was sure to look magnificent with its aerial view for the actual wedding ceremony and exchanging of vows. Kelvin was on the hill now, fussing over the flowers on the custom arch he’d made.

I waved at him. He bobbed his head at me, his fingers still patting petals into place. Kelvin looked good fancied up, in a dress shirt and pressed slacks. His usual go-to was a casual Henley and jeans.

There was a rainbow of beautiful blossoms decorating the immense arch he’d constructed. I didn’t know why Kelvin was so worried. There wasn’t a breeze to be found. It was perfect, and the flowers should stay put.

If anything, the temperature was slightly too warm today. Thankfully, it was dry heat, typical of the San Joaquin Valley. Whoever thought tea was a great idea in July had not factored in the weather. Then again, traditions were important. I headed over to the tea tent, and as soon as I put my head through the flap, Leanne squealed.

“You came to help. Thank goodness,” she said. The bride-to-be wore a red qipao with a golden phoenix trailing down the front. Her hair was pinned up, and pearls were scattered across the hairdo as decoration, matching the dangling pearl earrings she wore.

“How can I assist?” I asked.

“With the hot plate. You’re good in the kitchen. Er, bakery. Can you get it started?”

“I can try.” I mean, I was hired to cater the cake, not the tea. But I’d done the bare minimum online research. Maybe I could fake my way through.

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