Feelings

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Summary

How will Melendez react to finding out that Lim is infected with the airborne virus? And when Lim recovers, will he ever get the courage to confess his true feelings for her? This story is based purely on speculation from episode 2x10 and the preview for episode 2x11. For those who are Team Limlendez!
Chapter 1

“She’s infected,” Andrews informed him.

The news hit Melendez like a ton of bricks and his stomach twisted in knots. The deadly virus that had already claimed the lives of three people at San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital was now invading the body of Dr. Audrey Lim. He had just woken up beside her this morning. She was perfectly fine just a few hours ago. But now, she was infected with the virus they weren’t quite sure what it was. In a matter of time, her fever would spike, she would be struggling to breathe, he observed she already had the rash on her neck, and the virus could very well claim her life, making her the fourth victim of the life-threatening disease. He wanted to do something, he had to do something for his colleague, his friend, and yes, his former and still somewhat current competition.

But Dr. Lim wasn’t his patient. He had a patient of his own whose life was hanging in the balance. Chris desperately needed a bone marrow transplant to strengthen his immune system and his donor, Bob, was quarantined in the emergency room since he was exposed to the virus. Just like Lim was.

“Dr. Melendez,” Andrews stated.

“We have work to do,” informed Andrews.

“Right,” said Melendez. As the team continued to review the situation, many emotions were coursing through Melendez: anger, concern, heartbreak, nervousness, and uncertainty. Would Chris receive his bone marrow transplant before he flat lined since he had signed a DNR? Would they figure out what the virus was before it infected other patients (seriously, why was the damn CDC team stuck on the east coast)? Would Lim get the proper treatment in time and more importantly, would she live? He couldn’t help but keep looking back at the TV monitors and Lim seemed to be leading Dr. Reznick in a combat field style surgery, but she was clearly struggling to breathe, “No, NO!” Melendez thought to himself. He did his best to distract himself but his eyes kept coming back to the screen like a magnet on a refrigerator. And then he saw her collapse.

Morgan didn’t even notice at first, but then the young blonde resident finally glanced up and noticed the situation Lim was in, “Why isn’t anyone helping her? PLEASE SOMEBODY HELP HER!” Melendez silently screamed.

His beeping pager interrupted his thoughts. He glanced down and noticed Chris had flat lined so he immediately left the conference room and met up with Claire in Chris’s room. Claire had a look of sorrow on her face, “What happened?”

“His body just gave,” informed Claire.

Melendez knew Chris had signed a DNR and he knew it would be a clear violation to attempt to resuscitate him, but he just couldn’t let him die. He had to be able to save someone today, “Start compressions, I’ll go get the defibrillator,” he ordered.

“He signed a DNR,” scolded Claire lightly.

“Well, he shouldn’t have,” Melendez began to set up everything.

“This is battery,” said Claire firmly.
“He doesn’t need to die,” said Melendez, “We’re going to get his donor’s marrow.”

“Andrews agreed to the plan?” asked Claire in surprise.

“Not yet. If he doesn’t, we’ll think of something else,” he said, “I have to save him. I have to help someone live.”

Claire sighed, but obeyed Melendez’s orders and started compressions. She had no idea what had suddenly gotten into him. He almost NEVER violated protocol and had been scolding her just weeks ago for going around him to explain a form of treatment to a patient without his consent. She knew he was concerned about Dr. Lim, she was too, but to violate a patient’s DNR? There was something more behind him desperately wanting to save Chris.

After several minutes, Chris obtained a steady pulse, so Melendez discarded his gown and mask and started to head towards the ER, “Dr. Melendez, don’t you have to talk with Andrews first?”

“I will soon, right now I have to take care of something else.”

Somehow Melendez’s random walking had led him to the ER. There were still security guards standing outside the doors, but he had a clear view of isolation. At this point, there were physicians attending to Dr. Lim. Melendez observed the monitors and her oxygen saturation and respiration rates were extremely low and plummeting fast, like the first drop on a roller coaster. She was clearly having trouble catching her breath, and goodness, that little nose piece wasn’t going to do anything to help her! He heard one of the doctor’s state, “She’s in full respiratory failure.” He couldn’t help but want to do something, “I’ve got to get in there!” he thought to himself.

He went to get closer to the door when one of the security guards stopped him, “I’m sorry, sir, this emergency room is under quarantine,” he informed.

“I know that!” Melendez shouted perturbed, “But I have to get in there. One of my friends is infected. I’ll follow all protocol, I’ll wear the HAZMAT suit, and I won’t touch anything or go anywhere. But you have to let me in!”

“I’m sorry, sir. Unless you’re a member of the CDC, we’re not authorized to let you into the quarantine zone,” the security guard apologized.

Melendez barged past him and leaned against the glass door, watching the doctors, nurses, and other staff members tend to Lim. She glanced over and noticed him standing there, but she was too weak to call out to him or say anything. Still, she had seen him. And that was all that mattered to Melendez, “Just have someone page me if Dr. Lim flat lines,” said Melendez, walking away into a remote area of the hospital. Once he was completely alone, he couldn’t help but kick the air and slam his hand against the wall, a pain shooting through him arm from the impact. She was fine just this morning. He had downplayed their romantic endeavors the previous night to keep things civil in the workplace and to keep things professional. He also hadn’t wanted to risk ruining their friendship and their mutual respect for one another because they had been competing for the Chief of Surgery position just days ago, until Andrews had decided to keep it for himself. He had decided to play it safe.

But now, Lim was at the clutches of death’s door, and if the doctors or the CDC couldn’t get a handle on whatever virus was causing her symptoms, then he would never get the chance to tell her how he really felt. That secretly, deep down, he was hoping to be more than friends one day. That if they truly cared about each other they could make it work. That he wanted to go out with her in a
different way than just friends having a drink after work.

But right now, none of those feelings really mattered. Sure, they were still there, but right now, there was only one thought racing through his mind. He went back over to the door of the secluded area where he could get a clear view of her, looking so helpless and pale, not quite as white as the sheets covering the gurney on which she was lying, but her dark blue scrubs were containing the most color on her. She looked over towards the hall and this time, her eyes stayed focused on him, though he didn’t know if she was staring at him or just staring in that direction. It didn’t matter to him either way. He could see her and she might have been able to hear him when he said, “Please don’t die, Audrey.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Hi all! Thank you so much for the review so far. So this next chapter does involve a little bit of medical lingo and I did my best to research things, but if it's a little inaccurate, I apologize in advance.

Melendez could just tell what the doctors were doing wasn’t working and if he couldn’t get into the ER, he was going to find someone who was already quarantined and to get them to help Lim. Where was Dr. Shaun Murphy when he needed him? He glanced over towards a large crowd of people and he found Shaun lying on the floor in the fetal position, covering his ears. He had to have someone get Shaun’s attention, “Dr. Murphy? Dr. Murphy, can you hear me?” he shouted through the doors. Melendez noticed one of the nurses trying to get Shaun’s attention, but he didn’t seem to be responding to her words. After several more moments, he finally stood but he started spinning in a circle, like he was trying to choose something or someone to focus on currently. He finally noticed Melendez calling out to him and he walked over to him, “Dr. Melendez, you can’t come in here. This ER is under quarantine.”

“I know, and I’m not going to come in, but I need you to follow my directions exactly,” said Melendez. Shaun nodded and Melendez took a deep breath, trying to compose himself so he could calmly give Shaun directions. “I need you to get an oxygen mask and albuterol. I also need you to get another dose of whatever antiviral medication you all are using. I need you to put on your HAZMAT suit and go and give the oxygen and albuterol therapy and antivirals to Dr. Lim. Do you understand?”

Shaun didn’t say anything but he just walked away, so Melendez had no idea if Shaun was doing what he had asked of him. It seemed to be taking Shaun forever to get the proper treatments, so Melendez figured Shaun had gotten distracted and that Lim wasn’t going to get any treatment. He went back over to observe isolation and was shocked to find that Shaun was already in the room, fully protected by the HAZMAT suit, obviously arguing adamantly with the nurse about Lim’s course of treatment. The nurse finally agreed and upped the dosage of antiviral medication and also put the larger oxygen mask on her and started the medication. It took about another ten minutes before Lim’s O2 levels and respiration rate increased. Still below normal, but better than it was beforehand. He could finally breathe a sigh of relief, at least for now.

Melendez finally realized that he had been so worried about Lim that he had forgotten about his own patient, so he made his way back up to the conference room to see if he could find Andrews. When he arrived, Andrews stood and said, “Dr. Melendez, nice of you to join us again.”

Dr. Andrews,” Melendez acknowledged his superior, “I was just on my way here to talk about a course of treatment for Chris Santos,” Melendez looked over at the monitors and mentally smacked himself, just now realizing that Andrews would’ve seen him on the monitors. Thankfully, Andrews didn’t say anything, at least not yet, “It would involve expanding the quarantine just for Chris. One of the quarantined doctors can extract the bone marrow and hand it to me so Dr. Browne and I can do Chris’s bone marrow transplant,” explained Melendez, “I will follow all quarantine protocol and I will make sure no one else is exposed to the virus.”
Andrews crossed his arms over his chest and took a deep breath, “Dr. Melendez, you realize expanding a quarantine zone could very well set up a potential for the spread of the virus even further. The emergency room is under quarantine for a reason.”

“Dr. Andrews…”

“I know you desperately want to save your patient, but the hospital has to live with mortality rates,” explained Andrews.

“Well, without bone marrow, Chris Santos will die,” said Melendez steadfastly, “He’s already died once.”

“But if we expand the quarantine zone, many more individuals could die. This virus has been killing it’s victims within hours after the infection has begun. And Chris’s donor might have been exposed to the virus; if he’s infected, the virus could be spread to Chris, exposing other patients in this hospital,” said Andrews. Melendez side-eyed towards the monitors and Lim appeared to be somewhat stable, “I’m sorry, Dr. Melendez, but I just can’t risk it, you’re just going to have to find another way,” Andrews stated firmly. Melendez sighed and went to leave the room, “Nice going with Dr. Lim, by the way.”

“What?” asked Melendez, turning towards his boss.

“Getting Dr. Murphy to help treat her symptoms. I spoke with the CDC; the team should be here in a few hours.”

“Good,” Melendez breathed a sigh of relief, sincerely hoping they would arrive in time to save Lim. He went to go find Claire, though he couldn’t help but worry about the situation down in the ER. Not only was Lim severely ill, but Park’s son was having an asthma attack, Morgan was struggling with the emergency surgery, and Shaun was clearly overwhelmed by all of the chaos. Thankfully, for Lim’s sake, he had chosen to focus on following Melendez’s instructions. He finally found Claire and explained that Andrews didn’t approve of the plan.

Claire took a deep breath and asked, “So what now?”

“I don’t know,” Melendez admitted honestly, “We can continue monitoring for a good match from the registry, but I don’t know if it’ll come in time for Chris.”

Claire nodded her understanding, “If he flat lines again, we can’t…”

“I know,” Melendez admitted, “It would be too risky to revive him more than once. All we can do is hope for a miracle.”

Claire nodded in agreement, “How’s the situation in the ER?”

“Andrews told me that the CDC team will be here in a few hours. I just hope no one else in that emergency room has been exposed. If Bob Cravens tests negative we can get his marrow. If he’s positive, who knows?”

Claire knew Bob Cravens wasn’t the only person Melendez was concerned about in quarantine. Word had gotten around the hospital that Dr. Lim was infected with the virus and she knew how close Melendez and Lim were. She could feel the tension when she had set foot in that elevator a few weeks ago. Sure, they were both vying for the chief of surgery position at the time, but there was always a certain amount of chemistry between them. In fact, most of the staff at St. Bonaventure noticed except for Drs. Melendez and Lim themselves, “Well, I’ll keep checking the registry; I’ll have someone page you if anything changes with Chris.”
Melendez knew he was supposed to be taking a break, but somehow, his feet had once again led him to the ER. There was a break room on the first floor where the emergency department was so he could go back and forth between the ER and the break room. He finally decided if he didn’t eat, he would become a patient and he wouldn’t be able to help anyone then. When he arrived at the room, Park was already in the lounge, “Dr. Melendez,” he acknowledged him.

“Dr. Park,” Melendez answered back. He grabbed his lunch out of the refrigerator, “How’s your son doing?”

“Kellan is doing better,” informed Park, “Some of the staff found him some emergency albuterol. I just hope he doesn’t have that virus. The asthma is bad enough; I can’t even imagine what it would do to his lungs.”

“I was informed by Andrews that the CDC should be here soon. Hopefully, they can get a handle on whatever the infection is,” said Melendez.

“Right,” Park responded. Both doctors heard monitors going off and several individuals rushing around so they both went over to the glass doors to check out the situation, Melendez hoping and praying it wasn’t who he thought it was, but sure enough, his worst fears were true. Dr. Lim had gone into cardiac arrest. Shaun, Morgan, and several nurses had already started CPR, but her heartbeat was extremely irregular. He couldn’t watch it any longer without doing something. He was going into quarantine, “Distract the guards,” Melendez ordered Park.

“Excuse me?” questioned Park.

“Distract the guards while I go find a decontamination suit. I’m going in,” he asserted.

“Dr. Melendez!” called Park, “You can’t go in there. Dr. Andrews is monitoring the whole area. He’ll see you and your job will surely be in jeopardy. And even if you don’t get fired, you can certainly kiss the Chief of Surgery position goodbye once Andrews finally gives up the title.”

“Maybe so,” Melendez agreed with Park, “But Dr. Lim won’t get it either if she dies.”

“Dr. Melendez, I can’t in good conscience let you into that room,” said Park.

“Watch me,” Melendez walked away from him.
Chapter 3

Melendez was desperately trying to find a decontamination suit when a thought suddenly hit him. He wouldn’t be able to get into the ER because not only were there security guards, but there were codes that locked the doors as well. Sure, he knew what the codes were for the locks; every attending did in case they were in a situation like the one they were currently experiencing, but the ER doors locked from the inside. The only attending surgeon currently in quarantine was Dr. Lim. And she couldn’t get to the doors to unlock them. He had to direct Shaun and Morgan from the outside.

He went back over to his view of isolation. Morgan was still doing chest compressions while Shaun had just set up the defibrillator, “Everyone off,” he shouted, “Clear!” he pushed the button and a tachy heartbeat appeared on the monitor.

“She’s still tachycardic, we need a better rhythm,” said Morgan, “Another push of epi,” she finally glanced over and saw Melendez standing at the window and it looked as if he was motioning her over to him, “Dr. Murphy, continue compressions. I think Dr. Melendez wants to speak with me,” Shaun nodded and followed Morgan’s orders. Morgan walked over to the glass pane and said, “Dr. Melendez, she’s had an irregular heartbeat for five minutes, she’s struggling to breathe, if she flat lines again, should we call it?”

Melendez shook his head,” No,” he said, “Keep doing compressions with Dr. Murphy. Have the other take over if one of you gets tired. Shock her between every five cycles if it doesn’t work. Once she has a steady pulse, we need to get her oxygen levels up. Have you ever intubated anyone?”

“Once or twice in med school. Mostly on dummies in training,” informed Morgan.

“Well, when she gets a steady pulse, I want one of you to intubate her,” instructed Melendez.

Morgan nodded and went back into the isolation room, “Melendez wants us to keep going,” said Morgan taking over chest compressions for Shaun. She kept going for another several cycles, “Come on, Dr. Lim!” she whispered to herself.

Melendez watched on as the two residents worked together for once, closely observing the monitors, “Come on, Audrey.”

Shaun amped up the AED again and shouted, “Everyone off!” Morgan stopped compressions, “Clear!” another shock went through the room, but suddenly, a steady heartbeat appeared on the monitor, “Sinus rhythm, we have a pulse,” Shaun announced.

Everyone in the room along with Melendez breathed a sigh of relief, though everyone knew Lim was far from being out of the woods. Morgan took a deep breath and said, “Dr. Melendez said to intubate her.”

“Have you ever intubated anyone, because I never have? It’s not something I’m comfortable with,” Shaun explained, shying away from Morgan.

“I’ll do it then,” said Morgan, “Just get me the supplies.”

If it was one thing Shaun was usually good at, it was following instructions, but the buzzing from the light kept distracting him. When he arrived back in isolation, he said, “Someone really needs to fix the light. Do you hear the buzzing in the light?”
Morgan listened carefully, “I don’t hear anything.”

“It’s loud, it needs to be fixed,” commented Shaun.

“Okay, Shaun,” scolded Morgan, “I really need you to focus right now because I’ve only performed a few intubations. And it’s not just any patient, it’s Dr. Lim,” she said, a hint of concern creeping into her usually sarcastic voice. Shaun gave his quick nod and turned on the ventilation system and handed Morgan the laryngoscope. Morgan searched the area a little, thinking carefully about what to do, “Okay, I need you to press on her Adam’s Apple.”

“She’s a woman, she doesn’t have a pronounced Adam’s apple,” stated Shaun.

“Well, press where an Adam’s Apple would be if she was a man,” said Morgan. Shaun felt around and pushed where he was supposed to while Morgan carefully inserted the tube, “Okay, I got it,” she inflated it and one of the nurses attached the cuff to the tube, “Dr. Murphy, check for normal breath sounds.”

Shaun took a stethoscope and put it on Lim’s chest, though he could still hear the buzzing of the light in the background, “Normal breath sounds on both sides, you inserted it correctly,” said Shaun, “They still need to fix that light.”

“Thank God,” sighed Morgan as she taped the tube and hooked up the tubing to the ventilator.

The team from the CDC arrived shortly thereafter with high doses of the only antiviral medication the virus was responding to at the moment. The team had determined the virus was a mutation of SARS that was faster acting and therefore, killing those infected faster without measures to stop it from progressing. One of the team members, John, came to the door already dressed in a decontamination suit, “Is this the quarantined area?” he asked.

“Yes,” one of the guards confirmed just as Andrews came down to the area.

“How many people are quarantined, how many have been infected, and how many fatalities?”

“About forty patients, two residents, one attending surgeon, thirty nurses, and a dozen staff members,” informed Andrews, “So far, four individuals have been infected, three have passed.”

“Okay, well, we’ll care for the infected first and then we’ll test those who are locked under quarantine,” responded John.

“Sir, when you go to test everyone, please know my son, Kellan Park, is in there. He has asthma and I want him out of there as soon as possible,” pleaded Park.

“And if you could test Bob Cravens towards the front, I’d really appreciate it. One of my patients needs him,” stated Melendez.

“We’ll go as quickly as we can but we have to care for the infected first,” said John. The guards let him into the ER and he went over to isolation, “I’m here with the medication for those infected. Which one of you is the attending surgeon on call?”

Shaun and Morgan looked at each other, “She’s right there,” Shaun pointed to Lim, still asleep on the gurney.

“Oh, so you must be the two residents then?” asked John.
“I’m Dr. Reznick, this is Dr. Murphy,” interjected Morgan, “Dr. Lim was the trauma surgeon on call when she became infected.”

“So what treatments have been administered?” asked John.

“Oxygen therapy, albuterol therapy, antiviral medication, CPR, and intubation,” listed Shaun counting on his fingers. He heaved a sigh as he continued to hear the buzzing in the background and covered his ears.

“And you both figured out how to do all of that as residents?” asked John surprised.

“Well…” started Morgan.

“Thank Dr. Melendez,” said Shaun, uncovering his ears and pointing to his superior standing on the other side, “He told us what to do.”

“Dr. Murphy’s right. If it wasn’t for Dr. Melendez directing us and telling us to keep going after she flat lined, well, we might have had four victims succumb to the virus,” said Morgan, holding back tears as she thought of Tyler. She had been wondering at first why Lim hadn’t been wearing a mask until she had seen the rash on her neck.

John looked over towards Melendez and then back towards Shaun and Morgan, “Well, good job to all of you. But after I start these medications, I need to really test both of you to make sure neither one of you had been infected.”

More members of the CDC arrived and started testing everyone while Andrews, Melendez, and Park waited outside. Melendez watched Lim’s monitors like a hawk, looking for any signs of cardiac arrest or respiratory distress. She looked so fragile on that stretcher, so helpless, instead of her usual obstinate, adrenaline junkie self. Right now, he was grateful for Morgan and Shaun for being in there with her and that she hadn’t been alone without any residents. They all heard someone come out of the ER and Kellan was shouting, “Dad?!?”

“Kellan!” Park cried out. Kellan ran over to his father and Park embraced him, “Thank God, you’re alright. What were you doing down here in the first place?” scolded Park as Kellan and he walked away from Andrews and Melendez.

A short while later, Bob Cravens came out of the ER and said, “I’m looking for a Dr. Neil Melendez?”

Melendez looked him in the eyes, “I’m Dr. Neil Melendez.”

“Hi, I’m Bob Cravens, I’m…..”

“Chris Santos’s bone marrow donor, we’ve been waiting on you,” said Melendez. He took Bob away from the ER and found Claire so they could get everything set up for the transplant. Once he found Claire and got Bob checked in and prepped for surgery, they removed the bone marrow and then prepped Chris for the first transfusion. Thankfully, Chris was responding well to the treatment, so Claire went home as her shift had ended an hour ago. Melendez’s had as well, but he couldn’t help but go back down to the ER one last time. Dr. Lim was still in isolation, but thankfully, her vitals were steady, her heartbeat was strong, her O2 levels and respiration rate were higher, and the antiviral medications seemed to be working. He knew she wasn’t out of the woods yet, far from it, but something was finally being done.

Andrews came up beside Melendez and said, “We really need to discuss your actions today, but tomorrow is another day. Go home Dr. Melendez, it’s been a long day for you and you saved two
lives today,” Melendez glanced back over towards isolation, “John and several other members of the CDC have been assigned here to continue monitoring the situation. They’ll be keeping an eye on Dr. Lim. I’ll call you if anything changes.”

Melendez nodded, not entirely relieved, but followed Andrews’s orders and went home anyways. When he arrived home, he was more fatigued than anything else so he went straight to his room. His bed was torn apart, no thanks to the night before hand (he should’ve known Lim was going to be a wild, adventurous one), so he straightened it out and undressed before falling onto the mattress, not even bothering to put on pajamas. The bed felt so empty compared to yesterday night, which was strange, because nobody had been spending the night at his house since he was engaged to Jessica. In fact, Lim had been the first woman to be brought up into his bedroom since he broke up with Jessica. Sure, they hadn’t been completely sober and they were both pissed that Andrews had screwed them over, so they took out of that frustration on each other, but she hadn’t regretted the sex, so that had to mean something, right? I mean, there had to be some reason behind them sleeping together, right? Familiarity? Frustration? Anger? Hurt? All of the above? Finally, the sheer exhaustion of the day trumped Melendez’s worry, causing him to fall asleep.
The alarm buzzed at 5:00 in the morning, startling Melendez awake. He rolled over and smacked the snooze button, trying to motivate himself to get out of bed. He had a bypass surgery with Dr. Park along with assisting Claire with another transfusion session for Chris. On top of that, Andrews had asked to speak with him first thing in the morning and that was rarely a pleasant experience. He finally pushed back the covers and went to freshen up in the bathroom. He showered and dressed and was just about to leave the room when he noticed something half-heartedly thrown in the corner of the room. He picked it up and noticed it was a black leather jacket that didn’t belong to him, “Audrey,” he whispered to himself amusingly, throwing it over his arm so he could return it to her, hopefully without anyone else noticing. Then he remembered where Lim was: trapped alone in isolation with no one else to comfort her, hooked up to IV’s, ventilators, and other various monitors. That was if she even made it through the night. Why, oh why, did he actually go home instead of sleeping in the break room last night? He shouldn’t have just left her alone without at least one familiar face nearby. Somehow, he managed to bring himself back to reality enough to drive to St. Bonaventure and went to the locker room to change into his scrubs, storing Lim’s jacket in his locker for the time being. He knew that the first stop he had to make today was Andrews’s office, so he mustered up the courage to go find his boss. He found Andrews’s office and knocked on the door, “Dr. Melendez, please have a seat.”

Melendez nodded nervously and sat down across from Andrews, “Dr. Andrews,” he tried to hide the quiver in his voice.

Andrews folded his hands on his desk and leaned, “It pains me that I’m going to end up rewarding you for your actions once this conversation is over, but what were you thinking yesterday? You had no idea what was going on in quarantine other than the little information we were provided, you had no idea how Dr. Lim was going to respond to any of those treatments because she was not your patient, and you put your patient’s life in the balance by trying to get his donor out of quarantine instead of just going for a match from the bone marrow registry.”

“My patient preferred a biological match for the bone marrow,” Melendez defended, “And Dr. Lim wasn’t anyone’s patient.”

“But taking over a case without being assigned to it,” warned Andrews.

“Dr. Andrews, I realize Dr. Murphy and Dr. Reznick are second-year residents, but they were both overwhelmed without Dr. Lim’s guidance. I had full confidence in their abilities as long as they had a supervising physician,” Melendez explained his motives, “I had them treat Audrey the same way I would have treated any other patient with ARDS.”

Andrews sighed, “I really shouldn’t be doing this, because your actions were somewhat reckless, but if it wasn’t for your knowledge of treating ARDS and respiratory failure, then the hospital could have very well had four victims of the SARS mutation.”

“So she’s still alive?” Melendez asked himself happily.
“Because you often exercise good judgment and because you were in the running for the chief of surgery position, I’m assigning you as Dr. Lim’s attending physician while she’s hospitalized. You will work with the team from the CDC team and do exactly as they tell you to do in regards to Dr. Lim’s course of treatment. You will follow all hospital protocol, you will protect yourself from infection at all times, and you will not disobey or take over unless absolutely necessary. Have I made myself clear, Dr. Melendez?”

“Yes sir,” Melendez affirmed.

“Good,” Andrews said, “You may go about your day.”

Melendez went to go find Park before he turned back to face Andrews, “Dr. Lim? May I check on her before I start my day?”

Andrews nodded, “You may. She’s still in isolation and potentially contagious, so you need to wear a full decontamination suit.”

Melendez nodded his appreciation, “Thank you,” Melendez went down to the ER and found a fresh HAZMAT suit. Thankfully, the ER was no longer under quarantine, so he didn’t have to worry about guards. He went over to isolation and Lim seemed to be awake, so he quietly knocked on the door and entered. She turned to face him and she seemed relieved to finally have someone familiar near her in the midst of all of this unfamiliar territory. She tried to sit up, but was struggling since she was still weak, so Melendez stopped her, “Here,” he raised the bed for her. He took a deep breath and said, “You know you gave everyone a scare, Audrey,” he commented. Lim pointed to the tube and motioned for Melendez to find paper and a writing utensil, “Yeah, of course.”

He quickly obtained a pen and scratch paper, handing them to Lim. She scribbled something down and it looked like typical doctor handwriting; thankfully, Melendez was used to reading her messy penmanship, “Don’t think I don’t know it was you who was guiding Drs. Murphy and Reznick.”

Melendez raised his eyebrows in surprise, “So you saw me?” Lim nodded, “So, um, how are you feeling?” he asked a little awkwardly.

Lim scribbled down some more words, “Like someone ran over my chest with my motorcycle.”

Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle. Lim nearly died yesterday, but could still crack jokes to him, “Well, the CDC team hit you with a high dose of antiviral medication, so hopefully you’ll start to be able to breathe better soon and hopefully your fever will come down,” Melendez stood to leave, “Well, I have both a transfusion to perform and bypass surgery, so I’ll check on you later,” he went to lay his hand on her shoulder, but stopped himself. They were just friends, after all. He went to leave but remembered something, “Oh, you left your black leather jacket at my house. It’s in my locker; I’ll give it back to you once you’re out of isolation.”

Lim wrote down some more words, “When you leave for the day, can you stop by my house and get some stuff for me? Spare key is hidden under the potted plant in the backyard.”

“Why there?” he asked.

More scribbling, “Because under the doormat is too obvious.”

“Well, I have to make sure all of my patients are well taken care of,” commented Melendez, a hint of amusement in his voice. Lim’s eyes widened at his statement, “Oh, I didn’t tell you, Andrews assigned me as the attending physician to your case. You have to follow all of my orders,” Lim scowled and fell against the pillows, perturbed that she couldn’t rip the endotracheal tube out of her
throat and start giving Melendez flak, “Now get some rest,” Melendez emphasized, “It’s an order,” he added just to get on her nerves. She scowled at him, but, of course, couldn’t say anything, and even if she could, she was too tired to argue. He was going to enjoy this experience a little too much, she just knew it.

Melendez found Claire in Chris’s room and she was surprised he was running behind, “Where were you?” she asked.

“Emergency room. Andrews assigned me to Dr. Lim’s case,” Melendez informed.

“Oh,” Claire responded, “Well, I have the marrow and Chris is ready for his second transfusion.”

“So, how have you been feeling after your first round of marrow?” asked Melendez.

“Pretty crappy still,” responded Chris.

“Well, as your bone marrow levels rise, so will your white blood cells to fight off infection. You should begin to feel more like yourself again,” assured Melendez.

Melendez let Claire go work on another case while he found Park to do the bypass surgery. At the end of the day, he decided to check in on Lim one last time before heading home for the day. He put on his gear and entered the room. It was clear she had been asleep, but she stirred when she heard noise, “Hey,” he said softly, “I just came to check on you before I head out for the day. I’m going to swing by your house to get whatever you need. Do you have any preferences,” Lim handed him a long list, but Melendez wasn’t entirely surprised by this fact, “I’ll leave the stuff in my locker and check to make sure what you can and can’t have in here,” Lim nodded her understanding, “Now, don’t do anything to scare me tonight, understand?”

Lim found the pad of paper and pen and wrote something, “Do you think my stubborn ass is going to allow a deadly airborne infection to kill me? I’m too obstinate to die right now.”

“I take it that means you’ll try,” answered Melendez. Melendez went to leave, pondering on whether or not to bring up the other night’s activities, but he decided to wait. He couldn’t discuss it right now, not with Lim unable to speak directly to him and not in someplace as public as a hospital emergency room, “Hey, Audrey?” he asked, but noticed Lim had fallen asleep again, so he just let her be.

When Melendez arrived at Lim’s house later that night, he had a hell of a time finding the key to her house, because what Lim hadn’t mentioned was that there were multiple potted plants in the backyard. When he finally found her key, he unlocked the door and entered her house. When he stepped inside, he found the place to be a complete and total mess; if he didn’t know any better, it looked as if her house had been burglarized. Melendez looked at the list Lim had given him and said, “This might take a while.”

Melendez hung the jacket in the closet and went upstairs to find the toiletries and pajamas, feeling a little awkward as this was the most personal thing he had ever done for a patient. But Audrey wasn’t just any patient; she was his closest friend and colleague. When he reached Lim’s bedroom, he was shocked at the picture he found on the dresser. It was taken at a party when they were second-year residents, he had this look on his face was as if he wanted to be anywhere but there; Lim, all decked out in a Wonder Woman t-shirt and sporting her thick glasses (she hated wearing contacts for the longest time), was grinning at the camera with her arm wrapped around him. He honestly didn’t know why Lim had kept this particular photo. He figured it was because he looked
ridiculous in the picture so she kept it so she could look at it every time she needed a good laugh.

He put the picture back down and began to gather the clothes and toiletries, wondering if he would ever bring up his feelings for her. Honestly, he was wondering if they even were true feelings, or if it was just because she was severely ill. Sure, they had both enjoyed the sex a few nights ago, but in all honesty, Lim had seemed like it was just casual and that it didn’t mean anything. She never struck him as the type of person looking for a committed relationship, particularly after her divorce. But then again, maybe she hadn’t settled down because she hadn’t found the right person yet. Surely, her keeping that one photo of them together meant she cared about him a little? One thing was for sure, almost losing her and quite frankly, the idea that he could still possibly lose her made Melendez no longer want to chicken out about how he felt about Audrey.
Chapter 5

Lim improved a little over the next week, at least enough to be weaned off of the antiviral medication and switched to a steroid to reduce the swelling in her lungs. After a week, she was breathing well enough on her own that both John and Melendez determined they could take her off of the ventilator and switch to supplemental oxygen. If it was one thing Lim was looking forward to, it was getting that tube out of her throat so she could give Melendez a hard time. Oh sure, he had been excellent in treating her, but still, it would be fun to agitate him a little. She was still in isolation, but hopefully, she would test negative and be able to be moved to a standard private room before Christmas, but she knew there was a long recovery ahead. Melendez grabbed his gown, gloves, and full mask before entering the room since she was still potentially contagious. He walked over to Lim and said, “Well, I know you’ve been dying to critique me all week, so how about I take that tube out of your throat and then I’ll let you lay it on me, okay?” Lim nodded a little too eagerly, “Alright then,” Melendez suctioned everything, removed the mouth holder, and suctioned the tube before he went to remove it, “Alright, you know the drill. Deep breath,” he instructed in a teasing tone.

Lim did so and Melendez pulled the tube out. Lim coughed a few times before she glanced over at him and said, “Do you know how much I’ve been wanting to give you lip all week?”

“I’m sure you have, Lim,” Melendez chuckled lightly and sat down next to her. He put the oxygen piece in her nose and turned on the supplemental O2 before he asked, “So how are you feeling?”

“My throat is sore from the tube,” she said.

“I can go get some ice chips,” said Melendez.

Lim shook her head, “No that’s okay. The meds have been making me nauseous anyways.”

“Well, you still might be contagious so you’re stuck here for a little while longer, but your fever is going down and your vitals are stable. Anything else you want to throw at me?” he joked.

Lim took a deep breath and coughed some more before she answered, “Well, I’m surviving a deadly airborne virus that killed three of my patients within hours, thanks to you, so right now, I feel like Wonder Woman,” she responded, “God, I can’t believe I just said that,” she joked.

“Well you were Wonder Woman,” Melendez complimented her, “You put everyone before yourself. You led Dr. Reznick through an emergency surgery as you were struggling to breathe, you were willing to pass out cold instead of resting,” he said.

“Are you mad?” she asked hesitantly.

Melendez shook his head, “No, because that’s the Dr. Lim I’ve known for ten years now,” Melendez held back a few tears, “But you could’ve died, Audrey,” he admitted, his voice softer and more compassionate.

“I know. But I didn’t,” she mocked him a little, “Because I had a good doctor looking out for me.”

“You know you have a long road ahead of you. Once you test negative, you’ll be moved to a private room out of isolation, but I was speaking with John and depending on how much the virus attacked your lungs, you could be facing a rough recovery. It can include residual damage so that means medications, exams to test lung capacity, albuterol treatments, pulmonary rehab, and possibly even oxygen use and inhaler use at home. It depends on the severity of the damage. You’ll
be out of work for a while,” Melendez admitted, knowing she wasn’t going to be happy about that fact.

Lim sighed and coughed some more, “But, I’m sure you’ll ride my ass to do as I’m told, even though you know it won’t work because I never do as I’m told.”

“It’s only because I care about you, Audrey,” he blurted out unintentionally. Lim froze, “I mean as a friend,” Melendez quickly added.

“Right,” Lim nodded, though the two surgeons could feel the tension in the room, “So are you working on Christmas?”

Melendez shook his head, “No, I’m actually going to see Gabi on Christmas. The group home where she lives has a big Christmas celebration every year. Santa comes and hands out presents and they have a big Christmas dinner.”

“Oh, that sounds like fun,” Lim smiled, “I was going to work on Christmas like I usually do, covering the ER.”

Melendez laughed, “You’ve loved doing so since we were interns,” he admitted, “Listen, I’m off both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but I can stop by on Christmas Eve if you want some company,” he mentioned hesitantly.

“Sure, that would be nice,” she admitted.

“And hopefully you’ll pass your test this weekend and you’ll be in your own room, by then,” he said.

“Mmhmm,” she nodded mutely. She yawned loudly.

“Well, I should be going. I have other patients and I’m sure you’re still extremely fatigued.”

She nodded, “Yeah,” she said weakly.

“Well, I’ll check in on you later. Page a nurse if you need anything. Don’t try to get it yourself,” he warned in a playful tone.

“Alright Dad,” she huffed jokingly. Melendez was just about to leave the room when Lim called out to him, “Neil,” she used his first name.

Melendez stopped and turned around, “Yeah?”

“Thank you,” she said.

“For…for what?” asked Melendez.

“Again, I can’t believe I’m saying this, but for saving my life. If you hadn’t have come down and directed Dr. Reznick and Dr. Murphy about what to do, well, we might not have been having this conversation.”

Melendez didn’t say anything more, instead choosing to go and find Shaun since he was to assist him on a surgery that day. Once they were scrubbed into the OR, Melendez wasn’t saying much other than giving instructions to Shaun when the young man suddenly asked, “How is Dr. Lim doing?”
“What?” asked Melendez, shifting his focus from the work he was doing.

“I asked how Dr. Lim was doing. She’s sick, so it’s proper to ask how someone who is sick is doing,” explained Shaun.

“Oh, um, she’s doing better. But it’ll be awhile before she can leave the hospital,” admitted Melendez.

Shaun stayed silent for a few more moments before he spoke again, “Should I get her flowers or balloons?”

“I guess. Why are you asking, Dr. Murphy?” questioned Melendez.

“Because when I go into patients’ rooms, their families and friends have often brought them flowers or balloons. Dr. Lim is one of my supervising surgeons, so I think I should bring her flowers or balloons,” Shaun said in his usual monotone voice, “But I also don’t want to seem like I’m playing favorites, which is why I’m asking your opinion. I don’t know what the protocol is when your supervising surgeon gets sick.”

“Well, I’ll admit, it’s new territory for me too,” said Melendez, “If you want to do a small gesture, I’m sure it would be okay to get her a get well card.”

“Mm. Okay,” stated Shaun, “They finally fixed the light in the emergency room.”

Later that night, after his shift ended, Melendez stopped by Target to pick up some puzzles and another stuffed panda bear for Gabi since she had lost her old one a few months ago. He was just about to go check-out when something in the stuffed animal section caught his eye. It was a stuffed bear dressed in a little motorcycle outfit. He chuckled because the bear was so Audrey and he knew she would find it funny. He thought back to Shaun’s questions about protocol when it came to giving her gifts, but Lim was Shaun’s superior while Melendez and she were equals as of right now. But was it even appropriate to give her a gift? They were just friends, after all. Finally he decided to get the bear as well: it was Christmas and they were close friends and she was a close friend who was sick and had almost died. The gesture didn’t have to mean anything more. He was getting it for her because they were friends. Period. Nothing more, nothing less.
Dr. Lim’s test came back negative much to everyone’s relief, so she was moved out of isolation and into a private room in the Intensive Care Unit. Christmas Eve arrived and Melendez had cleared it with Andrews to allow the other residents into Lim’s hospital room for the holiday. Melendez would be visiting Gabi on Christmas Day, Shaun would be spending Christmas with Lea, Park would be celebrating with Kellan, and Claire and Morgan had to work on Christmas, so they decided to have the surprise celebration on December 24th. Around noon, after most of her early morning tests had been done, Melendez dressed in his gown, gloves, and mask (which thankfully was a standard surgical mask more for Lim’s protection due to a weakened immune system than for anyone else’s safety at this point). He knocked on the door and Lim rolled over to face him, “Right on time. For once,” she chuckled.

“Hey, you know the life of a surgeon,” he joked. He handed her the bag in his hand, “I bought you a little something. I saw it when I was buying Gabi’s presents and I just couldn’t resist.”

Lim peeked into the bag, chuckled, and coughed a little as she pulled out the motorcycle bear, “Oh it’s adorable. Very thoughtful,” she smiled, “But just to be clear, I don’t have to think of you every time I look at it right?”

“No, but it might be hard not to,” he smirked under the mask. Lim scowled and smacked his chest playfully, but she went into a coughing spell, so Melendez said, “Easy, Audrey. You have to build your strength back up before we’re on an even playing field of playful fighting.”

“Well, I can’t wait for the day when I feel like myself again,” she admitted honestly.

“You will, Audrey, you will,” Melendez smiled, “Are you feeling up for more visitors?”

“Depends on the visitors,” she said.

Melendez stood and walked towards the door, “Don’t worry, I think you’ll like these ones.”

Park, Shaun, Claire, and Morgan all came into the room, beaming under their masks, handfuls of fake flower bouquets, balloons, and a few standard get well bears in hand, “Melendez, what is this?” asked Lim in surprise, returning her voice to her usual sarcastic tone.

“Don’t worry, I cleared it with Andrews. Just thought that since you couldn’t do your normal ‘work the ER on Christmas’, you might have wanted an alternative,” he explained.

“How are you feeling, Dr. Lim?” asked Claire.

“Pretty crappy,” she admitted, “But don’t think you all can slack off just because I’ll be out of commission for a while. I expect the same level of excellence that I know each and every one of you are capable.”

“We won’t let you down, Dr. Lim,” assured Park.
“We brought you flowers and balloons,” Shaun motioned over to the gifts, “But we brought fake flowers because your lungs might be permanently damaged from the SARS mutation.”

“Shaun,” warned Claire.

“It’s the truth,” he said, “But she can recover most of her lung function…”

“Shaun, it’s Christmas,” said Park.

“No, it’s Christmas Eve, Christmas is tomorrow. I’m spending it with Lea,” stated Shaun.

“That’s okay, Dr. Murphy. I’m aware I have an extensive recovery ahead of me,” she comforted him, “But I have to give a special congratulations to both you and Dr. Reznick.”

Morgan’s eyes widened, “Why?” she asked.

“Because you both remained calm under pressure, you showed your abilities as second-year residents, and you both worked together to save a life, my life. I couldn’t be more proud of you both and your growth as surgeons,” commended Lim.

Morgan held back a few tears, thinking about how she lost Tyler. She couldn’t lose someone who had become a mother figure to her, “Thank you, Dr. Lim.”

“Yes, thank you, Dr. Lim,” said Shaun as well since it seemed to be the correct social convention.

“Well, I’m sure you’re still feeling run down and we all have work to do,” said Claire, “We just wanted to see how you were doing.”

“Don’t worry about me. You all have lives to save,” said Lim, “Now go get started and have a Merry Christmas,” the four residents nodded and left the room. Lim turned to Melendez and her cheerful demeanor suddenly became more somber now that it was just her and her dear friend, “They ran many tests over the weekend, Neil,” she whispered softly.

“I know,” he nodded. Lim held back a few tears, but some still fell down her cheeks, “Hey it’s okay,” Melendez wiped them away as they fell.

“I don’t know why I’m crying because I don’t cry,” she chuckled to herself.

“What happened, Audrey?” asked Melendez.

“First, they ran the test to make sure I was no longer contagious and I’m not, thank God,” she admitted, “But they performed a lot of tests to determine what percentage of my lung function I lost and I lost a lot of it because of the virus. My numbers were just barely above the criteria for full respiratory failure.”

“Audrey, there are so many treatments for respiratory failure. There’s medication, there’s pulmonary rehab…you can live a full life with the proper education,” Melendez said.

“But they said I might never get to 100% function again,” Lim admitted softly as she let more tears fall, “I’m scared, Neil,” she admitted, not quite believing she was saying that to anyone, especially him.

“I know you are,” Melendez said, “But I know you, Audrey; you will be just fine,” Melendez grabbed her hand and then mentally chastised himself for doing so. But he also noticed Lim didn’t pull her hand away, but maybe it was because she was too frail to react quickly.
Shaun waltzed into the room and said, “I left my scalpel in here,” he went to grab it and noticed his two superiors holding hands. He didn’t say anything though, he just stated, “I found my scalpel.”

He quickly left the room and the two friends chuckled nervously. Melendez pulled his hand away and said, “Well, I have some last minute things to do before I go see Gabi tomorrow. I know it probably won’t be, but have a good Christmas, Lim.”

“You too,” she smiled, “Tell Gabi I said ‘hi’.”

“Will do,” Melendez answered. He went outside and noticed Shaun was sitting on the bench, “Dr. Murphy, what are you doing out here?”

“I’m waiting for Lea to pick me up. She’s giving me another driving lesson because I have no surgeries today,” said Shaun, barely looking Melendez in the eye. Melendez just nodded and went to go to his car when Shaun asked, “Dr. Melendez?”

“Yes, Dr. Murphy?” said Melendez.

“Do you care about Dr. Lim?” he asked.

Melendez sighed, pondering on how to tell the young resident that they were just friends, “Well, I’ve known her for a long time and we’re close friends, so yeah I care about her.”

“You were holding her hand,” Shaun stated.

“I know. But that was a one-time thing,” said Melendez, though he didn’t know if he was trying to convince Shaun or himself.

“You didn’t get her flowers or balloons,” stated Shaun again.

“Um, no. I got her the little bear dressed in a motorcycle outfit,” he said.

Shaun absorbed the information, “She rides a motorcycle. That was an appropriate gift.”

“Have a good driving lesson, Dr. Murphy. And Merry Christmas,” said Melendez.

Shaun stayed silent for a few moments before he said, “I will have a good driving lesson and I will have a good Christmas.”

Melendez knew that was Shaun’s way of wishing him a Merry Christmas, so he headed for home to wrap Gabi’s gifts. Tomorrow would be a wonderful day spent with his sister, and quite frankly, he wanted to have something to take his mind off of his ambiguous feelings.
On December 25th, Melendez woke up bright and early that way he could be at the group home by 10 AM when the party started, though sleeping until quarter of nine was sleeping in for him. He found his red sweater that had a Santa Claus on the front of it; he thought it was the ugliest sweater on the planet, but Gabi adored it so much and Melendez would do absolutely anything for his sister. He grabbed Gabi’s presents and drove over to the group home. When he entered the main dining area, Gabi was already seated in her favorite spot by the window. He walked over to her and smiled, “Hey Kiddo, Merry Christmas!”

Gabi looked up at her brother and smiled, “Neil,” she beamed, “Merry Christmas.”

Neil kissed her cheek and sat down next to her, “So how have you been?”

“We made Christmas cookies, and we decorated the tree, and they took us to the mall and helped us buy Christmas presents,” she said happily.

“Well, that’s wonderful, Niña,” he said and handed her the gifts, “I have something for you.”

He helped her unwrap the puzzles and panda bear and Gabi grinned with delight, “New puzzles! And a replacement for Cookie! Thank you, Neil,” she embraced her brother.

“De nada, Niña,” he answered.

“You haven’t come to see me since Thanksgiving,” said Gabi sadly.

“I know, Gabi,” Melendez sighed sadly, “I’ve been busy at work.”

“HO, HO, HO!” everyone heard and the residents cheered when Santa walked into the room, including Gabi, “Merry Christmas everyone!”

“Merry Christmas, Santa,” everyone chorused. Melendez smiled to himself as one by one, the residents went to sit on Santa’s lap and receive their gift, a craft to be made. When it was Gabo’s turn, she happily sat and clearly enjoyed talking to Santa. She eagerly took her present, knowing that she would make it with her brother. It pained Melendez that he couldn’t visit her more often, but with the long hours he worked and the fact that their parents could no longer help care for her, it was better for her health and safety to be put in a group home.

He also thought back to a couple Thanksgivings ago when he had come to the home’s annual Thanksgiving dinner with Lim. It had been three years ago in 2015. Jessica and he had only been casually dating at that point and so she had spent Thanksgiving with her father without inviting him (that should have been the first clue that things weren’t going to work out with Jessica). Lim wasn’t scheduled to work Thanksgiving (much to her dismay), so he had invited her to spend Thanksgiving with him and Gabi (just as friends, of course). Lim and Gabi had only met that one time, but Gabi had taken to Lim pretty easily and Melendez couldn’t help but admire how good Lim had been with his sister. But as he thought about it more, she was also the most patient with Shaun out of all of the attending surgeons at St. Bonaventure minus Glassman, himself included, so it didn’t really surprise him now. Gabi immediately wanted to start her craft, a small foam Santa, so Melendez helped her unpack everything and found the glue to help her put it together, “Oh, I saw Ms. Audrey yesterday and she told me to tell you hi,” said Melendez.

Gabi smiled at the mention of Lim, “Where is Ms. Audrey?” she asked.
Melendez sighed, knowing Gabi didn’t have the capability to understand Lim’s current condition, at least not right now, “Niña, you know Ms. Audrey works every Christmas.”

“Oh,” Gabi pouted sadly.

Melendez decided to change the subject before Gabi could ask any more questions, “I think this is Santa’s belt,” he held up a piece of black foam.

After the big Christmas dinner, Melendez was just getting ready to leave when Gabi looked up at him, “Promise me you’ll come visit me soon?”

“I promise, Kiddo,” he kissed her forehead, “I hope you had a wonderful Christmas.”

Gabi nodded and Melendez left the group home. He checked the time and visiting hours weren’t over at the hospital, so he decided to swing by to see Lim before heading home. He made his way to the ICU and put on his mask and gloves before he knocked on the door. Lim turned and smiled when she saw Melendez, “I thought you were off today?”

“I am. But the party at Gabi’s group home is over so I decided to stop by and check on you,” he took off his coat.

Lim chuckled and covered her mouth, “Nice sweater,” she commented amusingly and coughed a little.

“What?” Melendez looked down and realized he was wearing the Santa sweater, “Oh, Gabi loves this sweater, so I wore it for her sake,” he admitted.

“Well, that’s what makes you a wonderful brother,” smiled Lim.

“So how was your Christmas?” Melendez took a seat next to the bed.

“Santa came by earlier for the kids in the ICU. Dr. Browne and Dr. Reznick both came by today. But I’m glad you also came to see me,” she said.

Melendez took a deep breath, “Gabi was asking about you today.”

Lim nodded, absorbing the information, “What did you tell her?”

“I told her you had to work. She doesn’t have the ability to understand, you know…” Melendez trailed off mid-sentence.

“Right,” Lim nodded.

Melendez stood, “Well, I really should get going, but I just wanted to check on you.”

“Do you make personal visits to all of your patients?” she joked.

“When they’re my friend, I do,” he admitted, “Now get some rest. You’re going to start your physical therapy with walking and pulmonary rehab tomorrow and you need to be well-rested.”

“Well, thanks for stopping by. I was starting to get a little lonely,” she admitted.

“It’s no problem, Lim,” she held out her arms for him and, though surprised, he embraced her back, “Merry Christmas, Audrey.”

He went to pull away, but Lim wouldn’t let go, at least not right away. She finally loosened her
grip and gave a hesitant smile, “Merry Christmas, Neil.”
Chapter 8

The physical therapists arrived bright and early the next morning, much to Lim’s dismay. Oh sure she knew very well that walking as soon as possible would aid her in her recovery, but these therapists were a little too cheerful. And quite frankly, it was embarrassing to go from one of the most respected surgeons at St. Bonaventure to a patient in the blink of an eye. At least Melendez would be right by her side. Or so she thought.

She noticed it was nearly 9:00 and he still hadn’t stopped by that morning. She turned to one of the nurses, Carrie, and asked, “Carrie, do you know where Dr. Melendez is?” Lim asked quietly.

“I believe he’s in the OR,” answered Carrie, “He had to perform an emergency surgery.”

“Oh,” Lim responded understandingly, though she was slightly disappointed.

“I’m sure Dr. Melendez will be by when he’s finished but for right now, we really need to get you walking. I’m sure I don’t have to explain all of the medical reasons why,” said Carrie.

Lim shook her head, “No, you don’t.”

Carrie and the physical therapist, Matt, made sure to disconnect monitors and move IV stands before helping Lim attempt to sit up. She regularly rode a motorcycle to work (at least until her motorcycle license had been suspended), she was the first in line for the latest thrill ride at Disneyland; she thrived on a good adrenaline rush. But now, everything was different. Now, it took all she could to stand without collapsing she felt so weak in the knees, it took all she could not to vomit because of the amount of drugs in her system, she became short of breath just taking a stroll around the main desk in the ICU. She also had another round of lung function tests and, although the results were better than they were just days ago, the outcome still wasn’t great. In between tests and walking sessions, Lim really didn’t have much else to do other than read or watch TV, so she had a lot of time on her hands to think about things. All she had wanted that morning was to be close to Melendez, but why? It’s not like she ever thought about him that much before a few weeks ago. Okay, maybe she had, but it wasn’t romantically; it was more competitively over the chief of surgery position. Or maybe she occasionally thought about him romantically, but it was deep down. Way deep down. Practically non-existent. He had been engaged earlier this year. No, she didn’t really want to date him. She wasn’t falling for him. The sex was just stress release as a result of being angry about Andrews’s decision. Nothing more. That was what all of the rationalizations had been about when they woke up the next morning.

But now, everything had changed. She would never admit it to anyone, but she had been petrified when she had seen the rash on her arm. She had immediately locked herself away in isolation to protect Morgan from infection but she had wanted nothing more than for someone to comfort her the moment she had found out the deadly virus was attacking her body. Her first thought had been, “Am I going to die?” She probably had at one point given the fact that she had woken up with a tube down her throat. And while both Shaun and Morgan were growing into excellent surgeons, they were both still learning. She knew that Shaun had been overwhelmed by the chaos in the ER and she knew that Morgan had been distraught over Tyler’s death and probably had become distraught after she had collapsed. But they had helped save her because Dr. Neil Melendez had come to their (and her) rescue. Never mind the fact that they had been set against each other for a promotion just days beforehand, never mind the fact that she had brushed off the sex as being casual and meaning nothing (because it didn’t, truly). He had seen her in trouble and nothing else had mattered to him. Quite frankly, if there hadn’t been security guards protecting the quarantine area, he probably would’ve broken the windows and run into isolation unexposed if it meant saving
her. Because in the end, they were friends who were always there for each other, no matter the circumstances. Damnit, she was beginning to like him in that manner and was starting to imagine a future with him as more than friends. But she could never tell Melendez. He probably didn’t feel the same way about her. He was too professional for that sort of thing.

A knock on the door interrupted her train of thought. She glanced over and found Melendez standing in the door frame, a look of worry on his face, “Hi,” he said softly.

“I was starting to think you’d never come by,” she admitted.

“I meant to be here this morning, but I had an emergency come up and the surgery took longer than Dr. Reznick and I expected. We just got out a half hour ago,” he apologized.

“It’s okay. I’m a trauma surgeon, I understand that those kinds of things happen,” she said, though he could still hear the hurt in her voice.

Melendez entered the room and sat down in the chair next to Lim’s bed, “So, how did the tests go?”

Lim swallowed thickly, “The numbers were better than a few weeks ago, but still not great,” she informed.

Melendez nodded nervously, “Alright, and the physical therapy?”

Melendez could tell Lim was holding back tears again, “Oh Neil,” she whispered softly, “I ride a motorcycle, I once ran a marathon when I was in med school, I’ve been surfing, hiking, I had a dream of skydiving…but today, I could barely make it around the ICU without getting winded and I went into a terrible coughing spell when I reached my room again, so they had to up my oxygen.”

“Audrey,” Melendez comforted, “You’ll get your strength back, but it’s going to take time. It won’t happen overnight.”

“I know,” her breath shook, “Just that being a surgeon, I’ve always viewed a diagnosis strictly from a medical perspective. I mean, we can empathize with our patients, but we never truly know what they’re going through while they’re recovering. But now, being the patient, it’s giving me a whole new understanding of things,” she admitted.

“Well, we both know learning sometimes means walking a mile in another person’s shoes,” Melendez said, “But, as much as I possibly can, I will be by your side the entire time, even long after you leave this hospital.”

“You promise?” she asked.

“I promise,” he confirmed. Lim desperately wanted to say something about how she felt about him, but she was too fearful to do so. Of course now would be the moment she decided not to be a risk-taker, “Did you want to try to do another walk?” she hesitated a little, “Audrey, you know in the long run, it’ll help prevent blood clots, collapsed lungs, and it’ll help you regain your endurance.”

“Alright,” she succumbed. Melendez grabbed her hand and helped her stand. They walked slowly, it was much slower than usual for her since he was used to trying to catch up to her speed in the halls, and they had to stop a few times so she could catch her breath, but she persisted like the tenacious woman he knew was in her. Having Melendez by her side somehow gave Lim the motivation to keep going, even when she wanted to give up and this time, the walking was a bit easier.
They arrived back at her room and Melendez helped get her settled for the night. He went to leave when Lim called out to him, “Neil?”

He turned back to her, “Yeah?”

“Stay? Please?” she asked softly.

Melendez thought about it carefully. He didn’t have any surgeries scheduled for tomorrow, only clinical appointments. He had both an extra pair of scrubs and a change of clothes in his locker and he could always shower in the locker room tomorrow morning. Usually, he had no trouble putting his foot down about things, but he could tell by the look in Lim’s eyes that she needed the companionship tonight. He smiled and nodded softly, “Okay,” he sat back down in the chair and turned on the TV, flipping through some of the channels before he finally settled on the Sharks game, “You have to tell her, Neil,” he thought to himself. He took a deep breath and asked, “Hey, Audrey?”

Lim turned to face him, “Hmm?”

Melendez knew what he wanted to say, but he just couldn’t say it, so he said, “Is the Sharks game okay?”

“Well, I’m more of a baseball kind of girl, but since it’s the wrong season, the hockey game is fine,” she smirked.

“Good,” he said. It wasn’t long before Melendez heard quiet breathing, so he looked over and realized Lim had fallen asleep. He turned off the TV and converted the chair into a bed, grabbed an extra pillow and blanket, and lied down. Usually, he could tune out the various machines whenever he was focused on performing a surgery unless an alarm sounded when a patient was in trouble, but now, he noticed everything: the beeping of the pulse ox and heart monitors, the buzzing of the blood pressure cuff every so often, the whooshing of the oxygen tank, the drip of the IV with the antiviral medication and other fluids; it was a tad annoying at first, but soon, the steady noises of everything along with Lim’s soft breathing lulled Melendez into a much needed sleep.
Lim had been surprised, yet extremely elated when she had woken up the next morning and Melendez was still in the room. She also noticed he had been spending more and more evenings with her. Sure, he didn’t sleep at the hospital every night (he did have things to take care of at home, plus he was also visiting Gabi more as he had promised her), but he was staying in her room three or four times a week. As the weeks went on, her numbers slowly improved and she was able to function with less and less supplemental oxygen. She only used it at night most of the time. Her appetite returned once she had been completely weaned off of the antiviral medication and her energy levels steadily increased over time. Around the end of January, the doctors, respiratory therapists, and pulmonologists determined it was safe for Lim to continue her recovery at home. Lim was, of course, more than looking forward to being at home, eating her own food, sleeping in her own bed, and not getting woken up every two hours for vital checks (she was really starting to think the doctors and nurses had made it their God-given mission to invade her personal space). Melendez had agreed to drive her home and check-up on her periodically; Lim wasn’t looking forward to that. Okay, maybe she was. Just a little. But seriously, not a lot. She wasn’t falling for Melendez.

The pulmonologist went over the discharge instructions after Melendez signed off on them and handed Lim the scripts for the medications to be taken either over a period of time or indefinitely. They also gave her the schedule and exercises for rehab and told her to dial 911 if she exhibited any signs of severe respiratory distress and the emergency inhaler didn’t work. Once the nurse had finally removed her IV (of course, it took 45 minutes just to have that task done), Melendez came into the room and asked, “So, are you ready to go?”

“More than ready,” she chuckled honestly, “It’ll be nice to eat non-hospital food, take a nice long bath, and sleep on non-sterile sheets.”

Melendez smiled and laughed, “Well, as soon as Carrie gets you a wheelchair, we can go.”

Lim wanted to argue that she was fine, but she knew it was St. Bonaventure policy for patients to be escorted out in wheelchairs. She sat down and pointed a finger at Melendez, “Don’t race me down the hall.”

“Oh man, taking all of the fun out of it,” Melendez joked, “Besides, I thought you were an adrenaline junkie.”

“I still am, but I remember a certain doctor harping on me to take things slow,” Lim smiled up at him.

“Sounds like a wise doctor,” he said. Once they reached the entrance to the hospital, Melendez asked, “Um, are you okay to walk to employee parking or do you want to wait here while I go get my car?”

“Well, it’s probably better for me to walk and I can walk longer distances without becoming short of breath,” she smiled proudly.

“Okay,” he agreed. She hesitantly stood and took a deep breath before they both made their way to Melendez’s car. They began their journey to Lim’s house, but Melendez couldn’t help but notice how quiet Lim was, “Is everything alright, Audrey?” he asked quietly.

“Yeah, just have nothing to say,” she answered, though there was a slight waver in her voice.
Melendez just nodded, deciding not to pressure her into talking. It didn’t take them long to get to Lim’s house; she only lived ten minutes away from the hospital. He parked on the street since Lim’s car and her Ducati were both in the driveway. They went inside and Lim couldn’t help but feel an overwhelming sense of comfort to finally be home. Sure, she was used to being at the hospital more often than not, but being the one poked and prodded for a month and a half made her miss the comforts of her home. One thing was for sure: it gave her a whole new sense of empathy for her patients. Melendez came in behind her and placed her bag on the floor, “So are you good for now?” he asked nervously.

Lim nodded, “Yes, I’ll just unpack everything and then rest.”

“Okay, if you get too winded doing anything, then just don’t worry about it. It’s not worth losing the 70% lung capacity you’ve gained back,” said Melendez, “I have to get back to work, but I’ll come and check in on you later tonight.”

“Okay,” Lim said. Melendez left and Lim decided she was too tired to do anything significant, so she grabbed the medication and oxygen and went upstairs. Melendez had clearly done some cleaning the few times he had come over when she had been in the hospital given the fact that her bedroom no longer looked as if a tornado had torn through the place. Lim finally realized all she wanted to do was soak in the bath and then have something good to eat so she filled up the tub and undressed before settling into the water. She glanced down at her right arm and she couldn’t help but vividly remember the rash that had been there just a short time ago. She swallowed thickly to keep the bile in her throat from fully coming up. She had lived and she had to keep telling herself that.

A loud knock interrupted her flashback, so she quickly drained the water, dried off, threw on a pair of sweatpants and a Spiderman t-shirt, and went downstairs to answer the door. She was relieved to find Melendez on the other side, “Melendez.”

“Hey Lim,” he said, “Can I come in?”

“One of course,” she stepped aside. He entered the living room, “Have you eaten?” she asked.

Melendez shook his head, “No, I had a light meal at the hospital cafeteria, but nothing substantial.”

Lim looked towards the kitchen, “I don’t know what I have that’s good still. I’m sure most everything is spoiled, expired, or stale.”

“We can always order pizza like we used to when we were residents,” suggested Melendez, a small smile forming on his face.

The thought of an old memory that had nothing to do with ERs, respiratory viruses, and hospitals made Lim’s heart secretly leap with joy, “Pineapple and pepperoni still?”

“Would we use any other strange combination to confuse the pizza place?” Melendez asked sarcastically. The pizza arrived and Melendez paid the delivery driver. Lim went to reimburse Melendez when he stopped her, “No, that’s okay, Lim. You’ll be out of work for a while. Consider it a get well present.”

The two surgeons sprawled out on the couch and began to devour the pizza pie, just like old times, but Melendez couldn’t help but notice that Lim was constantly looking towards the inside of her right arm, like she was checking for something. What they couldn’t eat, Lim stuck in the refrigerator, figuring her first task would be to clean it out, though it seemed Melendez had done some of that already. When he went to leave, she couldn’t stop herself from saying, “Neil?”
Melendez stopped to face her, “I know you’re not technically my doctor anymore, which makes what I’m about to ask a little easier, but could you please stay here tonight? You know, just in case I start having trouble breathing or something and I need help or need to be rushed to the ER,” her voice quivered a little when she said the letters ‘ER’.

“Yeah, sure,” Melendez said, “Um, you don’t have a guest room do you?”

Lim shook her head, “No, sorry.”

“Well, I guess I can sleep on the couch,” Melendez said.

“Oh,” Lim spoke hesitantly. “You could sleep in my bed with me?” Melendez raised an eyebrow.

“Neil, come on. It’ll be more comfortable for you and we’ve…shared a bed before. It’s not like we’ll be doing any hanky panky…just sleeping.”

Melendez gave in, “Alright,” he agreed.

“I have a spare toothbrush in the bathroom closet,” she pointed.

Melendez nodded and disappeared into the bathroom while Lim took her medicine and set up the oxygen tank to help her breathe better. By the time Melendez came out of the bathroom, Lim had already turned out the lights. He stripped down to his underwear and crawled in next to her, making sure he was a safe distance from her side. Other than the humming of the oxygen tank, the silence in the room was killing him, so he finally asked, “Did you take your steroid and use the inhaler?”

“Yes,” she answered.

More moments of silence, “And the oxygen is on the right setting?”

“Neil, I swear to God, if you don’t shut up, I’m going to kick you out of this bed, throw your ass down the stairs, and make you sleep on the couch!” she shouted quietly before coughing a little.

“Right, sorry,” he apologized. He rolled over to his left side, not really knowing what to do with his hands. He finally laid his right hand on Lim’s hip, sincerely hoping she didn’t roll over and smack him across the face, so when she grabbed his hand and squeezed it tightly, it surprised him. Not that he minded though.
Melendez woke up and rolled over the next morning to find Lim still fast asleep, but he figured this was the most restful sleep she had had in nearly two months, so he decided to just let her be. He showered (hoping no one at work would ask him about smelling like green apple shampoo), brushed his teeth, and dressed in his scrubs from the night before, figuring he could change into dress clothes or obtain fresh scrubs from his locker when he arrived at St. Bonaventure. He quietly left the room as not to disturb Lim and was just about to leave for work when he realized he still had the key to her house. He laid it on the coffee table in the living room and turned to leave again when he heard Lim come down the stairs, “You’re still here?” she asked surprisingly.

“Yes, but I was just getting ready to leave. I’ll grab a coffee and a muffin at the hospital cafeteria,” said Melendez.

Lim nodded, “Hey Neil, do you think it’s safe for me to drive?”

Melendez sighed, “Well, depends on how far.”

“Just to the supermarket,” she responded, “I wanted to restock the fridge and the cabinets.”

“I think you’ll be fine as long as you take your time and drive your car and not your motorcycle,” he informed.

“I can’t drive my motorcycle anyways,” said Lim.

“Why not?” asked Melendez.

“Because I got my motorcycle license suspended for a year for speeding,” informed Lim unintentionally.


“The same day I spent nine hours in jail,” Lim chuckled and then stopped herself when she realized what she had said to Melendez.

“Wait a minute? You spent nine hours in jail?” Melendez asked in confusion.

Lim froze briefly before she said, “Not important in this conversation. Take things slow, don’t drive my motorcycle, got it.”

Melendez was just about to ask more questions about his dear friend spending time in the slammer, but decided to stop himself, “I have to get to work.”

Melendez arrived at St. Bonaventure and changed in the locker room before he found Shaun and Morgan, who were to assist him with a bowel obstruction surgery. Once their patient was in the OR and anesthetized, Melendez began the surgery. It didn’t take long before Shaun started asking some random questions, “Dr. Melendez, where were you last night?”

Melendez scowled a little under his mask, “I was at home just like you were, Dr. Murphy,” Melendez answered. And he had technically been at home, just not his home.

“You came from the south today and you usually come from the north end of the street,” stated
“Well, there was traffic, so I had to make a detour,” Melendez lied.

“No there wasn’t because I also come from the north end of town. The bus did not have to make a detour,” explained Shaun.

“Shaun,” scolded Morgan snippily.

Melendez noticed that Morgan was doing an exceptional job with the surgery, but he also noticed she wasn’t her usual persnickety and borderline rude self, “You’re doing a wonderful job, Dr. Reznick,” commented Melendez.

Morgan brought her attention to Melendez, “Oh, well, I recently performed a bowel obstruction surgery.”

“Oh really, when?” asked Melendez.

Morgan knew exactly when, but she didn’t like remembering that day, so she lied, “I don’t remember exactly.”

“I do. It was the day of the quarantine. Dr. Lim was guiding us from isolation,” said Shaun.

“Thank you, Shaun,” said Morgan sarcastically. Sometimes Shaun’s autism really got on her nerves, even though she was learning that he couldn’t help it.

“You’re welcome,” said Shaun.

Once Morgan used her finger to plug the hole, she stopped. She hadn’t gotten any further in the surgery because Lim had collapsed from the virus, “Dr. Reznick?” asked Melendez, “Are you alright?”

“Yes,” she confirmed, “I just don’t know what to do after this point. Dr. Lim collapsed before I could get any further,” Morgan didn’t like remembering that moment, seeing her mentor on the floor of isolation, three dead bodies lying on the gurneys behind her, one of them being Tyler’s cold, lifeless body. She couldn’t help but worry that Lim would be the next to join them, even though Morgan usually wasn’t too attached to other people.

Melendez managed to get the young blonde back on track, though he could tell something was bothering her still. Once the surgery was over, Shaun and Morgan helped close and the nurses wheeled the patient to the recovery room. Morgan was just discarding her gear when Melendez came up behind her, “Dr. Reznick?”

Morgan turned to face her superior and stood a little straighter, “Dr. Melendez.”

“Nice job in there. You’ve really improved in bowel obstructions,” commended Melendez.

Morgan nodded stiffly, “Just doing what I was taught,” she said curtly, “How is Dr. Lim doing?”

“She’s doing well, breathing better, can do day to day tasks as long as she doesn’t exert herself,” informed Melendez.

“Well, that’s good,” said Morgan. At least Dr. Lim had lived. At least Lim was still there for Melendez (Morgan might be competitive and overbearing, but she wasn’t unobservant. She could tell immediately via their little bet when she had joined their team and the annual charity gala that
the two attendings were burying mutual attraction for each other). But Tyler had been a different story. His body had succumbed to the SARS mutation. They never got to take their first date, he never got to leave the hospital, his family had spent their first Christmas without him. Morgan had secretly attended the burial, but nobody knew she had been there. She felt flirting wasn’t enough to actually approach close friends and families at the funeral. But she had had to say goodbye, “Well, I really should be making my rounds with Dr. Darlington, so I have to get going.”

Lim arrived at the grocery store and she wasn’t looking forward to shopping. She hated any kind of shopping and wasn’t one of the girls who spent all her free time at the mall in high school. She had been more likely to be seen on an athletic field. She went to grab a shopping cart, but she suddenly couldn’t help but think about the amount of germs on the handle. Funny, she had never really thought about it before now. She grabbed a wet one from her bag and thoroughly cleaned the handle before going inside. She needed to go through pretty much every aisle and once she arrived at the check-out, she couldn’t help but flinch at the person coughing behind her. She told herself that it was probably just the common cold; it was January after all. But what if it wasn’t? She couldn’t helped but discretely observe the person’s neck. No rash, no flushed skin, just the cough.

“I can help the next customer,” the cashier interrupted Lim’s daydream.

“Right, of course,” Lim got out her wallet to pay. She cringed again when the patron behind her coughed some more.

“Having a party,” joked the cashier as she observed the amount of groceries on the conveyor belt.

Lim shook her head, “No I…I’m a trauma surgeon at St. Bonaventure. I don’t always get to spend a lot of time at home,” she didn’t want to admit she had been in the hospital since early December. She didn’t need to scare anyone with the concept of a lethal airborne infection nor did she want a pity party.

“Oh, my brother is a cardiac surgeon at Johns Hopkins. He’s lucky if he gets to spend a full six hours in his house sometimes,” the cashier sympathized. More coughing coming from behind Lim.

Once she had paid, Lim got out of the supermarket and drove home as quickly as she possibly could without breaking the speed limit (she couldn’t get her regular driver’s license suspended on top of her motorcycle license). She couldn’t help but wonder what the hell was wrong with her? Sure, she was well aware of microscopic viruses and bacteria, but she had nearly panicked over a simple trip to the grocery store. She was Audrey Lim, daredevil extraordinaire for crying out loud! She arrived home and put all of the groceries away when she noticed her house key on her coffee table. It must have been the one Melendez had been using when she had been an in-patient. She picked it up and sighed, figuring she could go out and hide it amongst the plants at a later time (Lord knows what kinds of illnesses were in the backyard). Later that night, she was secretly hoping that Melendez would stop by, though she knew he probably wouldn’t. They had decided that if she really was in trouble to call 911 and have the paramedics take her to St. Bonaventure; Andrews or whomever was on call would contact Melendez. She took the key to her room and put it on her nightstand. She flipped on her iPad and began binge watching *Arrow* for the umpteenth time. Once it hit 8 PM, she decided to call it a night; she could probably use the extra sleep. She turned out the lights, though she spent another hour pondering her life. She finally decided she was done being cautious. She always lived her life on the edge and the next time she saw Melendez, she was going to state exactly how she felt about him. She honestly didn’t care whether or not he liked her back; if he didn’t, she could at least move on with her life. But if surviving a fatal disease had taught her anything, it was not to take anyone or anything in her life for granted because it could all
end in a split second. Now if only she could find the words to explain how she felt.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year everyone! Here’s to a great 2019!

It had been a stressful day for Melendez. He had lost a patient on the table which was never a pleasant experience, no matter how many years he had been a surgeon. He was also feeling guilty about not stopping by to see Lim yesterday. Why he felt remorseful, he honestly didn’t know. He was just about to leave when he saw Shaun sitting out front. Shaun did a quick glance at Melendez and said, “Have a good night, Dr. Melendez,” he went back to staring straight ahead of him as he waited for the bus.

“You too, Dr. Murphy,” he acknowledged. He went to go to his car when he stopped himself, “Dr. Murphy, is there a reason why you cared so much about my whereabouts when we were in the OR yesterday?”

Shaun stayed silent for a few moments, “I don’t care,” he admitted stoically, “But Dr. Lim is very patient with me and I miss working with her and I think you can help her get better,” he said in his monotone voice.

Melendez furrowed his brow and sat down next to the young resident, “Um, what makes you say that?”

More silence, “Because when I was treating her in isolation, she was whispering your name.”

“Oh,” Melendez was surprised by this admission.

“She was also praying to God about not letting her die,” Shaun stated. This admission also surprised Melendez given the fact that Lim wasn’t very religious, but he accounted it to the ‘no atheist in a foxhole’ mentality, “Her vitals would improve whenever you were around and even before she got the virus, her pupils would dilate, which indicates attraction.”

“Dr. Murphy…”

“She also insults you, stares at you across the room, and sometimes stands close to you, all signs of flirting,” explained Shaun, “She laughs at your jokes even though they’re usually not funny,” Melendez decided to ignore Shaun’s insult because he was probably oblivious to it, “The scientific facts show that she’ll recover better if you’re around her more,” Melendez raised his eyebrows, having no clue that Shaun was that observant, “Lea once told me that if you like someone, then you should tell that person how you feel before he or she gets away.”

Melendez wasn’t quite sure if Shaun was actually giving advice or just trying to understand and make connections to the situation, but Melendez didn’t care. He immediately got up and headed towards his car, not bothering to say goodbye to Shaun, though that action was also something Shaun did on a regular basis, so thankfully Shaun didn’t seem offended. He drove straight to Lim’s house and knocked on the door, hoping she wasn’t napping. She answered the door quickly, like she had been waiting for him, “I was wondering if you would come by today,” she said softly.
Lim let Melendez into the house and Melendez remembered that she had another pulmonary rehab session today. “So how did your session go?” he asked.

“It went well,” she said, “Still at 70%, but I could walk a mile on the treadmill before I got winded.”

“Well, that’s good,” Melendez said, “Listen, Audrey…”

“No, let me speak first. It’s important,” she pleaded. Melendez nodded and Lim pulled him over to the couch. They sat down and she took a deep breath, “Listen, Neil, I’ve been meaning to talk to you about something. You remember the night before I got sick?”

Of course he remembered that night, but he was still going to ask for confirmation, “As in the night we had sex?” he asked a little too cheerily.

Lim glared at him but nodded, “Yes. You know how I said it was pretty great? I lied,” she said.

Oh no. She had regretted the sex, “What do you mean you lied?” asked Melendez.

“I said it was pretty great. What I didn’t say was that it was amazing. It was freaking fantastic. It was the best sex I’ve ever had in my life, and I was a little…loose in college, so that’s saying something.” She began to pace. Talking about romantic feelings had never been her strong suit.

“Audrey, slow down,” said Melendez, though it wasn’t of any use, “Why was it the best sex you ever had?”

Lim looked at Melendez incredulously, “Because it was with you, you asshat! I wanted that to happen for a really, really long time, but I was afraid it would ruin our friendship. That’s why I made up all of those rationalizations the next morning,” she poured out, “I brushed it off like it was no big deal. But once I was stuck in quarantine, I couldn’t help but think about our night beforehand. And once I saw that rash on my arm, the entire time I was in isolation, as it got harder and harder to breathe, I was afraid I’d never see you again, never get to tell you how I really feel. I had to be all alone in order to protect everyone else in that emergency room, but all I wanted was for someone close to me to be able to hold me and tell me everything was going to be alright, because I had never been more terrified in my life,” Lim ranted and Melendez swore she had a few tears in her eyes. She grabbed his hands and stood him up, “Neil, I don’t want to be friends anymore. I want to do that thing where you take me out to dinner or the movies and pay. Or I can pay; I really don’t give a hoot about gender roles. It doesn’t even have to be dinner and a movie; it can be a sports game or something crazy like zip lining. I want to do that thing where you walk me to my front door and kiss me good night. And once my lungs are up to par, we can turn that good night kiss into hot, passionate, wonderfully awesome, freaking fantastic sex like we had the night before the quarantine where it all might have ended…”

“Audrey, I’m not an expert on romance, but I think what you’re describing is called dating,” said Melendez.

“Yes, that. Dating,” Lim pointed at him happily for finding the right word, “So what do you say?”

Was this Lim’s unique way of asking him out? It was too good to be true that she felt the same way about him as he did about her, “Are…are you asking me out?”

Was she? She supposed she was, “I’m asking,” she took his hands, “Neil, will you please be my boyfriend?”

Neil smiled and said, “Audrey, I’ll admit when we were residents, I couldn’t stand you. You
constantly got first dibs on surgeries, always performed them better than me; but you became one of the best trauma surgeons in the country and easily one of the best physicians to ever work at St. Bonaventure. I honestly thought I was going to lose the chief of surgery position to you, not Andrews,” he chuckled and she laughed as well, “The moment I looked at that monitor and realized you had been infected, none of that mattered. I desperately wanted to get near you, to comfort you, to tell you everything was going to be alright even if it turned out the opposite. Dr. Murphy, of all people, really got me thinking about our future today. Audrey,” she looked up into his chocolate orbs, “I would love to be your boyfriend.”

“Good,” Lim answered calmly. Almost too calm, “Then I guess it’s safe to do something else I’ve wanted to do for a while.”

“Which is?” asked Melendez, raising an eyebrow.

“This,” she pulled him closer to her and smashed her lips against his. After a brief moment, they both pulled back.

The pair pulled apart and Melendez stuck his hands into his pockets, “So I guess this means we’re going steady now?”

“Yeah, I guess we are. Why, what’s wrong?” asked Lim.

“Nothing. It just feels a little anticlimactic,” admitted Melendez.

“Well, I would say to make it Facebook official, but I think we should keep it down low for the time being,” said Lim.

Melendez nodded in agreement, “Of course.”

“Plus, I’ll be going back to work soon so… there’s that,” said Lim.

“Oh no, Audrey,” protested Melendez.

“Neil, I’ve discussed it with Andrews. He agreed to let me work six hour shifts instead of twelve hour ones and to always have a second attending with me in case any surgery gets too complex or I get too fatigued,” Lim laid a hand on Melendez’s chest, “I can’t not work forever just because I nearly died. I have to start somewhere and slowly build up my endurance.”

Melendez sighed, his rational side in complete agreement with Lim, “Fine.”

They both glanced at the clock on the microwave and realized it was getting late, so Lim hesitantly asked, “Um, did you want to go home or did you want to stay here tonight?”

“Well, I guess now that we’re boyfriend and girlfriend, I can stay the night,” he confessed.

“Okay, well, I’m going to start getting ready for bed. I guess you can follow soon,” she turned towards the stairs before turning back, “Oh, speaking of stamina, it might take some time before my lungs can take the physicality of… you know?”

“Right,” Melendez answered understandingly. Of course, he was disappointed because he wanted to go upstairs and make sweet passionate love with her right now, but he also knew she couldn’t help it. Lim went upstairs and Melendez reheated some of the leftover pizza before following behind her. He undressed and crawled into bed next to her, the humming of the oxygen tank becoming more of a comforting sound to him. He kissed her temple and said, “Good night, Audrey.”
She didn’t say anything, so Melendez assumed she had already fallen asleep when he heard her say, “Good night, Neil.”
Chapter 12

Lim went back to work part-time a couple weeks later and so far, everything was going smoothly for her. Lim and Melendez had also slowly been making the transition from friends to boyfriend and girlfriend, though they had both been keeping things quiet at work. They still called each other by their last names, they didn’t make out in supply closets or do it on abandoned gurneys, and they kept everything pretty low key. They had gone on their first official date the day after Valentine’s Day because Lim hated Valentine’s Day, claiming it was nothing but a Hallmark greeting card holiday (funny, because Lim was always watching the schmaltzy Hallmark movies every Christmas season, though she would deny it to anyone who confronted her about it). Overall, everything was going pretty well.

The only thing that Melendez (and many other doctors at St. Bonaventure) noticed that was off was that Lim was avoiding the ER like the plague. Whenever Andrews would ask for someone to volunteer for one of the surgeons to be on call and cover the ER, Lim was almost always the first person to volunteer. Now, not so much. One morning, about two weeks after Lim had returned to work, she was getting ready to start her day when Andrews came up to her and said, “Dr. Lim, I need you to cover the ER this morning.”

Lim froze a little at the mention of the ER, “I thought Dr. Cooperberg was covering the ER today?”

“He called in sick, so I need another trauma surgeon to take his place. Dr. Darlington will be down as soon as he’s out of surgery,” explained Andrews, “Dr. Reznick and Dr. Browne will be your residents today.”

Lim knew that there was no getting out of this, so she slowly made her way to the ER. When she approached the area, she swallowed thickly but entered anyways, where Claire and Morgan were waiting for her, “Where’s Dr. Cooperberg?” asked Claire.

“He’s out sick. I’m covering until Darlington is out of surgery,” said Lim.

The two residents nodded, “Well, room one has a fall down the stairs, room two has a patient coughing and struggling to breathe, room three has a cut from a kitchen knife who needs stitches,” informed Morgan.

There was no way Lim was going anywhere near the coughing patient. She had gone in head on the last time and look what happened, “Dr. Reznick, take room one, Dr. Browne, take room two, I’ll take the patient with the cut,” directed Lim.

The women went to the various areas and Lim got the supplies to stitch the wound. In the next room over, she could hear Claire asking the patient about her condition, though she tried to focus on the task at hand. Thankfully, she zoned enough on the wound and did a perfect stitch as always. She bandaged the wound and gave the patient his discharge instructions before checking in on Morgan, who had treated her patient for bruised ribs, so Lim signed his discharge papers as well. There was only one patient still currently being treated. Morgan went to assist Claire, both of them noticing that their supervisor was hesitating to come into the area. Lim finally appeared and asked, “What have you done so far?”

“I’ve administered supplemental oxygen, it hasn’t improved her O2 stats,” informed Claire.

“Any prior lung disease?” asked Lim.
“I have cystic fibrosis,” the patient informed.

“Have you been out of the country in the last two months?” asked Lim, just to be on the safe side, “Asia, maybe?”

The patient shook her head, “No, I’ve never been outside of the United States.”

Dr. Lim listened to her breath sounds and said, “She has decreased breath sounds with the right lung. We could be looking at a pneumothorax. Get her up to radiation for a chest x-ray and a CT scan to see if her right lung is collapsed,” ordered Lim to a few of the nurses.

“Right away, Dr. Lim,” she nodded.

Lim left the room, the patient coughing the entire time she was being rolled away by the nurses. Suddenly, Dr. Lim pictured all of them: the two passengers from the airplane and Tyler, coughing, wheezing, and struggling to breathe the same way this patient was. Lim could feel her heart pounding in her chest, her chest was aching, her palms were sweating, her stomach was in knots, her throat felt tight, and, though very few individuals in the emergency room were coughing, the few that were seemed to be echoing throughout the room. Lim’s breathing got heavier and faster and she was becoming dizzy, “Dr. Lim,” she heard Morgan calling her. Lim didn’t know why she couldn’t regain control of herself. She just had this sense of dread she couldn’t shake off.

Both Claire and Morgan noticed that Lim looked pale and weak in the knees before she fell to the ground, struggling to catch her breath, “Dr. Lim!” Claire ran over to her.

Morgan followed her fellow resident and said, “She told me her inhaler was in her lab coat pocket.”

Claire nodded and helped her superior to use it. Of course at this point, a large crowd had gathered around them, so Claire said, “I think we should take her to a room.”

Morgan agreed and they both helped Lim to stand. Claire put some supplemental oxygen on her just to be on the safe side. Morgan went to treat other patients while Claire stayed with Lim until she calmed down some. When Lim finally became more aware of her surroundings, she glanced around the room and asked, “Where? Where am I?”

“As it turned out, one of the nurses had informed Andrews of the situation in the ER, so he had come into the room and cleared his throat to inform the two surgeons of his presence, “Dr. Browne, may I speak to Dr. Lim alone?”

“Of course, sir,” Claire promptly left.

Andrews had a look of displeasure on his face, so Lim was quick to defend herself, “I promise, sir, it won’t happen again.”

“Dr. Lim, if you weren’t ready to return to work, then you should not have done so,” scolded Andrews, “But now is not the time or place to discuss what happened. I’m ordering you out for the rest of the day. I’m placing Dr. Cleland on call until Dr. Darlington is out of surgery. We’ll discuss it tomorrow morning.”

Lim sighed, but complied, so she went home and spent the remainder of the day resting, as the
morning had taken a lot out of her and had made her feel extremely weak. Later that evening, she heard someone knocking, so she answered the door and smiled when she saw who it was, “Neil,” she sighed in relief and kissed his cheek.

“Hi,” he kissed her cheek as well.

She pulled back and noticed the look of concern on his face, “Neil, what’s wrong?”

He came into the house, “Dr. Browne and I were talking today.”

Lim stiffened, having the feeling she knew about what, but she pretended she didn’t understand, “About what?”

“About you,” said Melendez.

“So much for patient confidentiality,” Lim quipped under her breath.

“Well, you were my patient when you were hospitalized, so yeah, she came to me,” said Melendez, “She said you had a panic attack….”

“I didn’t have a panic attack, Neil! I was assigned to the ER unexpectedly and considering what happened the last time I covered the ER, yeah, I was a little nervous!” shouted Lim.

“Audrey, you had a panic attack. It caused a scene in the ER today, you know how many rumors I had to stop today?” asked Melendez, “And dammit Aud, your job could be on the line because of this!”

“Well, I tried to prevent it, but no, Andrews put me in that stupid emergency room anyway! You know how terrifying that was for me?”

Melendez took a deep breath to calm himself. He walked over to her and laid his hands on her shoulders, “This isn’t like you, Audrey. Please, tell me what’s going on?”

Lim sighed and wrapped her arms around him, “Oh Neil, I don’t know what happened. One minute I was fine, the next minute, I felt like I was reliving that whole day: the two sick passengers from the airplane, Tyler, seeing that rash on my arm, the burning from the fever, the moments before I collapsed, waking up surrounded by doctors and nurses, not being able to breathe, everything. My heart was pounding, I felt like I was ready to pass out, everything was all a blur, I felt like I was going crazy.”

Melendez noticed she had a few tears falling down her cheeks, so he wiped them away, “It’s okay, Audrey,” he ran his hand up and down her back, “I promise you, you’re not crazy.”

Lim pulled out of his embrace and squeezed his arms, “I know we weren’t planning on spending the night together, but can you please stay with me?”

“Of course,” he stroked her cheek, “Just let me go shower and maybe we can go grab some burgers or something.”

“Mm. I’d like that,” she smiled.

“Good,” he kissed her, “Stay there, I’ll be right back.”

“It’s my house,” she reminded him.

“Right, of course,” Melendez called from the top of the stairs.
Lim chuckled to herself. No matter how bad things got, she could always count on Melendez to be there for her.
Chapter 13

Lim was the first one to wake up the next morning, mainly because she hadn’t slept a wink that night. She was too worried about her discussion with Andrews, but she also hadn’t been sleeping well for the past few weeks since she had been home from the hospital. She quietly turned off the oxygen concentrator and removed the nasal cannula before going to shower. She turned on the water and the warmth always seemed to be a comfort to her right now. She heard Melendez come into the bathroom to brush his teeth and she couldn’t help but flinch a little when she heard him cough. Lim turned off the water and asked, “Neil, is it okay if I come out?”

Neil scowled into the mirror, “Of course, we have seen each other in that manner once before,” he reminded. Sure, they hadn’t had sex since that initial night, Lim still wasn’t feeling up to it, but still, they were boyfriend and girlfriend now. They could trust each other.

“I know, I’ve just lost a lot of weight while I was in the hospital, that’s all,” she wrapped herself in a towel. She wasn’t bare down to her bones, but she was a lot less muscular than she had been a short time ago. Funny, she had never given a rat’s ass about looks, hair, make-up, or anything else like that before now.

Melendez kissed her temple, “Audrey, you’re beautiful. Even when you wear comic book t-shirts and big glasses,” he teased.

He went to get dressed before turning back, “Um, I know we can’t go in the same car to work, but we should also space out when we arrive.”

“Right. I have a meeting with Andrews anyways, though, it probably doesn’t matter,” said Lim.

“Ooh. Good luck,” Melendez left the room. Several moments later, Lim heard him pulling out of the driveway. She quickly dressed in dress pants and a blouse, figuring on the off chance that Andrews did indeed clear her to work, she could change into the scrubs in her locker. She drove over to St. Bonaventure and slowly made her way to Andrews’s office. She knocked on the door and he looked up and motioned her into the room, “You wanted to see me,” she said.

“Yes, I did. Have a seat, Dr. Lim,” she hesitantly sat down in the chair across from his desk and he began, “Please know, I’m not going to suspend you. I realize the incident yesterday was beyond your control,” Lim was sure she visibly relaxed. She hadn’t expected that response. Honestly, she was expecting to be handed the pink slip straight away. “Yesterday, it was the emergency room. What if the next time is the operating room? If what happened yesterday happens there, then so much could be on the line: the hospital’s reputation, your medical license, and most importantly, people’s lives,” Lim sighed, biting her tongue as not to say something she’d later regret, “Dr. Lim,” Andrews softened his voice, “You are one of the best surgeons I’ve ever met in my entire career and easily one of the best doctors here at St. Bonaventure. You have the focus it took me years to get, you even had it when you were a resident, but I need all of my surgeons here at this hospital to be on their game and be functioning at 110%. Therefore, I am recommending you take some more time off from work.”

“And by recommending, you really mean…?”

“Mandating, that is correct,” affirmed Andrews, “When you feel ready to work again, in all
departments, we’ll discuss it. But for now, you are dismissed.”

Lim took a deep breath and grabbed her jacket and bag. “Sir, do I have to clean out my locker?”

“If there’s anything you’ll need in it during you’re time off, then yes, but I’m not firing you if that is what you’re asking,” said Andrews, “Now, I think someone is looking to speak with you,” he pointed to where Melendez was waiting outside his office.

“Of course. Have a good day, sir,” said Lim before going to join Melendez.

When she approached him, he apprehensively asked, “So do you still have a job?”

“Yes, thankfully, I’m just not allowed to do it. Andrews is forcing me to take more time off even though I told him I’m fine,” a nurse at the nurses’ station coughed and Lim flinched subconsciously. Melendez noticed but he didn’t say anything, “He’s afraid I’m going to have another panic attack even though I told him I’m fine.”

“Lim, I don’t know if you’re aware of this fact, but you’ve been wincing every time someone coughs,” Melendez stated.

“No, I haven’t,” she defended. Another cough and another flinch, “So you’re saying you agree with Andrews?” she questioned, doing her best not to raise her voice at him.

Melendez took her hand and pulled her into an empty conference room. He closed the door and then turned to face her, “I’m just saying, maybe you’re trying to jump too fast into things. It might not be a bad idea to take more time for yourself to heal.”

“And do what? You know how bored I am sitting at home all day? There are only so many books I can read and movies I can watch. I can’t even go for a good ride because my stupid motorcycle license got suspended.”

“And you’ll get there, Audrey, but you know damn well that if you were in Andrews’s position, you’d do the exact same thing. You wouldn’t hesitate to make Dr. Murphy or Dr. Reznick or any other resident take time to themselves if they weren’t performing up to par,” Melendez reasoned.

“But…” Lim stuttered just as Park walked into the conference room.

“Oh, I’m sorry, this is the right conference room for the staff meeting correct?” he asked.

Melendez remembered the meeting Andrews had called that day, so he nodded, “Yes, it is, Dr. Park.”

Lim put on her jacket and pulled her keys out of her bag, “Well, since I’m not working right now, I’ll leave everyone alone,” she remarked bitterly, “Have a good day, Melendez, Dr. Park,” she left the room.

Park and Melendez watched Lim leave the room. Park turned to Melendez, “What was that all about?”

Morgan, Claire, and Shaun all arrived, so Melendez just shook his head and answered, “Nothing.”

Somehow, Lim found herself at the bar, so she ordered a beer to take off the edge. She wasn’t mad at Melendez per se. She was used to him challenging her and she had to admit that it was one of the
things she found attractive about him. And she understood Andrews’s logic for forcing her to take more time to recover. Melendez was right; she would’ve done the same thing had she been in his position. She was more pissed at herself for even having a panic attack at work in the first place. God, what was the rest of the hospital going to think about her? She was always the calm, cool, and collected one, the one that rode a motorcycle and the one that willingly volunteered to cover the ER right before Christmas for fun. Now, she was the one being taken care of and it was awkward. She paid and tipped the bartender before stopping at Walgreens for a few necessities and heading home. By early evening, she saw Melendez pull up out front, Chinese take-out in hand, so she smiled and went to open the door, “I figured you could use some food. I got your favorite, kung pao chicken and steamed dumplings.”

She laughed, took the food, and kissed him, “Let me guess? Shrimp fried rice and egg rolls for yourself?” he nodded in confirmation.

Lim got some plates out and set the dining room table, “I’m sorry about what I said earlier. I’m not siding with Andrews; I just don’t want to see anything happen to you,” Melendez apologized.

“No, you were right. I would’ve done the same thing if I were him,” she admitted.

They continued to eat and converse when Melendez swallowed some of his egg roll wrong, so he started coughing forcefully. And then he noticed it in Audrey again: the flinching, the sweating, the fast-paced breathing, “Audrey,” she didn’t respond to her name, “AUDREY!” he said louder this time.

Lim focused her attention back on him, “I’m sorry, I…just got lost in my own thoughts,” she said quickly and went back to eating.

“What’s going on, Aud? This isn’t like you,” said Melendez in concern.

“I’m exactly the same as I’ve always been, Neil,” she furrowed her brow.

“Audrey, the woman I know is one who would nearly dance around the room whenever Glassman put her on ER rotation when we were residents and now I can barely mention it without you wincing, you cringe every time someone coughs, you haven’t been sleeping well or you wake up screaming in the middle of the night and that’s just when I’m here. I don’t know about when you’re alone,” listed Melendez.

Lim scowled at him, “What are you trying to say, Neil?”

Melendez took a deep breath and waited a few moments to compose his thoughts, “Audrey, do you think the virus left some…side effects that aren’t just physical?”

Lim put down her fork and shouted, “So, what, you think I’m crazy?”

“No, not at all,” Melendez assured her, “But you went through a lot, Audrey. You beat a deadly respiratory virus that killed three people at St. Bonaventure and who knows how many other people on that plane or the east coast and your life changed drastically in the blink of an eye. That can leave a lasting impression on anyone.”

“I see. And it’s your training in cardiothoracic surgery that gives you the knowledge to question my mental status,” she claimed sarcastically.

“It doesn’t, but we did have to do a rotation in every department when we were interns, including psychiatry,” reminded Melendez.
“I see,” said Lim, going back to her food.

“Aud, I’m just saying it might not be a bad idea to see someone,” said Melendez.

“I’m fine, Neil. It’s just taking me awhile to accept what happened. You know as well as I do that everyone handles recovery from things differently,” she gathered the plates, rinsed them off, and stuck them in the dishwasher, “Now can we just drop it please?”

Melendez didn’t really want to do so, but he also didn’t want to start a fight tonight, so he agreed, “Alright.”

“Good,” Lim smiled. She sashayed over to him and said, “You know? At my last rehab session, my lung capacity was up to 75%.”

Melendez raised an eyebrow, “Really?”

“Mmhm,” she ran her hands over his chest, “You know that thing I said shouldn’t happen again?” she began to suck at the flesh on his neck.

“Audrey…” warned Melendez, “You know you still get winded easily.”

“So?” she questioned, “I think if we go slow and take our time, I’ll be fine,” she smirked.

Melendez did have to admit, seeing her in nothing but a towel that morning had made him want to take her right then and there, so he swiftly scooped her into his arms, “Neil!” she chuckled. He carried her up to her room and laid her on the bed. They began to kiss before she stopped him, “FYI, it might not be as great as the last time because I might have to alternate between kissing and breathing.”

“As long as you get the job done,” said Melendez and Lim chuckled to which Melendez immediately swallowed it with a kiss.
The night went pretty smoothly for Melendez and Lim. Sure, it wasn’t as passionately wonderful as Lim had hyperbolized when she had asked Melendez to go steady with her, but it had still been pretty great. They both figured it would take practice like anything else. It had been five minutes already, so Melendez finally broke the silence, “Hey, Audrey?”

“Yes?” she asked.

“Is everything alright?” he questioned hesitantly.

“Yes, it’s fine,” she responded, “Just thinking about what you said earlier.”

Melendez scowled at the ceiling, “About what?”

Lim sighed and moved closer to him. He wrapped his arm around her and she said, “About the after effects. I don’t know what happened to me. I used to thrive on being in the emergency room. It was my comfort zone. But ever since that day…” she trailed off, “I don’t know. I feel so vulnerable. I just can’t help but see those two passengers and Tyler all lying there in body bags, the look on Morgan’s face when she realized Tyler was gone, the look on your face when you saw me lying there, worrying if the next time you saw me it would be my dead body, wondering if there is life after death and what it would feel like if I did die,” she rambled, “I feel the need to scrub every surface for germs, I’m afraid that every time someone coughs, they have that virus even though my rational side knows it’s most likely something else and worst of all, I don’t know I feel this way because I’m…well, me.”

“Audrey,” Melendez kissed her forehead, “Why didn’t you tell me any of this?”

Lim sighed, “I mean, we just started seeing each other a few weeks ago, and quite frankly I’m embarrassed to admit it. I mean I see suffering all the time as a trauma surgeon and I’ve lost patients before. You can’t do the kind of work we do and expect a positive outcome for every case,” Melendez nodded his understanding, “But seriously Neil, what will the rest of the hospital think if a surgeon who was a serious contender for chief of surgery is suddenly seeing a shrink? I mean I was 3-2 according to Vegas if Andrews hadn’t kept it for himself,” she said with contempt and Melendez chuckled, knowing all too well how she felt. Another thought hit her, “What will Andrews think?”

Melendez took a deep breath and stroked her cheek, “This is my professional opinion, but I think that just like you need rehab to help you heal your lungs, maybe you need someone to help you heal your thoughts. I promise you, Audrey, it doesn’t make you weak. It makes you stronger because you’re facing your fears.” Audrey sighed, still not entirely on board with the idea, “Well, as long you’re by my side, I can do anything. I feel a lot safer when you’re around,” she said. They both finally fell asleep, but when they woke up the next morning, Lim asked “So, do you have to work today?” she sat up in bed.

“It’s Saturday, Lim,” said Melendez.

“I know, but still,” she mocked.

“No, I’m actually going to visit Gabi today,” he responded.

“Oh, well that sounds fun,” answered Lim.
“Hey Audrey, do you have any plans for today?” asked Melendez.

“Just laundry and you know how much I love doing that,” she said sarcastically.

“Did you want to come with me today? I think Gabi would love to see you,” said Melendez.

“I’d like that,” she got out of bed and headed towards the bathroom before she stopped herself, “Are we going to tell her that you and I are, you know, seeing each other?”

Melendez sighed, “I think it might be best to wait a bit. We have been dating less than a month.”

“Okay,” she slowly pulled off her pajama top before tossing it aside and going into the bathroom. Melendez stood still for a few moments before he quickly followed her. He hadn’t really noticed before now, but damn, was his girl sexy.

Melendez drove over to the group home and Melendez could easily cut the tension between him and Lim with a knife. He glanced over at her and asked, “Are you alright, Audrey?”

“Yeah, just nervous. It’s been a while since I’ve seen your sister,” she answered, “What if she doesn’t like me for some reason?”

“Audrey, she adores you. She asks about you all the time,” said Melendez, “You’re the only person who’s come with me to visit her besides relatives.” Jessica had never gone to see Gabi with him; another sign Melendez should’ve picked up on about how it wasn’t going to work out between them.

Lim took a deep breath, “Alright then,” the couple entered the room and they both went over to greet Gabi.

Gabi glanced up and smiled at the pair, “Neil!” she hugged him happily.

“You remember Ms. Audrey?” Melendez asked Gabi.

Gabi nodded, “Hi, Ms. Audrey,” Gabi hugged her.

“Hi Gabi,” Lim hugged her and glanced at the drawing, “What are you working on there?”

“A picture of a farm,” Gabi responded. Melendez couldn’t help but smile. His sister had always loved animals.

“I think you might be missing some pigs and horses,” said Lim as she handed Gabi a few pink and brown crayons. Lim and Melendez sat down on both sides of Gabi and took some paper, spending most of the day coloring, doing puzzles, and playing games with her. Melendez knew Lim was trying hard to control herself whenever someone would start coughing, but he could still see the flinching, the sweating, and the hyperventilated breathing; thankfully, Gabi didn’t notice at all.

Once the staff started gathering everyone for dinner, Lim and Melendez bid Gabi their farewells, “Have a good night, Niña. Te amo,” Melendez kissed Gabi’s forehead.


“It was nice seeing you again, Gabi,” she smiled. Melendez and Lim left and Melendez wanted to bring up her symptoms again, but he decided against it. She had at least acknowledged that
something was off with her; the rest was up to Lim to actually seek treatment. He planned on returning home, but then he remembered what she had admitted to him about feeling safer when he was around, so he decided to stay with her. Almost as if she was reading his mind, she asked him, “Did you want to grab dinner somewhere?”

Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle at how in sync they were; they had been even when they were residents, “What were you thinking?”

“Well, I haven’t had tacos since the day I spent time in…” Lim trailed off.

“Jail,” Melendez finished for her. She nodded embarrassedly, “You’ll have to tell me all about that story some other time,” he pulled up to the taco truck that they both frequented and went to order, “Three brisket tacos, one chicken taco, two beef tacos, and two Cokes,” Melendez placed the order. They were both handed their food and sodas and went to one of the tables, “So, about you spending time in jail?”

“Yes, nine hours to be exact,” said Lim, “I was given a ticket for going over 100 miles per hour on my motorcycle, which the officer was way off, I was not going that fast. Well, I was technically on call for a 36 hour shift in the ER when I went to traffic court to fight the ticket.”

“Why?” asked Melendez.

“I was trying to up my hours in the hopes of making myself look better to Andrews and getting the promotion over you,” she admitted, “Well, I left Drs. Murphy and Reznick in charge and told them to call me only if they couldn’t handle anything. Of course they call right as I’m about to argue my case.”

“They didn’t,” chuckled Melendez.

“They did,” she nodded, “Well, since I had to take a two minute phone call, the judge kept pushing me back and pushing me back until I finally stood my ground and told her to review my case. Well, she didn’t even bother to hear me out and just sentenced me with a $1,500 fine and a license suspension for a year. The attorney told me to just appeal the case to another judge, but I didn’t want to appeal to another judge; I lost my temper and told her to do her job. And she did so…by throwing me in the slammer,” Lim finished.

Melendez nearly choked on his food and coughed some, Lim doing her best to stay calm, “Well, what would’ve happened if Dr. Murphy and Dr. Reznick needed you while you were in jail?” Lim didn’t respond right away, “Audrey?”

“Hmm?” she brought herself back to reality, “What?”

“I asked what you would’ve done if you had been needed while you were in jail,” Melendez clarified.

“Oh, I would have had someone else cover for me, but I didn’t feel the need to tell Andrews I was locked up unless absolutely necessary,” she answered. They went back over to Lim’s house and she asked, “Did you want to watch a movie or something?”

“No, I actually wanted to talk to you about our conversation this morning,” said Melendez apprehensively.

Lim scowled and crossed her arms over her chest, “Why?”

“Because you admitted to me something I’ve been concerned about with you,” said Melendez.
“Enlighten me,” said Lim.

Melendez took a few moments to carefully choose his words, “You admitted you feel something isn’t right with you.”

“Yes, but I’m sure it’ll go away with time,” she emphasized.

“But what if it doesn’t, Audrey?” asked Melendez, “Listen, I’m not a psychiatrist, I’ll admit I’m not fully trained to make a formal diagnosis, but the avoidance of the ER, the panic attacks and flashbacks triggered by the sound or sight of people coughing, the hypervigilance by cleaning everything, the insomnia, the nightmares,” listed Melendez.

“What are you trying to say, Neil?” asked Lim, raising an eyebrow.

“I’m talking about PTSD, Audrey,” said Melendez firmly.

Lim’s eyes widened and she shook her head adamantly, “No! No way!”

“Audrey, you went through a life-threatening traumatic event,” Melendez tried to reason with her.

“I got sick. It’s not like I haven’t been sick before,” she argued.

“But you didn’t have the common cold, you had a fatal respiratory infection,” he said, trying hard not to raise his voice, but it wasn’t working.

“Yeah I know, but it’s not like I’m a combat veteran or a survivor of a sexual assault or a horrific car accident,” protested Lim, “Come on, Neil, it’s me. I’m the bad-ass trauma surgeon who speeds on a motorcycle, who gets herself locked in jail, who covers the ER right before Christmas for fun, who goes to Six Flags and rides Goliath in the front seat at night.”

“I know Audrey, but you know as well as I do that nobody is immune to it,” said Melendez.

“Neil, you’re being ridiculous and paranoid!” shouted Lim.

“I’m just saying, Audrey, it wouldn’t hurt to be evaluated by someone,” he yelled worriedly.

“Well, you’re wrong, okay!” she screamed so loud, she was pretty sure the neighbors heard her.

Melendez sighed, as he clearly wasn’t going to win this argument, at least not tonight, “I’m going to go to bed,” she eyed him maliciously and went upstairs.

Melendez wasn’t quite sure whether she wanted him to follow her or not, so he went upstairs and knocked on her closed bedroom door. He received a pillow and blanket in response. He furrowed his brow at them and asked, “Should I just go home?”

“Nope,” Lim responded curtly from the other side.

“But you don’t want me sleeping in the same bed with you?” he checked to make sure.

“Nope,” she answered again.

Melendez sighed and went downstairs, not quite believing he was actually going to follow through with sleeping on the couch, but he didn’t want to jeopardize their relationship and more importantly, their friendship, so he decided it was safest to stay put. He didn’t know about Lim upstairs, but he didn’t get much sleep that night and not just because he was sleeping on a couch. Deep down, he knew that his girlfriend just wasn’t right, and given his workaholic, fix-it nature, he wanted to do anything he could to help her. Now to find a non-confrontational way to convince
Lim that she needed help.
Chapter 15

Melendez woke up stiff and sore the next morning from having slept on a couch all night long. He stirred when he heard noise from the upper floor and Lim came down the stairs a few moments later, “You’re still here?” she asked in surprise.

“Yeah,” Melendez sat up on the sofa, “You told me to stay,” he reminded her.

“I know, but I didn’t think you actually would,” she admitted and went to start a pot of coffee. She came back over to him and sat down next to him, “Neil, about last night, I’m so sorry about what I said to you. I…I don’t know what happened to me. I just had this sudden bout of anger and I took it out on you when I shouldn’t have. I understand if you don’t want to stay with me.”

“Audrey,” Melendez kissed her forehead, “Couples fight, that’s a given. I’m not leaving you over that.”

Lim breathed a sigh of relief, “Good, but you understand if I want to be alone today, right?”

“Of course, I have errands to run anyways,” Melendez agreed.

Lim smiled and asked, “Well, I stocked up on food the other day. Is there anything in particular you want?”

“Just an omelet is fine,” he admitted, “Unless you still don’t know how to make them.”

Lim glared at him and said, “I can make them well enough. Most of the time.”

Once they both finished eating, Melendez gathered his things and laid a hand on Lim’s shoulder, to which he noticed her jump a little, “Call me if you need anything. I’ll be home all day.”

“Don’t worry about me,” she reassured him, “I’ll just be doing laundry. And you don’t need to stay here tonight. Get some rest in your own bed.”

“Allright,” Melendez kissed her and left. Once he was gone, Lim spent most of the day doing laundry (she had a bad habit of letting everything back up because she had about twenty pairs of scrubs). In between loads, she somehow found herself searching the internet and all of her medical books looking for possible causes of her new found symptoms. All of the results came up the same and she wasn’t happy about it. But if it meant being able to go back to the job she loved, get rid of the flashbacks and nightmares, and to be able to function more normally, she was willing to try anything at this point.

She finally built up the courage to find the phone and call her primary care provider for an appointment, and thankfully, Dr. Bradley was able to see her the next day. Melendez had to work, so he wouldn’t know she had gone to see someone, at least not yet. If it was nothing, she didn’t need him worrying about her because he was already worried enough with her lungs. Early Monday morning, Lim arrived at the doctor’s office and signed in, waiting a few minutes before a nurse called her back, “Audrey Lim.”

Lim took a deep breath and followed the nurse back to the triage area, where her vitals were checked before she waited for Dr. Bradley. The physician entered the room and smiled cheerily, “Audrey, it’s been several months since I’ve seen you,” Dr. Bradley commented.

“I know,” Lim admitted, “I’m assuming you’ve been getting updates about when I was
hospitalized?” she asked softly.

“I have,” Dr. Bradley confirmed, “And how have your rehab sessions been going?”

“They’ve been going well enough,” answered Lim, “But my lungs aren’t the reason I’m here.”

“Well, what’s going on, Audrey?” asked Dr. Bradley.

Lim rubbed her hands together, not really wanting to admit what she was about to say next, “I don’t know if it’s anything, but my boyfriend is worried about it, so I’m getting myself checked out for his sake,” Dr. Bradley nodded, indicating for Lim to continue. Lim’s breath shook a little before she said, “Ever since I was released from the hospital after recovering from the virus enough to go home, I’ve been…different.”

“In what ways?” asked Dr. Bradley.

Lim swallowed thickly, “I’ve been having these nightmares that seem really vivid about the day I got sick. I have them almost every night. Sometimes I have these daydreams during the day as well. I keep checking for a rash on my arm that I know isn’t there, it takes all I can not to have a panic attack every time I hear someone coughing, I tried to return to work and just avoid working the ER, but my boss assigned me there at the last minute and I had a full-blown panic attack. Needless to say, he forced me to take more time off. I almost flipped out on him, but thankfully, I stopped myself before it cost me my job, I did start screaming at my boyfriend last night for no reason and made him sleep on the couch. And the thing is, he has his own house, so I don’t know why I did so,” Lim forced herself not to cry, “My boyfriend and I both think we know what it is, but if it is, then it’s so embarrassing to think that me, of all people would get…” Lim lowered her voice to a whisper, “PTSD.”

“Audrey,” Dr. Bradley sympathized, “PTSD and mental illness are nothing to be ashamed of, you know that right?”

“So, you think it’s…?” asked Lim for confirmation.

“Right now, you seem to have a milder case, but without treatment, PTSD can manifest into a crippling condition. Untreated PTSD can lead to job loss because of symptoms appearing at work, alcohol and substance abuse, relationship stress, it can interfere with your day to day functioning, it can even lead to suicidal thoughts,” listed Dr. Bradley.

Lim silently thanked the universe that she wasn’t suicidal, but she was still having trouble believing it, “So what do you recommend?”

“Well, I would recommend seeing a counselor to talk about your symptoms and at least be assessed for PTSD. I think it would help you process what happened,” said Dr. Bradley. She laid a hand on Lim’s knee, “I can assure you, Audrey, I know what a strong woman you are. You will get through this.”

“But Dr. Bradley, what will everyone at work think? What will my boss think? I was in the running for chief of surgery,” she admitted and then another thought hit her, “What will my boyfriend think? He was attracted to the woman who insulted him, who could outsmart him, the woman he would always go out for drinks after work with…now, I’m the woman who flinches every time someone innocently coughs.”

“I understand you’re concerned about the stigma. But without treatment, I think you’ll get a lot worse and I really do think it will help you process what happened. In regards to your relationship,
well, if he doesn’t stick around, then he’s obviously not the man for you,” admitted Dr. Bradley. She handed Lim the referral to a counselor, “Call me if you need any other assistance.”

Later that evening, after Lim knew Melendez would be home from work, she stopped by his house to let him know what was going on with her. She knocked and he answered the door a few moments later, “Hi Audrey.”

“Hi,” she smiled, “Can I talk to you about something?”

“Of course, anything,” Melendez stepped aside and let her into the house.

Lim looked around and noticed the $1 bill from their bet framed on the wall, “You actually framed the $1 bill from our bet and put it on the living room wall?” she chuckled.

“I told you I was going to frame it,” stated Melendez proudly, “And it was there when you were over here the last time.”

“I know, but I was too busy kissing you to look around the room,” she mentioned jokingly before her face fell, “Neil, we need to talk about something.”

Melendez noticed the look on her face and a worried expression overtook his own. They both sat down on the couch and he asked, “Is this about us?”

Lim shook her head, “No. At least, I hope not,” she said with a quiver in her voice, “I went to see Dr. Bradley today.”

Melendez nodded, “Okay, about your lungs?”

“No,” Lim shook her head, “About…the other thing we were talking about.”

“Oh,” Melendez responded, realizing Lim meant the possibility of PTSD.

“I don’t even know if I want to go through with it. Maybe I can just get better on my own…”

“Audrey,” Melendez grabbed her hand, forcing her to look up at him, “If Dr. Bradley thinks it’s PTSD, then you shouldn’t ignore it.”

“But Neil,” Lim interjected, “I can’t have that. I can’t have any of the residents or Andrews or the other attending surgeons constantly looking at me wondering if Dr. Lim is going to have a flashback or a panic attack in the middle of the day…”

“Audrey, they’re not going to think that,” reasoned Melendez.

“You don’t know that, Neil!” Lim shouted through gritted teeth, “You have it easy. You’re not a woman in a male-dominated field. You don’t have to worry about being seen as ‘too emotional’. You don’t have to worry about being seen as someone who ‘can’t let it go’. You don’t have to worry about being seen as someone who is ‘too weak’ to be a surgeon, especially a trauma surgeon who covers the ER,” she vented, “And what about us, Neil? When I asked you to go steady with me, I was the kick-ass girl who rode a motorcycle, ran marathons, drank her weight in beer, and always beat you at pool. Now, I’m a complete and total mess who flips out on you over nothing and can’t even be near someone who’s coughing even in the slightest,” she finally couldn’t hold them back any longer. She finally let the tears spill loose, “I’m afraid you’re going to want to leave me.”
“Audrey,” he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her head, “I don’t care about any of that. I like you for you because your personality will never change. You’ll always be Audrey Lim, even if you decided to sell the Ducati and never ride it again.”

She laughed and wiped away the tears, “Oh if you think that’s a possibility, you’re crazy. As soon as my license suspension is up, I’ll be taking a ride and popping a couple of wheelies on the son of a bitch.”

“I have no doubt,” Melendez agreed, “In regards to the other thing, I think you should at least give it a try. If you hate it, we can find another therapist or you can stop all together. You know Andrews can’t fire you as long as you’re still performing your job well.”

“I know,” she swallowed thickly, “I just didn’t think something like this could happen to me and I feel like I have no support. When you agreed to date me, this is way more than you signed on for.”

Melendez kissed her and said, “Well, I’m not going anywhere. Did you want to stay here tonight?” he asked gently.

“I don’t know. My oxygen is at home and so are my inhaler meds, at least the one I’m supposed to take in the morning and right before bed,” Lim explained.

“Well, I’ll let you go then,” Melendez squeezed her hand.

She went to leave and said, “You know, I could always go home and take it and then come back here. I’m supposed to go a night or two without the oxygen to see how I react anyways. If I have a reaction, I’ll have the emergency inhaler and you can always drive me back.”

Melendez nodded, “Well, then I’ll see you in a little bit.”
Chapter 16

It took another week or so for Lim to build up the courage to finally schedule an appointment with the counselor Dr. Bradley had recommended, mostly because she was still convinced she would get better on her own. But when the flashbacks and nightmares continued, she still startled easily, and she wasn’t up for any sort of romantic endeavors, she knew her symptoms weren’t going to disappear on their own. Melendez had wanted to go to her first appointment with her, but she had adamantly disagreed, “I need to go to this first one alone,” she had told him.

The day of her first session finally arrived and she arrived to the center around mid-morning. It was warm and inviting, much different than what she was used to at St. Bonaventure. Lim patiently waited for her name to be called, and soon, a blonde woman who appeared to be in her early forties appeared, “Audrey Lim.”

Lim swallowed thickly and waved her hand slightly, “That’s me.”

She followed the counselor back and found an office that looked pretty much like any office, only there were two chairs and couch in there as well, “Have a seat, Dr. Lim,” she said. They both sat down and she smiled, “Well, I’m Dr. Jacobson, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Lim,” she acknowledged.

“Please, call me Audrey,” said Lim.

“Alright then, Audrey,” Dr. Jacobson smiled, “So, your primary care provider is Dr. Joanna Bradley, is that correct?”

“Yes, that is correct,” Lim confirmed softly.

“And she believes you might be exhibiting symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

Lim sighed but nodded, “Yes, I sort of find it hard to believe, but I’ve been having certain symptoms that won’t go away.”

Dr. Jacobson nodded, “Well, psychotherapy for PTSD typically has about 8-12 sessions depending on how you respond, and in a few sessions, you will be facing the traumatic event and your symptoms, but today, I’m just going to get a little bit of background information on you. Does that sound okay?”

“Of course,” Lim agreed.

“Well, if you can tell me a little about yourself? Where you’re from, your job, your hobbies, stuff like that,” said Dr. Jacobson.

“Well, I was born in Taipei, Taiwan, my family came to the United States when I was eight, we settled in San Francisco,” Lim began.

“Okay and what about your family?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

“My mother and father are both gone, my brother lives in Dallas,” said Lim.

“Okay, so do you have any support in San Jose?” asked Dr. Jacobson gently.
Lim nodded, “Um. My co-workers, my colleagues, and my boyfriend.”

“Well that’s good,” said Dr. Jacobson, “It’s shown that individuals with a strong support system recover more quickly. So you mentioned co-workers. May I ask where you work and what you do for a living?”

“Well, I’m a trauma surgeon at San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital, I’ve been there since my internship,” said Lim.

“And I’m assuming you work a lot of hours?” ventured Dr. Jacobson.

“Yes, but it’s my choice. I love what I do,” said Lim.

“Well, that’s good to know. But when you’re not working, what do you do?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

“Well, when I’m not working or running errands, I like surfing, hiking, being outdoors, riding my motorcycle, those are the main things. I also enjoy reading mysteries and watching horror, action, or comedy movies,” listed Lim.

“Alright, and you mentioned having a boyfriend,” said Dr. Jacobson.

“Yes, but we’ve only been together for about a month. We’ve been friends for years though. We spend some time together but he’s also a surgeon at St. Bonaventure, so he works long hours as well,” explained Lim.

“I see,” said Dr. Jacobson, “As long as you both get to spend some time together outside of work.”

“We do,” confirmed Lim.

The two doctors talked a little bit longer, though Lim was silently wondering when they were going to get to the issue at hand. About an hour into the 90 minute session, Dr. Jacobson finally asked, “Okay, now to the tough part,” said Dr. Jacobson, “Can you give me a little bit of background about what it is that you went through recently that the flashbacks and nightmares are about?”

Lim swallowed thickly, “It was a mutation of SARS that I contracted during a shift in the ER right before Christmas,” her voice quivered, “It was spreading fast with a dismal outcome. Thankfully, one doctor who wasn’t quarantined directed the two residents who were quarantined in the ER on how to keep me alive,” Dr. Jacobson had the feeling she might know which doctor, but she wasn’t going to bring it up unless Lim did, “It killed people within hours after infection, so I was terrified I was going to die.”

“Well, that’s a valid fear, considering the fact that I’m sure you were watching it kill the other patients,” said Dr. Jacobson.

Lim nodded, “I was the head trauma surgeon on call, so I had to make all of the calls and keep everything running smoothly.”

Dr. Jacobson looked at the time, “Well, we are out of time for today, but during our next session, we can start getting into the details about the trauma.”

Lim nodded and stood. She was a little disappointed they didn’t jump right in because she wanted all of her symptoms gone, but her medical side knew that recovery from anything took time. She stood to leave, but turned to the therapist and asked, “Am I allowed to bring people to my sessions?”
“Depends on you comfort level, but you can have individuals accompany you if you wish,” confirmed Dr. Jacobson.

“Thanks,” said Lim.

Lim wasn’t surprised that Melendez showed up at her house later that evening and she was relieved to see him. When she let him the house, he hesitantly asked, “How did it go?”

“Alright, I guess. Dr. Jacobson seems nice enough. We didn’t really get into too many details today, so…” Lim stopped mid-sentence.

“Right, of course,” nodded Melendez.

“She also said I could bring people,” Lim stated out of the blue.

“Oh you can?” asked Melendez surprised. Lim nodded, “So I guess you want me to…?”

“If you can, but I don’t expect you to take off of work or change your shifts if you can’t,” she said.

“Audrey,” said Melendez, “If it helps you, I’ll do it.”

“Neil, you have your own life outside of me,” said Lim.

“But you are a part of my life now,” Melendez emphasized, “And in a way, I was also a part of this whole ordeal, so it might be an idea to have me there sometimes.”

Lim wrapped her arms around him and Melendez kissed the top of her head, “What would I do without you? And I wondered that even before we started dating.”

“Well, you’d probably still be wearing comic book t-shirts out in public and eating the exact same lunch every day at work,” joked Melendez.

Lim looked up at Melendez in mock anger, “Just for that, I’ll be wearing one the next time we go out on a date. And I’ll wear my glasses to top it all off with the nerdy girlfriend look,” she smirked.

“On one condition,” Melendez walked closer to her, “If you’re up to it tonight, you wear just the glasses and nothing else.”

Shivers went down Lim’s spine, but for once in a good way, “Well, you know right now, it’s whether or not my lungs decide to cooperate, but I don’t see why not?”
Chapter 17

Over the next few weeks, Lim steadily improved. By session four, she was willing to face the trauma head on in her usual manner. Melendez decided he wanted to accompany her to that particular appointment and Lim let him win that battle. Even though she had developed a good rapport with Dr. Jacobson, she wanted someone familiar to be with her. Lim’s appointment was a Saturday and Melendez rarely worked on Saturdays, so they were both grateful that he didn’t have to try to shift his work schedule since no one at St. Bonaventure knew about their relationship. They both patiently waited in the reception area before Dr. Jacobson came out and greeted Lim with a warm smile, “Are you ready, Audrey?” she asked softly.

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” admitted Lim nervously, “Um, Dr. Jacobson, I’d like to introduce you to Dr. Neil Melendez.”

“Nice to meet you,” she smiled and shook his hand. They both followed Dr. Jacobson back and she closed the door, “I’m going to make an assumption that you’re the boyfriend?”

“You would be correct in that assumption,” he confirmed.

“Well, are you ready to do this, Audrey?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

Lim swallowed thickly, but nodded, “Yes,” she affirmed softly.

“Okay. I’ll,” she glanced over at Melendez sitting next to Lim, “We’ll be right here if you start to panic and I’ll bring you back on the right track. But right now, I want you to close your eyes for me,” Lim did as instructed and she felt Melendez grab her hand, “Now I want you to give me as many details about that day as you can. How did the day start out?” Lim opened one eye and chuckled awkwardly, “What?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

“Well, Neil and I had just been competing for a promotion at work and we both were screwed over,” said Lim, “We went out for drinks and we both had a few too many and…” Lim trailed off, “And this was before we were officially together.”

“I see,” said Dr. Jacobson.

“I woke up at Neil’s house, we both admitted what happened shouldn’t happen again, not that that agreement lasted, and then I left his house to go to work,” began Lim.

“Alright, and you were covering the emergency department that day, correct?” asked Dr. Jacobson for confirmation.

“Yes,” confirmed Lim, “I met up with the residents under my command and we had two patients come in by ambulance, plus several patients who had arrived on their own. I can’t reveal too much because of patient confidentiality.”

“Of course,” Dr. Jacobson nodded her understanding, “What happened next?”

“There were two patients exhibiting the same symptoms: coughing, wheezing, a rash on their necks, a general feeling of sickness. One of the residents suggested that the infection was transmitted through the air, but I didn’t want to believe it at first. But once another person came down with the same symptoms, we had to put the ER under quarantine,” Melendez noticed Lim was starting to sweat a little, so he began rubbing soothing circles on her hand.
“So the quarantine went into effect,” repeated Dr. Jacobson, “And then what happened?”

“Um, well two of the patients died almost immediately, but the doctors, nurses, staff members, and I tried to keep the ER running smoothly, but for my one patient…the other one with the SARS mutation, things were looking bleak.”

“Alright and when did you discover you were infected?” asked Dr. Jacobson quietly.

Lim’s throat tightened, her stomach twisted in knots, and her breathing increased. She could feel the sweat forming on her palms and her heart racing. She jumped a little when Melendez’s hand moved to her back, “Deep breath, Audrey,” she heard him whisper.

“One of the residents and I were treating our patient. I was removing my gloves and I noticed the rash on my arm. Other than that I was asymptomatic. I immediately locked myself in the negative pressure room to protect everyone,” Lim’s voice quivered with each and every word.

“I’m sure you were scared,” sympathized Dr. Jacobson.

“Scared, I was fucking terrified! Pardon the language,” apologized Lim for the outburst.

“No that’s okay,” encouraged Dr. Jacobson.

“I stayed locked in isolation and our patient didn’t make it. I was afraid I was going to be next. Despite everything happening to me, I still felt the need to stay calm, do my job, and guide my residents. I continued to help as best as I could, but I could feel my fever going up, it was getting harder and harder to breathe, I felt like I was going to pass out, and the next minute I knew, I was waking up surrounded by doctors and nurses,” described Lim, her heart rate and breathing still increasing.

“Okay, Audrey, open your eyes,” Lim shot her eyes open and instead of being in a quarantined ER, she was back in the counselor’s office with Dr. Jacobson and Melendez, a look of gentle compassion and concern in his eyes. As she brought herself back to reality, the pounding in her chest faded and she could breathe more easily, “You’re safe.”

“But I wasn’t finished describing everything,” protested Lim.

“I know. But right now, your emotional state and your nervous system can only handle so much. But is there anything else you want to add before we end our session for today?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

Lim looked over towards Melendez and he nodded his encouragement, “Well, I want to just say how grateful I am to Neil,” smiled Lim, “If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t have lived.”

Dr. Jacobson smiled to herself. She hadn’t known exactly who he was, but she had had the feeling that the doctor whom Lim had said saved her was also now her boyfriend, “Well, next week we can begin to work through your worries and go over specific aspects of the day, but given how brave you were today, I’m confident you will do just fine.”

“Thank you,” said Lim softly.

“It was nice meeting you,” said Melendez.

“You too,” said Dr. Jacobson.

They left the counseling center and Melendez started the drive back to his house. He glanced over
at Lim, who hadn’t said anything since they had left the appointment, “Audrey, are you alright?”

“Yes,” she answered softly, “It’s just hard to relive my own mortality, that’s all. I mean, I know death is inevitable, but I’m only 36.”

“I know,” Melendez kissed her hand, “But I am so proud of you.”

“Why? It doesn’t feel like I’ve made much progress,” admitted Lim.

“I know you don’t,” Melendez placated, “But a few weeks ago, you wouldn’t have been able to talk about that day without having a full-blown panic attack. Hell, last week, you wouldn’t even talk about it with me in the room. But you did both today. Do you know how much courage that took? You haven’t been having as many nightmares or flashbacks. And it’s all you,” he praised.

Lim chuckled and squeezed his hand, “Well, knowing you’re with me puts my mind at ease,” she told him.

Melendez smiled back and asked, “Is there anything you want to do today?”

Lim wanted nothing more than an ice cold beer, but she really wasn’t supposed to be drinking a lot of alcohol with the PTSD diagnosis, so she asked, “Since I’m not really supposed to be drinking alcohol, want to grab some burgers and shakes?”

Melendez chuckled at her suggestion. It seemed they were always at the local In-N-Out together when they were residents, whether he wanted it or not, “Yes.”
Chapter 18

After another two weeks, Lim had decided she was ready to return to work. She had been out of work on and off since early December and she couldn’t stand not working anymore. She loved St. Bonaventure, she loved her co-workers (or most of them anyways), and she loved everything about her job. She spoke to Andrews and, though he had made it clear that he still had high expectations, she had been forthcoming about everything she had been going through the last few months, so he had appreciated her honesty about her diagnosis. As her therapy sessions progressed, she had gotten around to admitting she felt some survivors’ guilt from having lived unlike the other three patients. She admitted to feeling that the ER no longer felt safe for her and that she was afraid something like she had experienced was going to happen again, to her or someone she cared about. She had worked with Dr. Jacobson about different techniques she could use if she felt a panic attack coming on and also corrected some of her inaccurate assumptions (like that the deaths weren’t her fault and that the world wasn’t a dangerous place). Finally during the first week of April, Lim felt confident enough that she would be okay to work.

The morning of April 1, Lim woke up in Melendez’s bed after a night of passion, no surprise there. Another beneficial thing about the therapy sessions, both for her lungs and for her mind, was that her sex drive slowly returned, and clearly, they were both still in the honeymoon phase. She rolled over to find him still fast asleep, so she kissed his shoulders a little and whispered, “Wake up, sleep head.”

He groaned at being pulled out of a deep sleep, but he rolled to his left side and smiled when he saw his beautiful girl lying next to him, “Today’s a big day for you,” he commented.

“Mmhm,” she affirmed nervously, “But I’m ready for it. I want to be able to help others again. I know I can’t save everyone, but I’ll save as many people as I possibly can.”

“That’s my girl,” Melendez kissed her forehead. He went into the bathroom and began to shower, Lim sneaking in behind him. Before Melendez left, he kissed Lim and stroked her cheek, “You’re going to do great today, Audrey. You’ve come so far in the last few months.”

Lim smiled, “Thank you, that means a lot,” she gave him a quick embrace and Melendez went into work first. Lim arrived about twenty minutes later, Andrews being the first to greet her. Figures. Lim quelled the urge to roll her eyes and gave a polite smile, “Dr. Andrews,” she said to Shaun.

“Welcome back, Dr. Lim,” stated Andrews, “How are you feeling?” he asked and she swore there was a hint of compassion in his usually stern voice.

“I’ve been feeling really good,” confirmed Lim.

“Good,” nodded Andrews, “Dr. Murphy and Dr. Browne are waiting for you in the ER,” Andrews ordered.

Lim nodded and immediately went down to the said wing. She used some of the mindfulness skills before entering the room where Shaun and Claire were waiting for her, “Dr. Lim,” smiled Claire, “It’s good to have you back.”

“It’s good to be back, Dr. Browne,” admitted Lim, “Nice to see you, Dr. Murphy,” she said to Shaun.
He stayed silent, looking around the room until he gained the courage to look Lim in the eyes, “We missed you here at St. Bonaventure,” he said stoically.

Lim’s pager went off and she got the information from a staff member before she said, “Three car accident victims coming in, two are five minutes out, one is eight minutes out. Dr. Browne, Dr. Murphy, you take the first two patients,” instructed Lim, “I’ll wait for the one who’s eight minutes out,” the first two patients came in, one with a head injury and one with a broken arm, so Claire and Shaun started examining them. When the third patient was rolled in, Lim stepped beside the gurney and asked, “What are we looking at?”

“Thirty year old female, complaining of severe chest pain and trouble breathing, we’ve given her two units of morphine and supplemental oxygen, her pain remains the same and her oxygen stats remain low,” informed the EMT.

Lim could hear her patient wheezing and coughing, so she took a few deep breaths and focused on the task at hand. Now was not the time to panic. She had a job to do, “What’s your name?” she asked.

“Jackie,” the woman answered.

“I’m Dr. Lim and I’ll be your doctor today. You say you have chest pain and shortness of breath?” she asked for confirmation. Jackie nodded in confirmation, “What seat of the car were you in?”

“The front passenger’s seat,” Jackie informed.

“I’m assuming the airbags deployed?” asked Lim. Jackie nodded. Lim noticed her blue fingernails along with her increased heart rate. Lim listened to her breathing and could hear wheezing and decreased breath sounds on the left side. She took a few more deep breaths as the patient coughed some more and turned to the nurse, “She has cyanosis in her fingertips, an increased heart rate, and decreased breath sounds on the left side. She could have a pulmonary contusion along with broken ribs. We need to get her up to radiology for a chest x-ray and a CT scan. If there is internal bleeding, page Dr. Melendez to perform the surgery, otherwise, put her on oxygen therapy or intubate her if her oxygen stats get too low. Contact me if you need anything else.”

“Right away, Dr. Lim,” said Deena.

The nurse wheeled the patient to radiology and Dr. Lim commended herself for keeping herself together. The rest of the day went smoothly as her only other patients involved a young child with a deep cut on his knee and an older gentleman with an umbilical hernia which he was sent for surgery. At the end of the day, she drove over to Melendez’s house and they both arrived at the same time. He opened the front door before he nervously turned to her and asked, “Well, how did it go?”

Lim tried to keep a straight face, but she couldn’t help but grin from ear to ear, “I rocked it!” she boasted proudly.

“Alright,” Melendez smiled happily as she jumped into his arms, passionately kissing him, “But I knew you would.”

“Well, I couldn’t have done it without you,” she said.

“Audrey, you put all of the effort into it and you still are keeping at it by finishing out the sessions,” said Melendez.

“Fine. Unlike you, humility is one of my stronger suits,” she smirked and kissed him. She pulled
back and he had a worried look on his face, “What?”

“Nothing, I just wanted to talk to you about something,” he answered.

“Shoot,” said Lim.

“The annual charity gala is at the end of this month,” started Melendez.

Lim huffed, “Don’t remind me. Three hours of wearing a dress and heels, schmoozing with donors and important people, and making sure I don’t drink too much to prevent myself from saying something stupid.”

Melendez chuckled at the concept about how much Lim hated the charity gala; she always had, “I was wondering if you wanted to, you know, go together?”

Lim froze a little in his embrace, “You mean, like, as a couple?”

“Well, we are technically a couple,” explained Melendez.

“I know, but think about it, Neil. That means all of the residents, Andrews, Glassman, they all would know about us,” said Lim.

“Well, yeah, but if we want this to last, people will find out that we’re seeing each other eventually,” said Melendez.

Lim bobbed her head a little, “Yeah, you have a point. It’s just a huge step to make our relationship public.”

“If you’re not ready, then we can go separately…”

“No, you’re right, Andrews and Dr. Barnes will go together as husband and wife, we’re boyfriend and girlfriend, we should go as a couple,” said Lim, “So, this is really going to happen. Now it feels more official.”

“Yeah,” Melendez chuckled nervously, also a little nervous as to what everyone else would say.

“Well, I have to get going,” Lim grabbed her car keys.

“You don’t want to stay?” asked Melendez.

“I’d love to, but I have some stuff to do at home plus the stress of the day made me a little winded, so I might use the oxygen concentrator tonight. I hope you understand,” she sighed.

“Of course, your health comes first,” Melendez kissed her, “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I have a surgery scheduled but maybe we could grab lunch around the same time?” she asked hopefully.

“Sounds good,” said Melendez.

“Good,” she kissed him again, “Have a good night, Neil.”

“You too, Audrey.”
The day of the gala finally arrived, a Friday evening to be exact, so Melendez spent most of it putting on his tux and making sure he looked presentable after a long day at work. He, like many at St. Bonaventure, despised this gala, but money was green and it was a necessary evil of the job. At least he’d have a companion this time. Last year, he had gone stag since he was supposed to go with Jessica and they had broken up two weeks before the gala. If he hadn’t been conversing with Glassman, Andrews, or a donor, he had spent most of the night with Lim, so he supposed it wasn’t going to be much different this year. Once he was absolutely positive he had everything he needed, he grabbed his car keys and drove over to Lim’s house, sincerely hoping she was ready to go. He figured she would be; even when she had to dress up for an event such as this one, it rarely took her longer than forty-five minutes, an hour tops. He arrived at the front door and gently knocked. It was only a couple moments before she answered the door. And there she was, standing in front of him in a royal blue dress and complimentary black heels. Her hair was curled, her make-up was subtle but perfectly done, her nails the same shade of blue as her dress, and, quite honestly, he hardly recognized her (in a good way). He always forgot how stunning she was when she made the effort to glamorize herself, “Neil,” she said teasingly, interrupting his thoughts.

“How’s?” he brought himself back down to planet Earth.

“I don’t think I’ve seen you speechless the entire time I’ve known you,” she smirked.

“I…it’s just…” Melendez stuttered before he finally settled on, “You look beautiful, Audrey.”

“You do look dashing in that tuxedo,” she observed him.

Melendez chuckled and grabbed her hands, “So are you ready to do this, Dr. Lim?”

Lim smiled and nodded, “Yes.”

She grabbed her clutch and was just about to leave when Melendez started asking questions, “Do you have your inhaler?”

“Mmhm,” she confirmed.

“How about…”?

“Neil, I promise you everything I need fits in here,” she held up the clutch, “Now let’s go, we have some donors to win over.”

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Meanwhile, at the hospital ballroom, the gala was in full swing. The four residents had already greeted Andrews and Isabel along with a few important names, but other than that, there weren’t many people for them to chat with, so they had taken to standing around a table sipping cocktails (and Sprite for Shaun). Thankfully, Glassman arrived with Debbie Wexler and, though Glassman looked thinner and slightly frailer because of the chemo and radiation treatment, he was getting around pretty well. He waved to the residents and approached them, “Good evening Dr. Park, Dr. Reznick, Dr. Browne, Shaun,” he greeted.

“Dr. Glassman,” stated Shaun.

“You look great,” commented Claire.
“Well, thankfully, I’ve been feeling better,” said Glassman, “So how have things been with the new chief of surgery?”

“You mean, Dr. Andrews?” asked Morgan.

“He kept it for himself,” continued Park.

“Oh,” stated Glassman and then noticed Debbie motioning him over to her, “Well, I can’t leave my date, so if you’ll excuse me,” he excused himself.

The residents went back to silently sipping drinks before Morgan asked, “Where’s Melendez or Lim? I would think they both know how important this event is.”

“Well, I heard through the rumor mill that Melendez actually has a date this year, so he probably had to pick her up,” answered Park.

Morgan, Claire, and Shaun looked at him, “How do you know?” asked Morgan.

“Like I said, rumor mill,” responded Park.

“I wonder who his date is?” asked Morgan.

“Dr. Lim is Dr. Melendez’s date,” stated Shaun.

“Shaun, that is a broad assumption,” scolded Claire lightly.

“It’s not an assumption, it’s a fact. Dr. Lim is Dr. Melendez’s date,” Shaun pointed. His fellow residents glanced over to where Shaun was pointing and sure enough, the two attending surgeons had just arrived at the gala. Melendez took Lim’s coat off and kissed her cheek before he went to the coat closet area.

Park looked over at Claire and raised an eyebrow. Claire rolled her eyes, pulled a $20 bill out of her clutch, and handed it to Park, “What was that for?” snickered Morgan in curiosity.

“It’s a bet we’ve had since last year’s gala,” explained Claire.

“After I saw Melendez and Lim chatting over drinks at last year’s charity event, Claire swore that Melendez would never be able to score with Lim. Turns out, she was wrong,” boasted Park.

“What’s score with mean? Like with sports?” asked Shaun in oblivion.

“No Shaun, score means you finally land a date with someone,” explained Claire.

“More like have sex with them,” emphasized Morgan.

Melendez had left to talk with Andrews and a few important doctors in attendance, so Lim ordered a bourbon, found the residents, and went over to greet them, “Dr. Park, Dr. Reznick, Dr. Browne, Dr. Murphy,” she acknowledged each of them.

“Dr. Lim,” they all answered in stereo.

“Are you all enjoying yourselves?” she asked just to make polite conversation.

“Yes,” lied Park, Claire, and Morgan.

“No, not at all,” answered Shaun with brutal honesty.
Lim chuckled at his response, “That’s okay, none of us like these things.”

None of the residents knew what to say about Melendez and Lim until Shaun boldly asked, "Dr. Lim, are you scoring with Dr. Melendez?" 

“That’s okay, Dr. Reznick.” said Lim, though she could feel her cheeks getting hot and she was sure they were red. She knew Shaun couldn’t help that sometimes the first thought that came to his mind and was spoken was inappropriate, “Yes, Dr. Murphy, Dr. Melendez and I are dating.”

Luckily for everyone, a slow song came on before things could get more awkward. Andrews and Isabel along with Glassman and Debbie went out onto the dance floor and swayed back and forth with the music. Shaun uneasily turned to Claire and asked, “Would you like to dance, Dr. Browne?”

“Shaun, you don’t have to dance if it makes you uncomfortable,” soothed Claire.

“I know I don’t have to,” he answered, “But I want to.”

Claire smiled and took his hand, leading him out to the floor and instructing him on where to put his hands and what to do.

Park looked at Morgan and held out his hand for her, “Oh, what the hell,” she took it and followed him.

Lim slowly walked around the room until she met up with Melendez out on the dance floor, “There you are,” he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her lightly, “I was afraid I had lost my dance partner.”

“You know I can’t dance, Neil,” she draped her arms over his shoulders.

“What are you talking about? You’re a great dancer,” he said in mock astonishment.

“And you’re a liar,” she responded.

“You’re also the prettiest one here tonight.”

“Now, I know you’re lying,” she chuckled and stepped a little closer to him, Melendez kissing her forehead in response.

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It was her first time back at St. Bonaventure since she had taken a job at a major law firm in San Jose. Dr. Andrews had invited her to the gala since the firm she worked for was a major funder of the hospital and also because she had connections to a few other firms who donated to St. Bonaventure. She observed the room and saw Allegra with a few physicians, Andrews and Isabel along with Dr. Glassman and Debbie Wexler enjoying themselves during a slow dance.

And then her eyes landed on him. The man she was at one time meant to marry. She had ended the engagement because she had decided she did not want to bear children, something he so desperately wanted. She didn’t want to hold him back from raising a family, so she had determined it was best for him to marry a woman who desired the same. And quite frankly, she had to look carefully for a few moments before she realized whom he was dancing with. Sure, she knew they were friends, and she had noticed them laughing over a drink at last year’s charity gala. Maybe
they were still just friends. No, they were standing too close together and he kissed her forehead. Friends didn’t do that, lovers did. The song ended and he grabbed her hand before leading her over to the hor d’oeuvres, right where she was standing. She tried to make herself scarce but she wasn’t quick enough. She was soon looking them both in the eyes. They both looked shocked to see her there, but she really didn’t want to be rude, so she finally said, “Hi Neil, hi Audrey.”

Lim was too flabbergasted to answer, but Melendez did manage to barely get out the phrase, “Hi Jessica.”
“Fancy seeing you here,” said Melendez a little coldly.

Lim swallowed thickly to compose herself before she said, “Neil, I have to use the ladies’ room. I’ll leave you both alone for now.”

“Audrey,” Melendez tried to call out to her but she had already stormed away. Well, storm wasn’t exactly the right term since after about two hours in heels, Lim’s walk usually turned into that of a newborn baby giraffe attempting to take it’s first steps. Melendez hesitantly turned to Jessica and stuck his hands in his pockets, “So…I’m guessing Andrews invited you?”

“Yes,” Jessica nodded, “That and the law firm I work at now is a major donor to St. Bonaventure. Both my boss and Dr. Andrews felt it was best for me to attend the gala given my connections to the hospital and the fact that my grandfather was the founder.”

“I see,” nodded Melendez.

Jessica looked towards where Lim had walked away, though neither the surgeon nor the attorney could see her, “So…you and Audrey. Are you both…you know?”

Melendez sighed, but nodded, “Yes, we are.”

Jessica figured just as much. Them being all giggly over a drink at last year’s gala had meant something after all, “So did you start seeing each other right after we broke up?”

“No,” Melendez assured quickly, “We’ve only been together since February. We got together under some…unique circumstances.”

“I see,” said Jessica. She noticed a few important donors, so she took the opportunity to excuse herself, “Well, those two people over there are important donors from one of the major law firms in San Jose, so I have to go thank them. It was nice seeing you, Neil.”

“You too,” he said politely and she left. He sighed and figured he’d start looking for Lim. Break up wasn’t exactly the term he would use for his split with Jessica. Dumped by her was more like it as she had decided to break things off, leaving him heartbroken at the time. He supposed it had been for the best though because if he had married Jessica, he wouldn’t have been able to start dating Lim and she made him really happy. He guessed he would never know, but he figured if he had married Jessica, he probably would be miserable right now. He couldn’t find Lim anywhere so he finally approached Shaun and asked, “Dr. Murphy, do you know where Dr. Lim is?”

“She’s at the bar,” pointed Shaun.

“Thank you,” said Melendez before he went over to the bar area and sat down next to Lim, “Audrey…”

“Leave me alone, Neil,” said Lim, doing her best to keep herself composed.

“Audrey, I had no idea she was going to be here tonight,” said Melendez.

Lim sighed and looked around the room, “Listen, we’ve been here for two and half hours, we’ve done our socializing, we’ve talked to the people who matter. Can we just go home now?”
“Of course,” nodded Melendez. They got their coats and made a special point of saying goodbye to Andrews and Glassman before leaving the hospital.

Glassman finally looked over at Andrews and said, “I told you those two would eventually get together.”

Lim was pretty quiet on the way home. Deathly quiet. The only sound Melendez heard her making was her breathing. When they arrived at Lim’s house, she got out of the car, but stopped when Melendez didn’t follow her, “Well, are you coming?”

“Yes, of course,” he followed her into the house. They went inside and Lim immediately ditched the high heels before turning to face him, “I promise that encounter didn’t mean anything tonight.”

“Really? So you felt absolutely nothing when you saw your ex-fiancée, the woman you were once supposed to marry?” asked Lim.

“No, nothing. I promise you,” assured Melendez.

“Because when I got back from the bathroom, you seemed pretty talkative with Jessica,” reminded Lim.

“She was asking me questions, Audrey. What was I supposed to do? Be rude and ignore her? We both have past relationships you know?” shouted Melendez.

“I know, but given the fact that my last marriage was pretty shitty, I don’t want to make the same mistake twice, so if you’re going to be fraternizing with exes, then I’m out!” said Lim, “I was there the entire time, Neil; I know how much you cared about her.”

“Yes, I did care about her at one time. I’m not going to deny it,” said Melendez, “But we were on different paths in life and the past is the past. You don’t have to worry about me going back to Jessica or her getting in the way of us!”

“How can I be so sure?”

“BECAUSE I LOVE YOU, AUDREY!” Melendez blurted unintentionally.

Lim froze at first, but then stepped a little closer to him and asked, “What did you just say to me?” it was said in a stone cold tone.

“I mean…” Melendez stuttered, “Look, Audrey, I didn’t mean to just blurt it out like that, but now that I’ve said it, I’m not going to apologize or take it back because it’s the truth.”

Lim didn’t say anything for about two minutes, so Melendez figured it was all over. He was thoroughly surprised when she finally said, “Well, I love you too.”

“There, we both said it,” Melendez smiled.

“Yeah, we did,” she chuckled nervously and then went to sit down on the couch. Melendez sat down next to her and she grabbed his hand, “You know you’re the first man I’ve said that to since Kashal.”

Melendez nodded, recalling that Kashal was Lim’s ex-husband, “Well if it makes you feel any better, I haven’t said it to many women either.”

She laughed as he cupped her face in his hand, “I knew I was feeling something towards you, I just
didn’t quite know what. You know me and feelings don’t get along well.”

“I disagree, Aud. You feel things passionately; it’s just the expression of the emotions that doesn’t get along well with you,” teased Melendez.

She chuckled again and grabbed his hand, “I’m a little hungry because food at fancy galas…” she shuttered, “Want to order a pineapple and pepperoni pizza and call it a night?”

Melendez couldn’t help but smile at how fast Lim could change a subject yet still make it feel completely natural, “Yes.”
Chapter 21

In regards to last night’s episode, I’m just going to say these three words: LIMLENDEZ HAS SAILED (internal excited screaming)!

Lim woke up the next morning and she could hear Melendez still snoring next to her. She had another counseling session that day and she really didn’t want him accompanying her to this one, so she did her best to try to shower and dress quietly. Unluckily for her, Melendez was a light sleeper, so he stirred when he heard her opening and closing drawers, “Good morning,” she smiled softly.

“Morning,” he smiled, “Going somewhere?”

“My appointment with Dr. Jacobson, remember?” she reminded him.

“Oh yeah,” he recalled, “Did you want me to go with you?”

Lim shook her head quickly, “No, I’ll be okay by myself today. Maybe we can do something when I get back.”

“Alright maybe we can catch,” he thought hard for a moment, “Whatever superhero movie is playing like we used to when we were residents.”

“Captain Marvel?” Lim supplied helpfully.

“Yeah that,” said Melendez.

“Alright, I’ll see you soon,” she kissed him.

“Have a good session. I love you,” he said. It seemed to come so naturally to him.

Lim briefly hesitated before she said, “I love you too,” Lim decided to treat herself to a Starbucks Iced Cinnamon Dolce Latte as a reward for having to put up with dressing fancily and mingling with donors the night beforehand. She arrived at the counseling center and Dr. Jacobson called her back almost immediately, “Nice to see you again,” Lim greeted politely.

“You too, Audrey,” said Dr. Jacobson, “Is Neil not joining us today?”

Lim shook her head, “No, not today. I actually wanted to discuss a few things without him.”

“Of course,” said Dr. Jacobson, “Well, first of all, how have things been going for you at work?”

“It’s been going well,” answered Lim happily, “No panic attacks, no major issues, the relaxation techniques you taught me work for things even outside of the triggers, so far, no real stress other than the pressure that naturally comes with the job of being a trauma surgeon.”

“Well, that’s wonderful to hear,” said Dr. Jacobson, “And everything outside of work is going well too?”

Lim sighed, knowing whom Dr. Jacobson was partly bringing up into the discussion, “Yes,” she
said hesitantly, “Our hospital’s annual charity gala was last night and we went together, so that was
the first time our co-workers and superiors found out about us.”

“And no negative reactions?” ventured Dr. Jacobson.

“No,” Lim shook her head, “At least not yet. Our boss was too busy making small talk with
important donors to say much.”

“Is something bothering you, Audrey?” asked Dr. Jacobson.

“I don’t know if bothering me is the right word, it’s just….” Lim took the time to compose her
thoughts, “He told me he loved me last night.”

“I see,” said Dr. Jacobson.

“And I said it back,” added Lim.

“Well, are you having second thoughts about what you said?”

Lim quickly shook her head in interruption, “No, not at all. I really do love him with all of my
heart, I’m just….” Lim trailed off again, “I’m just scared to let my guard down. With my last
marriage, I, of course, worked the same long hours I do now. My ex-husband really didn’t like it.
He wanted me to work less. As time went on, we did nothing but fight before we finally divorced.
And once Kashal and I divorced,” Lim forced herself not to cry, “To deal with the hurt and the
anger, I threw myself into my work. I basically married my job, because it would never let me
down. And I guess that’s why I’ve stuck to an attitude of not being committed to relationships. I
promised myself I would never get hurt like that again. But now, surviving that respiratory virus,
getting together with Neil, I haven’t been this happy in a really long time. I’m scared I’m going to
get hurt again if I let my guard down and completely fall for him, because ever since my divorce,
I’m afraid it’s not going to be real even when it feels real,” she ranted, though in the back of her
mind, she knew she already had fallen head over heels for Melendez, “That’s the most I’ve told
someone about my romantic life, well, ever.”

“Well, Audrey, the key to any good relationship is open and honest communication, so I think you
know what I’m going to suggest you do,” smiled Dr. Jacobson.

Lim nodded, “Yeah,” she confirmed.

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Lim arrived home and quickly grabbed a few things she needed before she drove over to
Melendez’s house. He answered the door after she knocked and he grabbed his car keys, “Ready to
go?”

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you about last night,” admitted Lim.

Melendez’s heart sank. Did she regret making their relationship public? Was she having second
thoughts about being with him at all? He stepped aside and she entered the living room, “What’s
going on, Aud?”

“Listen, last night, I don’t know if I came off as brash or rude, but when you said…you know to
me, it was really unexpected for me,” she rambled.

“I know and I didn’t mean to tell you that in the manner that I did,” said Melendez, “I was going to
wait for a more intimate setting.”
“I was shocked, to say the least,” she chuckled, “But I guess, the reason I’ve been so hesitant to open up to you or let my guard down when it comes to this…us…loving you,” she stopped but Melendez stayed silent, so she continued her confession, “Is because ever since my divorce, I can’t help but think no matter how real this feels, it’s not,” Melendez nodded understandingly, “I married my job and kept things casual with every man that came into my life so I wouldn’t get hurt again like I did back then. But then you came along and SARS came along and I was done with being cautious because it all almost ended that day. But the idea of fully opening myself up to you and to make a full commitment to you scares me.”

“I know,” Melendez whispered to her.

Lim smiled softly, “But these past few months you’ve seen me at my worst, both physically and emotionally, which is something that usually takes years for most couples, and you never once thought about leaving me. You know we both work the same ridiculous hours, but with some effort on both of our parts, you showed me we can balance our professional lives with our personal lives. Who knows where life will lead us, but I can’t wait to make that journey with you,” she kissed him, “I love you, Neil, with all my heart.”

“I love you too,” he smiled, “Now enough with the sap and let’s go see Wonder Woman.”

“Captain Marvel,” Lim corrected.

“Whatever,” smirked Melendez as they went to his car. They spent the rest of the day watching the movie, Lim hogging the popcorn to the point where Melendez got about five pieces, just like old times, and when they got back to Melendez’s house, they spent the evening eating, talking, watching TV, and acting like they had been together for years. And right now, they both wouldn’t have it any other way.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

A/N: I'm introducing Daniel Dae Kim's character, Dr. Jackson Han, in this chapter, but this interpretation is based purely on articles and descriptions about him. Can't wait to meet Dr. Jackson Han in a few weeks. Also, I was dying to incorporate that Andrews/Lim/Melendez elevator scene in the promotional photos in Xin. ;)

When the alarm went off early the next morning, both Melendez and Lim regretted staying up until well past midnight. Thankfully, Melendez only had clinicals that day and Lim would be covering the ER, which was a task she could do with her eyes closed. Both of their phones also chimed with the text message alerts, so they checked them in unison, “Andrews says he wants everyone to meet in the conference room at 9 AM. Wants to introduce us to someone,” read Melendez.

“Oh goody. As if we didn’t do enough schmoozing Friday night,” groaned Lim sarcastically, “Let’s go. We definitely don’t want to get on Andrews’s bad side.”

They both showered and threw on scrubs or dress clothes before heading downstairs. Melendez was just about to leave when he turned to Lim and asked, “Hey, did you want to go in together?” Lim looked at him skeptically, “Come on, Aud, it’s not like people don’t know about us after Friday.”

“Alright,” she succumbed and got into the front passenger’s seat of his car.

They arrived at St. Bonaventure and went to the elevator closest to the main conference room. Of course, out of all of the physicians at St. Bonaventure, Dr. Marcus Andrews had to quickly waltz in with them, “Dr. Melendez, Dr. Lim,” he greeted politely.

“Dr. Andrews,” they nodded.

They all stared straight ahead of them when Andrews asked, “I trust you both enjoyed yourselves at the gala on Friday evening?” he tried his best to make small talk.

“As much as we possibly could for that type of event,” said Melendez.

“Good,” Andrews pushed the button for the fifth floor and they stayed silent the entire ride up to it. It was even more awkward than that elevator ride they had done with Claire. The doors opened and Andrews said, “Well, I’ll see you both in a few moments,” he said and left.

Lim and Melendez stepped off the elevator and turned to each other, “Well that was one of the most uncomfortable encounters in my entire life and I had Dr. Murphy ask me if I was scoring with you the other night,” said Lim.

Melendez scowled, “Where would he have heard a term like that one?”

“One of the other residents, I’m sure,” she emphasized as they entered the already crowded conference room. They both nodded towards the said residents in greeting.

Andrews stood in front of the room, Allegra close behind him, “If I could have everyone’s
attention please?” he announced and everyone focused on the hospital’s president, “First of all, I am pleased to announce that Friday’s gala was one of the most successful in St. Bonaventure’s history and I have each and every one of you to thank for that. I’d also like to remind everyone that, even though we occasionally like to relax, not to let your personal life interfere with your professional life,” Melendez and Lim both held in a sigh. Though Andrews didn’t say it outright, they both just knew it was directed towards them, “On that note, because of that hard work and dedication, we have become a distinguished surgical center both in California and the country as a whole. Unfortunately, as hospital president, I have been informed that I can no longer hold the chief of surgery position,” everyone in the room looked over towards Melendez and Lim while they glanced at each other. Was this going to be Andrews’s way of keeping them apart? They wouldn’t put it past him, “After a national search, I would like to introduce all of you to San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital’s newest chief of surgery, Dr. Jackson Han.”

Everyone clapped respectfully as an older gentleman who appeared to be in his late-forties to early-fifties came to the front of the room and waved graciously, “Thank you Dr. Andrews and thank you everyone. I am so grateful to begin my journey here at this great institution. I know it will be a challenge to fill the shoes of you as you have to fill the shoes of Dr. Aaron Glassman, but I am willing to take on that task. This hospital is one of the best, but I don’t want it to be just one of the best, I want it to be THE best in the nation. So with keeping what works and changing aspects that don’t work, I know we can do that. Together.”

Andrews stepped forward again and said, “Now, I’d like each and every one of you to make Dr. Han feel welcome. You are all dismissed.”

The surgeons and staff slowly filtered out of the room when Lim turned to Melendez and asked, “What do you suppose Dr. Han meant by changing aspects that don’t work? Everything seems just fine to me,” she commented.

“I’m sure there are things that can be fixed. What I don’t appreciate is the dig Andrews made at the two of us,” said Melendez. He looked at his watch, “I’ve got to get going, my first appointment is in twenty minutes,” he squeezed her hand, “Love you.”

“Love you too,” she said before heading towards the ER.

When Lim arrived at the ER, Shaun and Claire were waiting for her, but they weren’t alone. Han was also waiting with them, “Dr. Murphy, Dr. Browne, Dr. Han,” she acknowledged all of them.

“You must be Dr. Audrey Lim. Dr. Andrews has told me great things about you,” Han shook her hand.

“Thank you sir, I appreciate it,” she smiled graciously.

“Well, don’t let me intrude, I’m just going to walk around the hospital and get a feel for the place, so don’t mind my observing,” he gestured.

Lim nodded slowly and she went straight to work along with Shaun and Claire. Considering she had felt no panic symptoms, Shaun had remained calm all day, and she didn’t lose any patients, she considered that an excellent day. Lim couldn’t help but notice how often Dr. Han came by the ER, ten times to be exact. She wondered if the other surgeons were being watched this closely. When it was time to leave, she went to the locker room and changed into jeans, a blouse, and grabbed her black leather jacket and bag before heading towards Melendez’s office, though he wasn’t there waiting for her when she arrived. When he finally showed up, he smiled softly and asked, “Are you
“Yeah,” she nodded and followed him to his car. Melendez couldn’t help but notice how quiet she was on the way back to his house, but he knew it wasn’t a good idea to pressure her to talk unless she felt comfortable doing so. Later that night, as they were getting ready for bed, Lim sat down on the bed next to him and asked, “Hey, did Dr. Han shadow you today?”

Melendez shrugged, “Not really. He came by my office earlier today and watched me working for about fifteen minutes, but then he moved on. Why?”

Lim sighed, “Because he came by the ER ten times today and he seemed really interested in me and Dr. Murphy,” she informed.

“You and Dr. Murphy, why? And why not Dr. Browne? Wasn’t she with you today?” asked Melendez.

Lim nodded, “She was, but he didn’t talk to her as much. I don’t know what it is, but there’s something about him I just don’t trust.”

Melendez laughed and Lim widened her eyes at him, “I’m sure you’re just overthinking this, Audrey.”

“Am I?” she asked him suspiciously, “Because what you call overthinking I call woman’s intuition. You wouldn’t understand; you’re not a woman.”

“Listen Aud, he’s probably just trying to get to know everyone and how everything’s run at St. Bonaventure and we have the top emergency department in San Jose run by one of the best trauma surgeons in the United States,” Lim raised an eyebrow at him, “I’m just saying, Audrey. I usually tell you to trust your instincts about things because you’ve had that keen awareness ever since you first one upped me during our first surgery together as residents, but right now, I’m going to trust mine. Dr. Han is just learning about the hospital and the people who work there, that’s all.”

Lim bit her lip, if only not to start a terrible argument, “Fine,” she huffed and closed her iPad before laying it on the nightstand.

Melendez turned off the night and kissed her temple, “Now get some sleep. You have to continue showing everyone in that emergency room whose boss.”

Lim chuckled a little; Melendez could always manage to find a way to make her laugh, “Alright, I love you,” she mocked in amusement.

“I love you too. Good night, Audrey.”
Chapter 23

Over the next week, Lim noticed that Han still spent a significant amount of time around the ER, though the residents had switched so she was with Park and Morgan all week. Melendez still thought she was being suspicious when it came to Dr. Han’s motivations. That is, until he noticed that Han also seemed to be following him, or rather Shaun around a lot of times. Friday at lunch, Lim and Melendez went to his office and closed the door for a private conversation, though the glass panes only allowed so much privacy. He turned to Lim and said, “You might be right about Dr. Han having some…peculiar intentions,” Lim raised her eyebrows and grinned proudly, “Don’t get too excited there.”

“How can I not? You just said I might be right about something,” she grinned then returned her face to a normal demeanor, “What do you mean?”

“Just…” Melendez didn’t quite know how to explain it, “He asked me a lot of questions about working with Dr. Murphy. And also asked Dr. Murphy about his work ethic.”

“He did the same to me,” mentioned Lim, “And asked all of our residents about working with me and Shaun. It’s annoying is what it is. I’ve been doing this job for over ten years now and I’ve been an attending surgeon for five. I think I know what I’m doing. You and several other people in this hospital could back me up on that fact.”

“I don’t get it. It’s not like you and Murphy have all that much in common. You’re not the same gender or ethnicity. You’re not at the same level of training in that you’ve completed yours but he’s still doing his,” Melendez explained, “I can’t figure out what’s up with Dr. Han.”

They both heard a knock at the door and saw Shaun standing at the window. Melendez motioned him into the room, “Dr. Andrews wants to meet with me and Dr. Lim,” announced Shaun.

Melendez and Lim glanced at each other, “You better go,” said Melendez.

Lim nodded and followed Shaun to Andrews’s office, both surgeons not speaking a word to each other on the way. When they arrived, Lim knocked on the office door before sticking her head into the room, “You wanted to see me and Dr. Murphy?”

Andrews gestured them into the room and they both sat down across from him, “Granted, this isn’t really my decision; well, it is, but only because Dr. Han is highly encouraging me to do so. He wants me to give you both a performance review, so I have no choice but to shadow you both around for a couple of days,” informed Andrews.

“Why? My performance review was last year and the residents get their performance reviews every August with input from the attending surgeons,” said Lim.

“I don’t know,” Andrews admitted honestly, “He said something about he has evidence regarding the quarantine and he wants to do follow-up on it.”

Shaun looked like he was about ready to say something, but was hesitant. Lim nodded at him in encouragement and he said, “But we were all cleared by the CDC and you,” he reminded.

“I know, Dr. Murphy, and I promise I’m not going to punish you or Dr. Lim. I’m just going to do one for Dr. Han, but I wanted you both to be aware. You are now dismissed,” Shaun and Lim both left the room and Han came in a few moments later, “Well, Dr. Han, care to inform me of your supposed concerns?”
“Yes. When you hired me, I spoke with the Department of Public Health about the aftermath of the quarantine,” Han began.

Andrews shrugged, “We did all we could possibly do, the CDC cleared us safe again. I don’t see any cause for concern when it comes to our patients.”

“Well, you should,” he handed Andrews a picture of Shaun, “Dr. Shaun Murphy in the fetal position on the floor, I also found out through certain sources about Dr. Lim experiencing a panic attack in the middle of the emergency room. And to top it all off, since the Department of Public Health has access to certain online social media accounts it says that Dr. Lim and Dr. Melendez have been in a romantic relationship for several months. And based on my observations, that fact remains clear.”

Andrews took a deep breath. Sure he could be an asshole at times, but he wasn’t going to let any outsider attack some of his greatest employees, “Dr. Murphy has autism, which occasionally leads to mental breakdowns, but they are very rare,” he emphasized. Han went to speak and Andrews said, “No, let me finish. Dr. Lim was diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder shortly after that incident, but rest assured, I made her take time off and she has been actively seeking treatment. She hasn’t had any problems since then and she was extremely forthright with me about her diagnosis, which I applaud, because that takes some courage with the stigma around mental illness.”

“And about her relationship with Dr. Melendez?”

Andrews had had his suspicions about Lim and Melendez secretly dating, but they weren’t confirmed until he had seen them arrive together at the charity gala, so he shrugged again, “It’s not against hospital policy for employees of the same rank to pursue a relationship. It might not thrill me, but it’s not like either one of them are dating one of their residents, so I can’t penalize them because they’re not breaking any rules.”

“But is that really what’s best for St. Bonaventure? Employees who are easily distracted?” asked Han.

Andrews scowled at him, “I don’t know what you’re trying to suggest here, but let me set a few things straight. I will admit, I was biased against Dr. Murphy at first, but he has saved countless lives, because his autism and savant syndrome let him see things differently and come up with solutions to problems that our neurotypical surgeons may not even think about when trying to save patients. In regards to Dr. Lim, she’s one of the best damn surgeons this hospital has ever seen. And it’s not like I haven’t been watching her carefully. She’s been informing me on her progress in treatment, we have a safety plan in place in case she does have another anxiety attack or other symptoms while she’s working, and I check in with her regularly along with other surgeons here,” Andrews did his best to keep his voice at a normal register as anger built inside of him, “In regards to Dr. Lim and Dr. Melendez seeing each other, as long as they’re having their adult naptime during their personal time and not while they’re on the clock, then it’s really none of our business, now is it?” Han didn’t say anything, so Andrews continued, “Now, I’ll do your performance reviews, but I’ll be damned if I let you somehow dismiss three of my best surgeons because of your ‘changes’ and if you even try, you’ll have to ultimately go through me.”

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It had been a quiet night for Melendez and Lim. She hadn’t bothered coming back to his office after her talk with Andrews and she didn’t want to discuss what happened with Melendez, at least not yet. Melendez couldn’t help but worry that something was really wrong, considering it was in Lim’s nature to complain about almost everything that really pissed her off, including if he left the
toilet seat up or if he didn’t put a spoon in the dishwasher. He knew he probably wasn’t going to get any sort of explanation when she turned on the evening news because she despised watching the evening news, which meant she was desperately trying to avoid any discussion. When they both finally decided to turn in for the night, Melendez decided he couldn’t take the silence any longer. He knew he might regret the decision in the long run, but he was going to ask anyways, “Is everything alright, Aud?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she quipped.

Melendez furrowed his brow. She certainly didn’t sound fine, “Did something happen with Andrews?”

“No, I mean, he’s giving me another performance review, but he said he’d pass me because the only reason he’s doing it is at Dr. Han’s request,” said Lim.

“But you just had one last year, didn’t you?” questioned Melendez.

“I did, but it has something to do with the aftermath of the quarantine apparently,” said Lim.

“But you didn’t do anything wrong and the CDC concluded there was no way you could’ve prevented those three deaths,” said Melendez in confusion. Lim swallowed thickly and her breath shook a little, “Oh God, I’m so sorry, Aud. I didn’t mean to bring it up like that.”

“No, it’s okay,” she said, “You know I just don’t like to think about it, that’s all.”

Melendez stayed still for a few more moments just to make sure she didn’t start having a flashback, but once she seemed calm, he turned out the light and said, “Well, it’s late and I have an early morning surgery.”

“Yeah, and I’ll have Andrews following me around for the next few days,” sighed Lim, “Kind of like he did when he was trying to decide which one of us would be chief of surgery before he kept it for himself.”

Melendez chuckled and said, “At this point, I honestly wish he hadn’t given up the title.”
Chapter 24

Andrews did the performance reviews and made sure to glorify both Murphy and Lim. Thankfully, Han left both surgeons alone after he had confirmation from Andrews about their abilities; he did have to trust his boss after all. It made Lim feel 100 times calmer knowing she wasn’t constantly being followed. It relieved Melendez as well; a rage built up inside of him every time someone even dared to mess with his girl. As much as Lim sometimes hated Melendez’s slight overprotectiveness, deep down, she admired him sticking up for her.

Melendez was working the overnight shift and since it was nearing midnight, he decided to stop and eat before his next consultation. He went into the main break room and Dr. Han was there eating as well. Melendez hadn’t interacted with Han much in the two weeks he had been chief of surgery, but he really couldn’t be rude and ignore his new boss, so Melendez said, “Good evening, Dr. Han.”

Han looked up from the newspaper he was reading and said, “Dr. Melendez.”

The uncomfortable silence returned between the two surgeons because Melendez honestly didn’t know how to further the conversation, “Have you been adjusting to your new position?”

“I have. Thanks for asking,” he said, “Everyone has been very welcoming and Dr. Andrews has been showing me the ropes. It still amazes me how excellent this center really is.”

“Well, we have a strong legacy of presidents and chiefs of surgery,” said Melendez.

“And also the great surgeons who work here,” said Han.

Melendez nodded and then hesitated about what he was going to say next. He decided to anyways because it’s not like he’d lose out on a promotion at this point, “Then why did you want performance reviews for Dr. Murphy and Dr. Lim?”

“I have to make sure all surgeons were performing up to standards, Dr. Melendez,” emphasized Han.

Melendez was quiet before he said, “You know I was like you once. Thinking I could become chief of surgery and change everything. When Dr. Murphy first started here, I doubted his abilities as a surgeon based purely on the fact that he has autism. And on top of that, you doubted Dr. Lim could be a good surgeon because she was diagnosed with PTSD. But after working with him for almost two years now, Dr. Murphy not only has my trust, he has my respect. And Dr. Lim…let me tell you, she’s working damn hard to get better and I am so proud of her. You don’t know what it was like. We were both afraid her career was over. But she persisted through it like she always does, just like Dr. Murphy always does, like we all do when we have our bad days. I was really mad about not getting chief of surgery because I wanted the power. Dr. Lim even called me out on it. But now, I’m sort of grateful I didn’t get it, because I’ve learned there are more important things in life: the woman I love, seeing my residents grow as surgeons, and seeing St. Bonaventure grow as a whole, something I might have been blind to if I had been promoted.”

“I see,” Dr. Han crossed his arms over his chest, “And you’re telling me this evaluation is coming from no bias whatsoever.”

“Maybe a little,” Melendez admitted truthfully, “But Dr. Murphy is like a son to me and I learn new things from him every day just as he does from me. And in regards to Dr. Lim, that analysis
wasn’t from Audrey’s boyfriend, it was from her competitor and friend who watched her become one of the best trauma surgeons in the country,” Melendez stood to leave, “I know it’s not my place to tell you how to run the hospital, but it is something to think about. Have a good night, Dr. Han.”

Melendez arrived back at his house around 7:30 the next morning. He showered and ate before he fell into bed and noticed that there was a text message on his phone. Naturally, it was from Lim, “Might have to cancel our date tonight. Think I’m getting a cold, so I called in sick.”

Melendez put his phone on his nightstand and figured he could stop by to check on her later. He was exhausted from covering the night shift so he definitely needed some sleep. He woke up around one in the afternoon and even though he had no more messages from Lim, he decided to stop by her house anyways. He swung by Walgreens and picked up a few things for her, telling himself it was the doctor side of him and not the boyfriend side doing so. He used his key to get into Lim’s house; they were far enough into the relationship that they both had keys to each other’s houses, but Lim wasn’t in the living room, so Melendez went upstairs where she was watching TV in her room. She glanced over a little confused, but smiled, “You didn’t have to come over.”

“I know I didn’t have to, but I wanted to and I brought you a present,” he held up the Walgreens bag full of Vicks VapoRub, Nyquil, Tylenol, throat lozenges, and tissues, “Think of it as your doctor taking care of you,” he kissed her.

She chuckled lightly, “I’m surprised you want to kiss me. I’ll probably make you sick.”

“That’s okay,” he said and lied down on the bed next to her, “How are you feeling?”

“Like crap, full of snot,” she admitted graphically, “How was work?”

“Uneventful, which is how I like it,” he answered. Lim coughed a little and, at least to Melendez, she sounded awful. He felt her forehead and asked, “You feel a little warm, Audrey. Are you sure it’s just a cold?”

“Positive, Neil,” she affirmed. She coughed some more, and again, it sounded pretty bad to Melendez’s trained ears, “I’ve felt a little off for a few days. I’ll take a hot bath and use the oxygen concentrator tonight and I’ll be fine.”

“Mm. You want some company?” he smirked at her.

Lim raised an eyebrow at him. He’d be up for “company” every night if she allowed him, “You can stay, but no I don’t need you to bathe with me and no, you’re not getting any from me,” Melendez looked disappointed, so Lim rolled over to face him and said, “Tell you what? Once I’m over this, we can go out for a nice romantic dinner and then we can have a wonderfully passionate evening,” she described.

“You hate romance,” reminded Melendez amusingly.

“I like it occasionally,” she smiled, “So, do we have a deal?”

Melendez couldn’t help but smile back. God was Audrey Lim absolutely adorable when she wanted to be, “Deal,” he kissed her forehead, which still felt warm to him. Lim went to the bathroom and Melendez said, “Wouldn’t hurt to check your temperature, Lim!”

“Ohay, okay!” she shouted.
Since Melendez didn’t have to work the next day as he had covered the night shift, the couple spent the rest of the night channel surfing but Lim fell asleep fairly early, so Melendez read on his iPad until he was tired. At about two in the morning, he was startled awake when he heard Lim coughing and wheezing next to him. He sat up and rubbed her back, “Audrey, are you alright?”

Lim tried to answer, but she couldn’t with the coughing, so she shook her head, “No,” she finally squeaked out, struggling to catch her breath, “The inhaler…isn’t…working,” she gasped for air.

Melendez felt Lim’s forehead and it was as hot as fire, which clearly indicated a high fever. Her face was flushed, she was shaking with chills, and she was breathing rapidly, “Audrey, you’re burning up,” said Melendez worriedly, “We need to get you to the emergency room,” he tore off the covers and started throwing on his clothes.

“No, Neil,” she started, but stopped to cough some more.

“No Audrey, there is no arguing this time. You know your lungs are weaker and that you’re at a higher risk for complications. Now let’s go,” ordered Melendez.

Lim wanted to argue that she was fine, but she was too frail, could barely breathe without pain, and was clearly in no shape to argue, so she just nodded, threw on her jacket, and followed Melendez to his car.
Chapter 25

Melendez sped to the hospital as fast as he could without breaking the speed limit while Lim coughed and struggled to breathe the entire ride. In all honesty, he probably did break the speed limit. He parked in his usual spot in employee parking which was thankfully by the emergency room. Melendez pulled Nurse Fryday aside and asked, “Nurse Fryday, who’s on call tonight?”

“Dr. Cleland, Neil. Dr. Browne and Dr. Murphy are the residents on call. What’s the emergency?”

“Audrey…Dr. Lim…” stuttered Melendez, barely being able to form words.

“I’m having trouble breathing and my emergency inhaler isn’t working,” Lim muttered anxiously.

“Oh dear, “ said Nurse Fryday, ushering Lim over to one of the triage rooms, “Dr. Browne, Dr. Murphy, triage room 3! Stat!”

Shaun and Claire rushed over to see who their patient was, “Dr. Lim?” asked Claire in surprise.

“Chest hurts, can’t breathe,” she said, “Get the oxygen and then check my pulse ox and heart rate. Check to make sure there isn’t any fluid buildup and if it sounds like there is, do a chest x-ray and start me on IV antibiotics,” she instructed, “Also draw blood and send this to lab,” Lim held up a cup with phlegm in it.

Claire nodded politely and took the cup. Only Dr. Lim would be gathering secretions to test on the car ride to the emergency room. Claire started the oxygen therapy while Shaun listened to her heartbeat and breathing, “Did you come alone, Dr. Lim?”

Lim shook her head and nodded towards Melendez, who was outside the triage rooms pacing frantically, “Dr. Melendez, please stop your pacing. You’re distracting me,” said Shaun.

Melendez stopped in his tracks, “Sorry Dr. Murphy.”

Shaun could hear the bubbling sounds, so he announced, “Bubbling sounds on both sides, Dr. Lim might have pneumonia. We should do a chest x-ray to confirm.”

“I just said that, Dr. Murphy,” joked Lim.

“I know. I was confirming,” said Shaun, oblivious to the sarcasm.

Once the x-rays were taken and some of the labs were done, Shaun went to assist Dr. Cleland on a car accident victim while Claire went to talk to Melendez about Lim’s condition, “Dr. Melendez?” he turned to face his resident, “We started her on IV antibiotics and oxygen therapy. They seem to be improving her oxygen levels. We’re still waiting on a few lab results. I’ll consult Dr. Cleland, but from the sounds of it, they’re going to keep her here overnight.”

“Ohay, thank you Dr. Browne,” he acknowledged before he went into the triage room.

Lim looked over upon hearing him enter and he was giving her his look, “I know, I know, I should’ve been taking it easy as soon as I started feeling sick a few days ago. Instead, here I am.”

Melendez sat down next to her, “At least I was there to get you here.”

Lim chuckled and coughed a little, “You should go back home and get some rest. You’ll be more comfortable sleeping in a bed.”
“No, I’m not leaving you,” he shook his head.

“Just until morning, Neil,” said Lim, “Then you can back.”

Claire cleared her throat and both surgeons turned to face her, “I can stay with her and monitor her if you want to go and get some more sleep. I’ll call you if anything changes or if she’s discharged,” informed Claire.

Melendez sighed, “Alright, but I’m going back to your house since it’s closer and I’ll be here at 7 AM sharp.”

“Oh yes sir,” Lim mocked jokingly.

“Okay, I love you,” he kissed her forehead.

“Love you too,” answered Lim.

“Dr. Browne,” Melendez nodded and left the room.

Claire sat down where Melendez had been and looked at Lim, “You know you gave everyone here at St. Bonaventure one scare. You don’t need to keep doing so.”

Lim chuckled, “It wasn’t my intention either time, Dr. Browne, believe me.”

Claire smiled as well and looked down towards the floor, “He was so worried about you, you know?” Lim glanced at Claire in confusion, “Dr. Melendez. He was so worried about you on the day of the quarantine. I mean, we all were, but not like him. He was constantly glued to those monitors in the conference room, when he found out you were infected, he looked like he was ready to break down in tears. Don’t tell him I told you that. He made some…questionable decisions because he desperately wanted to get to you.”

Lim looked at the young woman and asked, “What’s on your mind, Claire?” she asked, using her first name instead of Dr. Browne.

Claire shrugged, “I don’t know. I guess I just look at you both and how happy you are together and wonder if I’ll ever have that type of love in my life. I mean, I was with Jared for a while, but I took him for granted and now he’s gone,” she vented.

“Dr. Browne, can I give you some non-medical advice? Woman to woman?” asked Lim.

“No problem,” smiled Lim.

Claire could still hear Lim wheezing, so Claire stood and said, “I’ll go ask Dr. Cleland if we should up your oxygen,” Claire went to leave when she turned back to Lim and said, “You’re
incredibly lucky to have a man like Dr. Melendez in your life. Don’t do what I did and take him for
granted. Do everything you can to hold onto him.”

Melendez arrived back at St. Bonaventure at 7:00, just as he had promised, though Lim had been
moved to a room on the main floor once she was stable to make room in the ER, “You don’t have
to work today?”

“No, since I covered the night shift a few days ago, I have off today. I cover the night shift again
tomorrow,” he sat down in the chair in her room, “So, did Dr. Browne and Dr. Murphy take good
care of you?”

“The only one of our residents who hasn’t had to treat me yet is Dr. Park,” Lim smirked. They
stayed silent, which didn’t really bother either one of them at this point, when Lim said out of the
blue, “I think we should move in together.”

Melendez quickly turned his head towards Lim and asked, “Wait what?”

“I said I think we should move in together,” repeated Lim.

“Why?” asked Melendez.

“Well, we already spend about 5 nights a week together, depending on our work schedules, what’s
two more?” asked Lim innocently, “If you hadn’t been with me last night, who knows what
would’ve happened to me. And we have clothes and toothbrushes at each other’s places. Isn’t that
the unofficial rule that means we should move in together?”

Melendez hadn’t asked Jessica to move in with him until after they had gotten engaged, but then
again, if they had both moved in together earlier in their relationship, they might have both
discovered how incompatible they were before he proposed. But as of right now, he didn’t know
whether Lim was thinking rationally or if it was just because of the current situation, so Melendez
answered, “How about we discuss it once you’re released?”

“Dr. Cleland says that should be either tonight or tomorrow morning and then I can rest at home,”
said Lim, “And no pressure, just something to think about,” Melendez would indeed have to think
about it, not because he didn’t want to live together eventually, but he didn’t know if it was still too
early in the relationship and he didn’t want to ruin what they already had, “Neil?”

“Hmm?” he turned to face her.

“Is something wrong?” she asked hesitantly.

“No,” he shook his head, “Go back to sleep if you need to.”

She nodded and closed her eyes again. Melendez couldn’t help but watch her sleeping peacefully.
He prided himself on his ability to make rational decisions, but when it came to Audrey Lim, he
always followed his heart over his head. And once again, it seemed his gut feeling was being led
by his heart.
Lim was released around mid-afternoon the next day, so Melendez was able to take her home before going into work for the night shift. Lim made a fairly quick recovery and was able to return to work a week later. Of course, as Lim recuperated from the pneumonia, Melendez was hesitant to bring up the whole moving in together discussion while she wasn’t feeling 100%. One day towards the end of May, Lim and Melendez were both finishing up their shifts when they were both paged by Andrews to meet in the main conference room. They finished changing into their everyday clothes and quickly went to where they had been called, the majority of the surgeons and residents already present. Allegra, Andrews, and Han were standing towards the front, all with somber looks on their faces. Lim glanced over at Melendez, grabbed his hand, and squeezed it, an action that surprised Melendez as Lim wasn’t big on public displays of affection, especially at work. When it seemed that everyone had arrived, Andrews stood at the front of the room. Everyone could sense a difference in the hospital president. Instead of his usual arrogant smile, his pompous stance, or his smug attitude, it had been replaced by a look of sadness and it looked like he was doing his best to hold back tears. He cleared his throat and began, “Thank you all for coming on such short notice,” there was a quiver in his voice. He swallowed and said, “It is with deepest sorrow to inform you that Dr. Aaron Glassman, longtime neurosurgeon and former president of San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital, passed away last night. He leaves behind a wonderful legacy, a legacy that I have been doing my best to maintain, probably without much success,” he admitted honestly, “I will be informing everyone of the viewing and funeral arrangements as soon as they are scheduled. Thank you.”

“No,” Shaun shook his head adamantly, “No, Dr. Glassman is not dead. I just saw him yesterday.”

“Dr. Murphy, he died in his sleep last night. Debbie Wexler informed me this morning,” said Andrews gently.

“No, NO,” Shaun started pacing frantically, “You’re wrong. It’s not true! He’s not dead!” Shaun ran out of the conference room, visibly distraught.

Everyone glanced around at each other: Claire and Lim both had tears streaming down their cheeks while Morgan was on the verge of crying. Park and Melendez were both doing their best to keep their composure. Morgan was the first to break the silence and muffled sobs, “We should split up to find Shaun.”

Everyone else agreed and paired up to find Shaun, sincerely hoping the youngest of the residents was still physically at the hospital. Melendez and Lim both had tears streaming down their cheeks while Morgan was on the verge of crying. Park and Melendez were both doing their best to keep their composure. Morgan was the first to break the silence and muffled sobs, “We should split up to find Shaun.”

Everyone else agreed and paired up to find Shaun, sincerely hoping the youngest of the residents was still physically at the hospital. Melendez and Lim naturally paired themselves together, though neither one had said much since Andrews had made the announcement. Melendez looked over at Lim and softly asked, “Hey, are you okay?”

“Yes,” she confirmed quietly, “I just can’t believe he’s gone. He was the first person to greet me when I started my internship here.”

Melendez sighed, “I know. Me too.”
“And Shaun…he’s known Glassman longer than we have. I can’t even begin to imagine what he’s going through right now,” said Lim.

Melendez smiled lightly, “It’s that big heart of yours that allows you to empathize with others.”

Everyone searched and searched with no such luck. People were just about to give up and admit that Shaun went home when Lim and Melendez found him in his favorite break room, curled up on the floor in the fetal position, “Dr. Murphy,” Melendez stated firmly, but Shaun shut his eyes and didn’t move.

Lim nodded towards Melendez as if to say she could handle it and then let go of his hand before quietly walking into the break room. She slowly lied down on the floor next to Shaun, but didn’t say anything. They stayed silent for several minutes, Melendez wondering what his girlfriend was doing to help Shaun. Finally, out of the blue, Shaun stated, “Dr. Glassman was my friend.”

“I know, Shaun,” acknowledged Lim, “Hell, he was everyone’s friend.”

“I saw him yesterday afternoon,” stated Shaun, a hint of sadness creeping into his usually monotone voice.

“I know,” Lim nodded.

The two surgeons stayed silent for even longer when Shaun asked, “Dr. Lim, do you think Dr. Glassman is in Heaven with Steve and my bunny?”

Lim struggled to answer for a moment, because she really didn’t think much about an afterlife, at least not since she had been sick with the virus. But surely, everyone had to go somewhere after death. She smiled softly at Shaun and said, “I’m sure he is. He was a good man.”

Shaun didn’t answer Lim. He just slowly sat up and finally answered, “He was a good man. He took care of me and he was my friend. Dr. Lim?” she sat up and crawled over next to him, “How do you keep yourself so calm when you’re stressed?”

“Well, when I had to go to counseling for my PTSD, my therapist taught me ways to calm myself down whenever I started feeling anxious,” admitted Lim.

Shaun stared straight ahead to compose his thoughts, “Dr. Glassman wanted me to see a therapist but I never wanted to. Now he’s gone.”

Lim went to lay her hand on Shaun’s shoulder, but stopped herself, “Is it okay if I touch your shoulder?” she asked quietly.

Shaun took a deep breath and nodded stiffly, “Yes.”

Lim laid a hand on his right shoulder and said, “Well, whenever I’m feeling overwhelmed, I’ve been taught to take deep breaths and focus on a happy memory. I can teach you if you would like.”

“I’d like that very much,” said Shaun.

“Ohkay,” she smiled and nodded, “I want you to close your eyes and think of a happy memory.”

“There was the time Glassy and I got high off of marijuana and took an Uber to Portland,” announced Shaun.

Lim and Melendez glanced at each other and snickered a little, both trying to imagine their former
supervisor high on marijuana, “Okay, use that memory,” chuckled Lim, “Now I want you to take a deep breath and count to four in your head,” Shaun did so exactly, “Good, now hold it for four seconds and blow it out through your mouth for four seconds, then stay exhaled for four seconds,” Shaun followed the directions, “Okay good. You do that as long as you need to until you feel calm again.”

Shaun did so several more times before he inquired, “Does it work?” Shaun awkwardly turned to Lim.

“It works for me. It’s called square breathing because, just like a square has four sides, you do all four actions for four seconds at a time,” explained Lim.

Melendez couldn’t help but notice how good Lim was with Shaun. She always had been, but now, it made him love her even more. She was so tough and strong, but seeing her softer side made his heart absolutely melt, “Dr. Lim, what are your happy memories?” asked Shaun curiously.

“Well,” she thought about Shaun’s question, “One of them is when I performed my first successful surgery, some childhood memories in Taipei and San Francisco…”

“Do your happy memories include Dr. Melendez?” asked Shaun bluntly.

Lim and Melendez glanced at each other and Lim blushed a little, “Some of them,” she admitted sheepishly.

Shaun nodded stiffly again, but stayed on the floor in a ball, “Dr. Lim, is it okay if you hug me?”

Lim nodded, “Sure,” she wrapped her arms around Shaun.

“Thank you…for helping me. You’re like Dr. Browne. You know how to talk to autistic people,” more silence on everyone’s parts, “You’ll make a great mom one day,” commented Shaun.

“Um…” Lim stuttered and quickly looked at Melendez. They were only discussing moving in together, let alone children. She looked back at Shaun and said, “Dr. Murphy, Dr. Melendez and I aren’t that far into our relationship.”

Shaun stood and went to leave the room, “I know,” he confirmed, “But when you both get married and have kids someday, you’ll be good with them,” Shaun left the break room.

Both Melendez and Lim stared at each other in complete silence until Melendez cleared his throat embarrassingly, “I guess we should get going.”

“Right,” nodded Lim. She grabbed her bag and followed Melendez to his Tesla. They were both quiet on the ride back to his house, not quite knowing what to make of Shaun’s bold declaration. Dinner was pretty low key and they spent the evening watching reruns of Friends before calling it a night.

Lim brushed her teeth and washed her face before she crawled into bed. She kissed Melendez, but didn’t really talk much, so Melendez said, “Come on Aud, you know Dr. Murphy says the first thing that comes to his mind.”

“Oh I know, it’s not that. I’m totally used to that,” she responded, “Just thinking about other things, that’s all.”

“About Dr. Glassman,” Melendez closed the book he was reading.
“No, well yes, but no,” she said.

“Then what’s wrong, Audrey?” asked Melendez.

Lim sighed, “Not tonight, Neil,” she said quietly, but firmly.

Melendez took a deep breath, but decided to respect her privacy, “Alright,” he agreed. She turned off the light and Melendez said, “I haven’t been ignoring your request. I just didn’t want to bring it up while you were sick.”

“About what?” she questioned bafflingly.

“About moving in together,” Melendez reminded.

“Oh,” she uttered.

“I’m just…” he trailed off, “Are we really ready for that, Audrey? We’ve been together for three months.”

“Neil, I’m not expecting you to put your house on the market or vice versa, depending on whose house we settle on; I’d just like to give it a test run. If we suck at living together, we can go back to the way things were,” she pleaded. She hesitated a little, “And if we’re not compatible living together, then we can…before we get too serious.”

“But everyone at works knows about us now,” said Melendez.

“I meant people like my brother and your sister,” she said.

“Oh,” Melendez said. They had visited Gabi a few times since they had started dating, but Gabi didn’t know they were a couple yet. And Josh Lim only called once every two weeks or so, mainly to check on Lim’s progress in therapy. She had briefly mentioned Melendez was helping her through it, but she hadn’t mentioned that he had gone from friend to boyfriend. Melendez took her hand and said, “I guess, ever since Jess and I broke up, I can’t help but wonder if we’re going too fast or if we’ll ruin things. I...I don’t want to lose what we have by going too fast or too slow.”

“I know,” she admitted, “It scares me a little too. But someone told me not to make the mistake she made and let a good guy like you get away. I love you, Neil, and I’m not letting you go. I think if we did start living together, it would be messy and complicated. I mean, when we first started seeing each other, we second guessed each other at work all the time, we didn’t know how to interact with others at first, but we adjusted to the new dynamic. If it’s meant to be, I think it’ll work out.”

Melendez raised an eyebrow, “Since when did you become all philosophical?”

“It’s one of my hidden talents,” she smirked cutely.

Melendez chuckled, shook his head amusingly, and kissed her, “You’re lucky I love you,” Lim smiled satisfied and rolled over to the other side of the bed. She was just about to fall asleep when she heard Melendez ask, “My house or yours?”
Glassman’s funeral was scheduled for that Saturday, so many of the surgeons who weren’t already off took off for the service. Melendez and Lim hadn’t discussed living together any further as their plans were on hold until after the funeral. The morning of the service, neither Melendez nor Lim quite knew how to comfort each other. Glassman had been their supervisor when they were residents, watching over them as they performed surgeries, harping on them when they weren’t living up to his expectations, but supporting them and encouraging them at the same time. Melendez came out of the bathroom to find Audrey sitting on the bed, gazing at the picture of her and Melendez at that party when they were residents. He silently sat down next to her and laid his hand on her knee. She jumped a little, but looked up at him and smiled sadly, “We were celebrating our first successful surgery together where we didn’t end up fighting afterwards.”

“I know,” sighed Melendez taking the picture from her, “Dr. Glassman was so proud of us.”

Lim wiped away a few tears from her eyes, “I knew it was probably coming when I found out about his cancer diagnosis, but now that it’s here…”

“Hey,” Melendez kissed her temple, “You know it’s okay to cry. You don’t always have to be a hard ass.”

Lim chuckled a little and wiped her cheeks again, “He was like a father to me.”

“He was like a father to everyone at St. Bonaventure,” Melendez remembered fondly, “But you and I know Dr. Glassman wouldn’t want us to be sad. He’d want us to celebrate his life. He’d say something along the lines of not to mope around because of me. You have work to do and patients to save,” Melendez did his best impression of Glassman.

Lim couldn’t help but giggle at Melendez’s awful impression of Glassman. She glanced at her watch, “Well, we better get going if we don’t want to be late.”

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Meanwhile, at the church, many of the other physicians had already arrived to pay their respects, Debbie Wexler standing over the now closed coffin. Jared had flown in from Denver when he heard about Dr. Glassman’s death; Claire had let him know about the former president’s passing, so he had taken an Uber from the airport and changed into dress clothes when he got to the church. He quietly approached Claire, Shaun, Park, and Morgan and laid a hand on Claire’s shoulder. She turned to face him and smiled softly, “Hi Jared,” she gave him a quick embrace.

“Nice to see you all again. Sad that it has to be under these circumstances,” Jared hugged Morgan and shook Park’s hand as well. He turned to Shaun and asked, “How are you doing, Shaun?”

Shaun took a deep, sad breath and said, “Lea has been listening to me whenever I want to talk about Dr. Glassman. She’s been a good friend. Dr. Lim also taught me how to do square breathing whenever I feel sad.”

Jared nodded. The residents heard the church doors open and Lim and Melendez entered hand in hand. Jared furrowed his brow and gestured his head towards his two former supervisors, “They got together after you left,” explained Claire. Jared nodded. He figured it was only a matter of time. He could see the flirty banter between the two of them with their bet where he had worked with Shaun along with the charity gala he had attended during his time as a resident at St. Bonaventure.
The minister stood at the pulpit and everyone found seats in the pews. He cleared his throats, “Friends and family, I welcome you today as we celebrate and honor the life of Dr. Aaron Joel Glassman. Many of us here remember him as president of San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital, others of us here remember him as a friend, but we all remember him as a great man. At this time, Dr. Glassman’s friend, Jessica Preston, would like to say a few words.”

Jessica stood and Lim and Melendez glanced at each other. They both fully expected to run into Jessica again given how close she had been with Glassman, “I can’t really remember a time in my life where I didn’t know Dr. Glassman. He was one of the first surgeons my grandfather hired when he founded St. Bonaventure and as a result, Dr. Glassman’s daughter, Maddie, and I became best friends. I can’t help but hope he’s been reunited with Maddie in some way. Dr. Glassman was always there for me whenever I was going through a personal crisis. He encouraged me to pursue my passion of a law career; he was a shoulder to cry on and a good listener when I had hardships in my life. I tried to be there for him like he was there for me, but I know I was only half the friend Dr. Glassman was to me. Rest easy, Aaron. Say hi to Maddie for me,” Jessica wiped a few tears from her eyes and took her seat.

“Thank you, Jessica. Now, Dr. Neil Melendez would like to say a few words.”

Lim looked at Melendez and squeezed his hand before he went to the front, “Dr. Glassman was my supervising surgeon during my residency at St. Bonaventure, then the chief of surgery, and finally the president for the last several years I’ve been there. He was always challenging me, always pushing me to do my best, helping me become a great surgeon. One of his biggest pieces of advice to me was to compete with no one other than myself. I think everyone who was around when I was a resident knows who I was always competing with,” he glanced over at Lim and she chuckled along with the rest of the audience, “But he knew how to get me to do my best and improve my skills without outright saying anything. And I think that’s what I’ll miss most about Dr. Glassman,” he forced back a few tears, “Watch over us, Dr. Glassman. We’ll all miss you at St. Bonaventure,” Melendez stepped down from the podium and briefly locked eyes with Jessica, though they did nothing more than smile sadly at each other before he returned to his place next to Lim.

“And lastly, Dr. Shaun Murphy would like to speak.”

Lea rubbed Shaun’s shoulder encouragingly and Shaun slowly made his way to the front of the room. He didn’t look at anyone in front of him instead focusing on his eulogy written down word for word on paper. He finally took a deep breath and said, “Dr. Glassman was my friend. He tried to help me save my bunny and then promised me that my bunny had gone to Heaven when he couldn’t save it,” Shaun took a long pause to compose his thoughts, “He also took me in after I lost my brother, who also went to Heaven. I think Dr. Glassman is in Heaven with my bunny and my brother...” Shaun glanced up and noticed the amount of people in the church. He began to hyperventilate upon seeing the crowd.

“Shaun,” Dr. Lim raised her voice some and his eyes locked with hers.

Shaun remembered what she had taught him and he took a square breath, “Dr. Glassman helped me when I was having trouble at St. Bonaventure and always stood up for me. Now he gets to stand up for my bunny and Steve in Heaven,” Shaun stiffly turned towards the coffin and said, “I love you, Dr. Glassman. Pet my bunny and say hello to Steve for me.”

After the casket had been buried, the majority of the congregants left to go to Debbie’s house for condolences, though a few people stayed behind to say their final goodbyes. Jessica was crouched
down in front of the grave, tears streaming down her cheeks. Lim turned to Melendez and said, “You go ahead to the car. I’ll catch up with you in a minute.”

“Okay,” Melendez nodded and headed towards his Tesla.

Lim walked over to the grave and cleared her throat, “I’m very sorry for your loss, I know how much Dr. Glassman meant to you.”

Jessica glanced up at Lim and stood, “Yeah, well, he meant just as much to you. Hell, he knew you and Neil almost as long as he knew me.”

Lim chuckled, “Yeah.”

The two women stayed silent for a few moments before Jessica spoke, “I don’t even know why I tried to go after him.”

“I’m sorry?” asked Lim in confusion.

“Why I even tried to date or marry Neil. I mean come on, Audrey. Ten years ago, I was fresh out of law school; you and Neil were beginning your internships. Sure, we were all in our late twenties, but we were young and stupid when it came to romance. We both thought Neil was attractive, but it was always you.”

“Jessica…”

“No I’m serious. The only reason we ever pursued a relationship or got engaged was because I falsely led him on,” said Jessica.

“Jess, I had Kashal for the first several years we knew each other,” reminded Lim.

“I know, but you both were like oil and water. But come on, Audrey, think about it? Whenever Neil lost a patient, who would he go to for comfort? You. When his dumb ass ran out of gas and he had to call a tow truck, who did he call to pick him up from the mechanic? You. Who would he always go out with for celebratory drinks after work? You. I mean, my God, that time we were talking about our wedding in front of you, your questions showed you were clearly jealous.”

“No I wasn’t!” defended Lim.

“Audrey, your voice was in such a catty tone you would’ve made Regina George proud,” Lim scowled confusingly, “Mean Girls,” clarified Jessica.

“Never seen it,” said Lim.

(Of course you haven’t,” joked Jessica.

“Look, Jessica, I’m not asking for your blessing, because I don’t really expect it, but I do want to let you know my side of the story. I had a crush on Neil ever since I started at St. Bonav venture, but I didn’t think he was interested in me because he was always competing with me at things, even though I was only competing with myself. And there you were. You were…you are beautiful, you were poised, you were smart, you were confident. I mean I always acted like I was, but I wasn’t back then. I was such a tomboy and I still am. I was nerdy, I was weird. I mean, I wore comic book t-shirts out in public. I never thought I could compete against someone like you, so I just bottled up my feelings and stayed back, didn’t get involved in the race. But I love him now, and I’m not going to apologize for it. With that said, I’m also not going to play the role of nasty girlfriend who’s jealous of my boyfriend’s ex, so if you want to talk about Dr. Glassman, I’ll listen.”
Jessica sighed, “Thank you, Audrey, that means a lot, but I think I’m okay,” Lim nodded and began to walk towards Melendez’s car, “As long as you make Neil happy, then you have my blessing.”

Lim stopped briefly before continuing her pace, though she couldn’t help but smile smugly to herself at Jessica’s words.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

A/N: this note is serving as an FYI that this chapter talks about miscarriage.

The phone in the ER rang informing the staff that an ambulance was less than ten minutes away from St. Bonaventure. Morgan and Park were assigned to the ER this rotation and it had been a quiet shift before now. When the ambulance arrived, all three physicians immediately went to assess the situation, “Patient is an eight year old female, Casey Garrison, she collapsed at soccer practice but regained consciousness on the ride here, complaining of shortness of breath and chest pain, she also has an arrhythmia,” informed the EMT.

“Any history of congenital heart disease?” asked Park.

“None known,” informed an older woman, whom the doctors assumed was Casey’s mother.

Lim listened to Casey’s heartbeat for several moments before she put her stethoscope back around her neck. She smiled warmly at the young girl, who looked absolutely terrified, as she was reaching out for her mother, who took her daughter’s hand, “Hi Casey, I’m Dr. Lim and this is Dr. Reznick and Dr. Park. Is it okay if I ask you a few questions?” she looked over at the girl’s mother, silently asking for her permission before looking back at Casey.

“Of course,” the mother said, “I’m Martha Garrison, by the way, Casey’s mother,” the woman explained.

Lim gently smiled and asked Casey, “So you play soccer?” Casey nodded mutely, “Have you ever had chest pain before?”

Casey shook her head, “No,” she finally uttered.

“How about a feeling that your heart is racing inside of your chest?” asked Lim softly.

Casey hiccupped amongst her tears, but nodded, “Yes.”

“How about trouble catching your breath when you run?” asked Lim again. More silence, but Casey nodded once more. She turned to Morgan and Park, “Do you mind if Dr. Reznick and Dr. Park take a listen to your heart?”

Both Casey and Martha shook their heads, so Lim had both of the residents take a listen. Lim pulled Martha aside and Martha asked, “So what’s wrong with my daughter?”

“It could be a number of things, Mrs. Garrison, but right now, I’m going to page cardiology and have one of our cardiothoracic surgeons run a few tests so we can determine a cause,” informed Lim.

“Will she need surgery?” asked Martha worriedly.

“Not necessarily. It could be something as simple as overexertion, but it’s better to be safe than sorry,” said Lim, “Dr. Reznick, page the cardiology department and Dr. Melendez and have them
prepare an EKG and an echo lab, possibly an MRI machine depending on those results,” ordered Lim.

“Right away, Dr. Lim,” said Morgan. Both Martha and Casey still looked terrified, so Lim smiled again and said, “Well Casey, in order to see what’s wrong with your heart, we’re going to have a doctor who specializes in treating heart things take some pictures of your heart using a machine that’s like one when a mommy has a baby in her tummy.”

“Are you coming with me?” asked Casey.

Lim sighed and shook her head, “No, but I promise you that Dr. Melendez is one of the best doctors here at St. Bonaventure. He’ll take great care of you, okay?” Casey nodded.

Morgan stuck her head into the triage room and said, “A few nurses will be down in a few minutes to take Casey to cardiology.”

“Oh, thank you, Dr. Reznick,” confirmed Lim. She turned to Martha and asked, “Do you have any other family members you’d like to be here? If they come to the ER, I can direct them to cardiology.”

“My husband is on his way from work. I’m going to call him and let him know what’s going on,” said Martha, “Thank you.”

Martha left the room, leaving Lim and Casey alone. Lim didn’t want to make Casey feel uncomfortable, so she asked, “So is soccer your favorite sport?”

Casey nodded, “I’ve been playing since I was three. I also like baseball, but not to play, just to watch. Daddy and I go to Giants games during the summer.”

“Now there’s something we have in common. I love watching the Giants play. Where I’m from, baseball is very popular.”

“Where are you from?” asked Casey.

“Um, Taiwan. It’s a small island country in Asia near China,” explained Lim.

“Princess Mulan is from China,” smiled Casey.

“Yeah, she is,” nodded Lim, “But personally, my favorite Disney princess is Merida.”

“Oh, mine is Belle,” answered Casey.

Martha came back into the room and rubbed her daughter’s head, “Daddy’s on his way, sweetheart. He should be here in a few minutes.”

“Oh Mommy,” said Casey. She turned to Lim and asked, “Dr. Lim, are you a mommy?”

“Casey Noelle Garrison!” scolded Martha, “I’m sorry doctor, she always asks the most off the wall questions to people.”

“That’s okay, I know how curious children can be,” said Lim. She turned to Casey, but hesitated before she said, “No, I’m not a mommy.”

“Why not? You’d be good at it,” said Casey.

Lim couldn’t help but think back to that one awful day during her first year as an attending
surgeon. A sad smile crept onto her face, but she tried to soften it for Casey’s sake, “Just hasn’t worked out that way so far.”

A few nurses came into the room, “Dr. Lim, Dr. Melendez and the cardiology department are ready for Ms. Garrison.”

“Oh, okay,” nodded Lim. She turned to Casey and said, “Well, I have to get going and so do you.”

“If I’m still here tomorrow, can you come and see me?” asked Casey with a puppy dog look in her eyes.

“Casey, I’m sure Dr. Lim is very busy,” said Martha.

“That’s alright; I think I can find the time. But hopefully I won’t have to visit you tomorrow because you won’t be here,” said Lim.

“Oh, okay,” smiled Casey as the nurses wheeled her away.

Lim turned to find Morgan standing behind her, a look of utter disbelief on her face, “What?”

“No, nothing,” stated Morgan, “I just never knew you were that great with children.”

“Well, I guess I am. But being a trauma surgeon and being a mother don’t really go together well and the universe had it’s way of letting me know that. Now we have other patients, Dr. Reznick,” said Lim in a tone that told Morgan to drop the subject.

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Later that night, Lim arrived home from work and Melendez was already at her house. They had decided to stay at her house since it was a bit larger and closer to the hospital, but they wouldn’t be transferring all of his stuff until that weekend. Melendez was reading on the couch, but glanced up and smiled when he heard the door open, “And there’s St. Bonaventure’s badass trauma surgeon.”

“Neil,” she scolded jokingly and hung up her jacket on the hook.

Melendez smirked and kissed her cheek, “So how was your day?”

Lim sighed, “It was alright,” she told Melendez only half of the truth.

“Really? Because there was a certain little girl today who thought highly of you,” said Melendez.

Lim hastily turned to face Melendez, “You mean? You mean Casey Garrison?”

“Well, she was the patient you sent up for an EKG and an echo, correct?” asked Melendez for confirmation, “She said you were really good with her.”

“Yeah, Dr. Reznick said the same thing,” sighed Lim, “So what do you want for dinner tonight?” she asked doing her best to change the subject.

Melendez scowled a little as he knew what Lim was doing, but he decided to let it go for now, “Do you have the ingredients for spaghetti?”

“Yes, as long as you don’t mind Prego sauce,” said Lim.

“Believe me, I wouldn’t want any homemade sauce you cooked anyways,” he joked and she glared at him and smacked his chest playfully. They spent the rest of the night talking about nonsense
stuff; well, it wasn’t completely nonsense, but more about finishing the moving in together process or what Lim was planning on doing while Melendez was at practice for the little league team he coached. Once nighttime arrived, they both settled into bed, Melendez hesitating before he brought up Lim’s obvious secret, “I didn’t mean to offend you earlier, you know.”

“About what?” she asked.

“About how you interact with patients,” said Melendez.

“Oh,” said Lim, fearing Melendez was going to further the conversation.

“Audrey, you’ve been acting a little strange lately. Ever since Dr. Murphy talked about us getting married and having kids,” mentioned Melendez.

Lim hadn’t really noticed that in herself, but she decided to believe him, “Well, I’m sure Dr. Murphy was just trying to make connections and most people who love each other get married and have children,” she reiterated.

“I know, but do you see us eventually getting married and having children?” asked Melendez apprehensively. This was a conversation where he was going to be direct. If Lim didn’t want children, he needed to end it now, “Do you not want children?”

Lim sighed sadly, “No, I wouldn’t mind having a few kids. I just don’t know if it’s meant to be.”

Melendez was so confused, “Are you saying you’re not able to have children?”

“No, I really don’t want to talk about it,” stated Lim firmly.

“If not now, then when Aud? You know what Dr. Jacobson said, you’re supposed to talk about your feelings,” warned Melendez lightly.

“That’s for the PTSD and my experience with having SARS, not this, Neil!” she shouted. She had some tears in her eyes.

“Audrey, that advice applies to other things. Now please tell me what’s bothering you,” said Melendez with more compassion this time.

Lim tried to stop herself, but she continued to cry. She sniffed and swallowed before she said, “Do you remember that time right after we officially became attendings where I was really sick with the flu and then Kashal had to rush me to the emergency room because I was vomiting so much, I became dehydrated?”

“Yeah,” Melendez recalled.

Lim took a square breath before continuing, “The fatigue and the nausea and vomiting weren’t from the flu. I was pregnant. And the reason Kashal had to take me to the ER wasn’t because I was dehydrated. It was because I was having severe cramps and bleeding,” Melendez’s eyes widened and he took a deep breath since he had the feeling he knew where this confession was headed, “I lost the baby at nine weeks. And sure, Kashal and I were rocky before then, but that’s when it all went to hell in a hand basket. I dealt with my grief by throwing myself into my work; he wanted me to just get over it. His exact words were, ’At least it happened early, you shouldn’t be this upset.’ He had no idea how devastated I was; sure, it hadn’t been planned, but I wanted that baby so badly. After that day, we were never the same and four months later, we were signing divorce papers. I was supposed to become a mother and instead, I became a statistic and our marriage became a statistic... and just hearing Dr. Murphy and Casey talk about how great of a mother I’d be just
makes me feel guilty because I couldn’t even protect my baby. As a mother, I was supposed to nurture it and provide it a safe home to grow and instead I lost it. And it’s something I’ll never forget,” Melendez didn’t say anything, so Lim finally asked, “You’re not going to say anything?”

Melendez shook his head, “No. You don’t need me to say anything; you just needed me to listen. I can’t tell you how you feel or how you should or shouldn’t react.”

Lim didn’t say anything, “Thank you…for not saying all of the BS phrases that I had to hear when I miscarried.”

Lim snuggled closer to Melendez against his chest and he could hear her crying still. Quite frankly, he didn’t really know what to say because he had no experience with miscarriage other than from a clinical standpoint, “Did you…did you want to talk about anything else?”

Lim sniffled and said, “No, I’m fine right here next to you,” more silence before Lim spoke again, “He or she would’ve turned five this year.”

Melendez smiled, but was also tad horrified at the prospect of a mini-Audrey, “And I’m sure he or she would’ve been beautiful just like his or her mother.” Melendez didn’t hear Lim respond, so he glanced down in the hopes he hadn’t upset her any further. But when he found her fast asleep against his chest, he kissed the top of her head and closed his eyes himself.
Chapter 29

Lim didn’t sleep much that night. It was the first time in a while that she had a nightmare and she had forgotten how terrifying they were. Naturally, she was the first one up, so she showered and dressed before going downstairs to start the coffee. Melendez came down not long after, also exhausted from lack of sleep. Lim turned to face him and smiled softly, “Morning,” she quietly greeted.

“Morning,” he smiled and kissed her. She seemed pretty stiff, almost embarrassed, “Is something wrong?”

Lim sighed, “No,” she lied.

“Audrey,” Melendez raised an eyebrow.

Lim finally surrendered, “I had my first nightmare in a couple months,” she admitted sheepishly.

“Oh,” Melendez acknowledged. So that explained Lim’s tossing and turning the night beforehand, “Did you…want to talk about it?”

Lim shook her head, “No, not right now, Neil. Maybe later tonight.”

“Okay,” Melendez said, relieved that she had agreed to talk about it.

“I just thought I was past them, that’s all. It’s embarrassing to take two steps forward only to take one step back,” she admitted.

Melendez squeezed her hand and said, “Everyone recovers at their own pace, sweetheart,” his face fell. He had never really called Lim any cutesy nicknames before now, “Um, is it okay if I call you that?”

Lim chuckled a little and nodded, “Yes, in the privacy of our own home,” she liked the sound of that: our home. She stood and walked around the table, laying a hand on Melendez’s shoulder, “But if you call me that at work, I’ll kill you with my bare hands,” she whispered in his ears.

Melendez nodded, perfectly understanding the context of the threat, “Yes ma’am.”

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When the pair arrived at work, they went their separate ways and Melendez went to find Shaun and Claire. When Claire saw her superior, she hastened her stride to catch up with him, “Dr. Melendez?”

“What do you have for me?” he asked her.

“You ordered a cardiac MRI for Casey Garrison today?” asked Claire.

“That’s correct,” Melendez confirmed.

“She says she won’t go unless the doctor from the ER comes with her,” explained Claire.

Melendez looked at Claire in confusion, “You mean Dr. Lim?”

“Well, she is the doctor that normally covers the ER,” said Claire.
Melendez sighed and said, “Go get Casey ready for the MRI. I’ll go see if I can find Audrey.”

Luckily, both Cooperberg and Lim were covering the ER that day and he agreed to let her go for the time being. By the time Melendez and Lim got to the MRI room, Casey was already prepared and George and Martha Garrison had followed the proper protocol to join her in the room. Melendez and Lim entered the observation room where Shaun and Claire were already seated. Lim pushed the button to turn on the microphone and spoke, “Hey Casey, it’s me. It’s Dr. Lim. Are you ready to be sent into the giant donut?”

“Yes,” everyone heard her say.

“Okay, we’re going to put you in slowly,” said Claire.

After about thirty minutes in the machine, Casey started to squirm out of impatience and anxiety, “Casey, I need you to lie still just a little bit longer,” said Melendez, though the young girl wasn’t calming down any.

Lim was quick to think on her feet and took over the microphone from Melendez, “Hey Casey, it’s been awhile since I’ve seen Beauty and the Beast. Can you tell me what happens again?”

Claire and Melendez both scowled a little, but Casey began to calmly explain the plot, “Belle’s mommy dies when she’s little and her Daddy goes to prison in a cursed beast’s castle when she’s older….”

“Keep going, Casey, you’re doing great,” said Melendez.

“She makes friends in the beast’s castle and she eventually falls in love with him, but Gaston wants to kill him. She also rescues her Daddy. Belle ends up kissing the beast…” Casey started to panic a little.

“Before the last rose petal falls,” said Melendez and Lim simultaneously and then chuckled a little.

“And the beast becomes a prince again,” said Casey.

“And they all live happily ever after,” they all three said at the same time.

Shaun didn’t seem to notice, but Claire couldn’t help but laugh quietly to herself. Lim and Melendez had only been together four months and they were already one of “those” couples that finished each other’s sentences and were in tune to each other’s thoughts, “You did great, Casey. We’re going to get you out of there now.”

The nurses rolled Casey back to ICU while Lim and Melendez went to the cafeteria for their lunch break, “I didn’t think of you as a fan of Disney movies,” Lim teased.

“I’ve seen nearly every one. Gabi loved Disney growing up. I used to lie in her room and watch them for hours with her and sometimes we still do. The Little Mermaid is her favorite. How about you? You are certainly not the ‘and they all lived happily ever after’ kind of gal.”

Lim sighed, “Before my father and I had such a tense relationship, we used to go see Disney movies together. It was just about the only girly thing about me when I was growing up.”

“Oh,” Melendez stated. He only knew bits about Lim’s father. She had always been closer with her mother.

Shaun came running into the cafeteria, “Dr. Melendez, Casey Garrison has hypertrophic
cardiomyopathy,” he glanced towards the ceiling and handed the iPad to Melendez.

“You better go and tell the family,” said Lim.

“Okay, I’ll see you later,” said Melendez and left.

Shaun stood next to the table awkwardly and Lim looked up at him, “You need something from me, Murphy?”

Shaun shook his head, “No. I always eat lunch at 2:00 and it’s only 1:58,” he pointed to the clock in the cafeteria.

“I see,” acknowledged Lim.

“You’re also sitting at the table and in the seat where I always sit,” said Shaun.

Lim sighed, “Okay, I have to get back to the ER anyways,” she stood and Shaun immediately took her place staring at the clock and only began to eat his turkey sandwich when the clock struck two.

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Lim left later that night since she had an emergency come in at the last minute, but thankfully, it had been an easy stitch. She arrived home but Melendez wasn’t anywhere to be found, “Neil?” she called out.

Melendez came down the stairs already dressed in his pajamas, “Hi Audrey,” he kissed her.

“Seriously, do you always dress in your pajamas at the crack of 6:00?” she asked curiously.

Melendez shrugged, “Sometimes earlier if I get home earlier.”

Lim chuckled, “You’re such an asshat sometimes, you know that?”

“But I’m your asshat,” he smirked and stole another kiss. Melendez took a deep breath and hesitantly asked, “Did you still want to talk about last night?”

“About?” Lim raised an eyebrow.

“About your dream,” Melendez reminded gently.

“Oh,” Lim sighed, “You can’t remember when I tell you to take out the trash, but you can remember that?”

“Lim…” Melendez interrupted, preventing her from changing subjects.

Lim swallowed, “Fine,” they went over to the couch and Lim twiddled her hands around each other before she said, “It was the recurring dream in the ER,” she admitted quietly.

“Was it the one with the three patients haunting you?” Melendez asked softly.

Lim held back tears and shook her head, “I wasn’t the one who was sick.”

“Then who was?”

“It was you,” Melendez widened his eyes in surprise, “I…I was perfectly fine. You were the one to get the virus. I did my best to save you, but I couldn’t. You…you died. And then…well that’s
when I woke up screaming.”

“I see,” Melendez finally managed to say.

“I don’t understand. You’ve never been in my dreams before. Actually, you have, but…well, that part doesn’t matter. You’ve never been in my nightmares before last night,” she blushed, “I don’t know what happened. I was doing so well…”

“Audrey,” Melendez grabbed her hand, “It takes time. You know that symptoms might still appear sometimes.”

“But…but if I don’t know what triggered it, I can’t stop it,” her voice quivered a little.

“Well, I can’t be 100% certain that this is what caused the nightmare, but it has been awhile since we’ve had a date or…” he trailed off.

“Had sex, Neil. You can say it,” she scolded lightly.

He tucked her hair behind her ear and said, “Tell you what? How about this weekend we do a proper date and then…” he winked.

She covered her mouth and giggled before she nodded, “I can go online and see if I can get some good seats for the Giants/Dodgers game on Saturday?”

Melendez grinned seductively, “Maybe we can make a whole day out of it?”

“Mm. That sounds like fun,” she leaned her forehead against his.

“Good,” he said satisfied.

“Well, my laptop is upstairs, so I’ll go see what’s available,” she said, “Why don’t you get started on dinner. And by that, I don’t mean ordering pizza, Chinese take-out, or drive through,” she agitated.

“I’m not that terrible of a chef, Lim!” he shouted, though she hadn’t heard him. He laughed to himself and started on dinner, asking himself a few questions in the process. He knew it was a bit early in the relationship yet, so he would probably wait a few more months before considering it again. He was always one to take things slow and not rush into anything, but at the same time there was the age old adage, “When you know, you know.”
The weekend arrived and thankfully, Casey Garrison had stabilized enough to be able to go home on medication, though she couldn’t participate on her soccer team for the rest of the season. She would need follow-up visits to monitor her condition as well. Lim woke up, thankfully nightmare free, and rolled over to find Melendez stirring awake as well. He rolled over and smiled softly, still not quite believing Lim was actually his. He kissed her and asked, “How’d you sleep?”

Lim sighed, “Well enough. Looking forward to today,” she smirked.

Melendez smirked, “For the game or after the game?”

She chuckled, “Both,” she admitted truthfully.

They both kissed passionately, “Or we could just stay here all day,” said Melendez.

“Neil, I paid good money for those tickets. They’re not going to waste,” she scolded jokingly, throwing off the covers. She ran her hand over his chest and grinned, “But if you’re well behaved today, you might get something extra special later tonight.”

Melendez shifted in bed, already longing to know what Lim had planned, “Well, then I’ll be your perfect little angel all day.”

Lim glared at him jokingly, “It’s physically impossible for you to be a perfect little angel.”

“You ain’t no saint, Lim!” he teased.

“Yeah, yeah,” she called from the bathroom, “Shut up and start getting ready if we want to get to San Fran at a decent time.”

The pair grabbed breakfast before they hit the road, both looking forward to getting away from home and the hospital for the day. Lim had been contemplating bringing up something to Melendez for a while, but she had chickened out whenever she thought about mentioning it. Living together was going smoothly enough; sure they had some stupid fights here and there, but nothing they hadn’t compromised on in the end. They had made their relationship known to the rest of the hospital, but there were still people they hadn’t told, namely Melendez’s parents, Gabi, and Josh.

“Hey Neil?”

“Hmm?” he asked, not taking his eyes off of the road.

“You’d say we’re doing pretty well, right?” asked Lim hesitantly.

“In life or with each other?” he asked for clarification.

“With us,” she confirmed.

“Sure, we don’t scream in each other’s faces when we argue, we’re adjusting to living together, our relationship is no longer clouding our judgment at work. Why?” asked Melendez.

Lim sighed before she said, “Because I think it’s time to reveal our relationship to our families.”

Melendez nodded his understanding, but didn’t say anything for a few moments, “I can guarantee
you Gabi will be thrilled."

“No, I know. And I’m sure your parents will be too. It’s my brother I’m worried about,” admitted Lim.

It had been awhile since Josh had come to San Jose for a visit, a few Christmases ago to be exact. It had been the Christmas after Melendez and Jessica had gotten engaged, so the four of them had spent the holiday together. Sure, Josh had a busy life in Dallas, but it’s not like he wasn’t a good older brother to Lim, “Why are you afraid to tell him?”

Lim sighed, “I don’t know. Just that even though we’re 36 and 44, he still thinks of me as his little sister that he needs to protect. Even more so ever since my divorce, which I don’t get because he’s gotten divorced too,” she trailed off, “Anyways, I digress. He wants to come up to San Jose for my birthday and just to see me.”

“And he doesn’t know about us,” finished Melendez.

“I mean, he knows we’re friends, but not ‘friends,’” Lim used quotes for emphasis, “It’s not that I think he won’t like you or anything, he’s just been so worried about me with my lungs and the PTSD, I haven’t had the heart to tell him about us. Not that I’m embarrassed by you or anything, he just is an overprotective fool sometimes,” Lim quickly added.

Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle. Josh Lim had not been a happy camper after he had found out about Kashal and Lim’s divorce, “I remember.”

“And, of course, with us living together, he’s going to find out,” said Lim, “So, I think it’s only fair we tell everyone. I’m fairly stable both physically and mentally, we’re fairly stable…I think it’s time.”

Melendez finally reached over and grabbed her hand, “Agreed. So when is your brother coming to visit?”

“He wants to fly in the last week of June, my birthday weekend,” answered Lim.

“Well, then maybe we can all go out to dinner for your birthday then,” he said.

Once they arrived in San Francisco, they spent the day visiting the kitschy tourist attractions (and probably acting like two idiots, but they didn’t care). Lim showed Melendez around Chinatown, reflectively describing the Lunar New Year celebration that took place there that she had annually attended with her family as a child. Once the game finally rolled around, Melendez couldn’t help but laugh at the fact that he was almost positive that Lim could be a spokesperson for the San Francisco Giants. Even though the Dodgers beat the Giants that night, the couple still had a good time. Once they arrived home, Lim hadn’t been kidding about having a surprise for Melendez (she must have paid a visit to Victoria’s Secret at the local mall, which pretty much proved her love for him given the fact that she usually avoided shopping malls at all costs). Soon, they were just lying in bed in silence, though they were both thoroughly satisfied, “Why can’t every day be like today?” she rambled absentmindedly.

“What do you mean?” asked Melendez.

“No difficult cases, no complex surgeries, no work related stress, no petty fights, no flashbacks or other PTSD symptoms, no doctor’s appointments for lungs; just you and me without a care in the world. The only thing that could’ve made today better is if the Giants hadn’t gotten their asses handed to them by their biggest rival,” she rambled absentmindedly.
Melendez couldn’t help but smile to himself, “I guess if every day was like today, then it wouldn’t be special.”

“Agreed,” Lim smiled cutely, the smile that made his heart just melt.

He rolled onto his side, kissed her, and stroked her cheek, “I love you so damn much.”

“I love you too,” she answered back and then yawned, “Well, it’s been a long day.”

“Yes, it has,” Melendez agreed. He kissed her again, “Have a good night.”

Lim didn’t answer, but instead set the oxygen machine to the right setting and closed her eyes. Melendez couldn’t help but watch her sleep peacefully. He loved this woman more than life itself and it made him wonder why he ever held back for so long. As every day passed, he could picture a future with her in it more and more. Waking up beside her every morning, teasing each other (both at work and home), going on adventures together, raising a family together (she had confirmed she wanted a few kids, so that was a plus for him), and growing old together. He listened to the steady hum of the oxygen machine and Lim’s quiet breathing before he finally drifted off to sleep himself.
When Lim and Melendez told Gabi about their relationship, as predicted, she was very happy for them (but they had no doubt she would be). Once the weekend of Lim’s birthday rolled around, Lim insisted that she be the one to pick up Josh from the airport and tell them about their relationship on the ride back to their house. Friday June 28th arrived, though Josh’s flight wasn’t supposed to get in until early evening after Lim finished with work for the day. Lim was just getting ready to leave for the airport when Melendez briefly stopped her, “So what’s the plan for tonight?”

“I’ll pick up Josh from the airport, I’ll tell him everything on the ride here while he’s trapped in a car, and if he doesn’t like it, I’m more than happy to leave him on the side of the road,” explained Lim.

Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle, “That’s my girl,” he kissed her, “Josh is staying at a hotel though, right?”

“Unless he’s willing to sleep on the floor, the couch, or the same bed as us, yes,” she smirked, “I have to get going. I’ll see you soon.”

Thankfully, there was no traffic on the way to the airport, so Lim was able to stand on the other side of security waiting for Josh’s flight to come in. She smiled broadly when he saw her coming towards her, “Limmy!” he hugged her excitedly.

“Josh, for Pete’s sake, we’re full-grown adults. You no longer need to call me that,” scolded Lim.

“Sorry,” he apologized, though she knew he didn’t mean it.

“How was your flight?” she asked as they went towards the parking lot.

“Long, squished, boring,” he admitted, “So what’s the plan for tonight?”

“Well, I found Mom’s recipe for beef noodle soup, so I was thinking some of that for dinner,” Lim smiled.

“Sounds great. Though I’m pretty sure it’ll never be quite as great as Mom’s,” he joked.

Lim glared and smacked his chest playfully before getting into the driver’s seat, “You’re still such an ass.”

Once they were on the road, they had forty minutes to kill with conversation, so Josh hesitantly spoke, “So, how have your lungs been?”

“Pretty good,” she admitted, “Last appointment they were up to 80%, no majors scares since I got pneumonia.”

“That’s good,” Josh sighed in relief, “And…the other thing?”

Lim sighed, “The main thing I still struggle with is nightmares,” Josh nodded, not planning to further the subject, “Enough about me, how have you been?”

“Good, I got a promotion at work, which included a raise,” he said proudly, “So is it just going to be you and me tonight?”
“It’s now or never,” thought Lim to herself, “No, Neil is going to be with us.”

“Oh, you invited him over tonight?” asked Josh curiously.

“Kind of have to. He lives there,” said Lim bluntly.


“Yeah, it often happens when people are in relationships,” added Lim.

“You’re in a relationship with Neil? I thought you both were just friends?”

“We were. And now we’re more than friends. Have been since February,” continued Lim.

“And you’re already living together?” asked Josh. Lim shrugged, “Sis, may I remind you about how your last relationship went?”

“Into the crapper the way yours did,” said Lim backhandedly, “And I took things slow with Kashal and it worked out great didn’t it? So if it feels right, that’s all that matters,” she said assertively.

Josh burrowed his brow in confusion, “Wait a minute? I thought he was dating that blonde chick?”

“Who, Jessica? He was, but she dumped him because she didn’t want kids,” explained Lim, “Now, Neil will be with us this weekend, we’re dating, and if you have a problem with it, I can either leave you on the side of the road or turn this car around, drive straight back to the airport, and buy you a ticket back to Dallas or Taipei.”

“Alrighty then,” said Josh and the two siblings went into complete silence.

“You’re pissed,” commented Lim.

Josh shook his head, “No, it’s your life, you do what you want. Just think you’re moving a little fast. What are you going to do next? Elope?” Lim threatened to turn the car around until Josh stopped her, “Okay, okay, I’m sorry. I’ll behave.”

They arrived at Lim’s house and Lim unlocked the front door, though Melendez wasn’t on the first floor, so she called out, “Neil?”

“Upstairs, Audrey!” shouted Melendez.

“Josh is here,” she said in a tone that told him to come down the stairs.

It took a few more moments before Melendez made his way down the stairs, smiling when he saw his girlfriend, “Hi,” he kissed her, “Josh,” he greeted.

“Neil,” said Josh a little bitterly.

Lim did her best to break the tension, “Well, I’ll get dinner started. There’s beer in the fridge if either one of you two want some.”

“I thought you weren’t supposed to be drinking?” asked Josh.

“I’m not supposed to drinking a lot. Neil has been checking up on me to make sure I’m not using it as a coping mechanism,” defended Lim.

Lim could hear Melendez and Josh in the living room, mostly talking about sports and what not. At
least they were getting along well enough. Once dinner was finished, they all sat down to eat before Josh apprehensively began the conversation, “So, Audrey says you’ve been together since February?”

“Yes, we have,” Melendez confirmed.

"Moving kind of quickly aren’t you? I mean, living together after only four months of dating?" urged Josh.

“Josh…” scolded Lim through gritted teeth.

“Right, behave myself,” Josh reminded himself, “Who am I to question how my sister repays her debt to the person who saved her life?”

“Is that what you think I’m doing?” asked Lim angrily.

“Hey, Audrey has had enough problems with nightmares and stress because of that day, we don’t need you adding to it,” Melendez defended.

“It’s okay, Neil. I’m a big girl, I can take care of myself,” said Lim and turned to Josh, “I don’t know why you’ve been so invested in my personal life ever since my divorce. Was it devastating for me at the time, yes, but I moved on with my life. And it’s pretty damn hypocritical that you care so much about my divorce when your ass is divorced as well. Well, let me tell you Josh. I’m not dating Neil as a way to repay him for saving my life. I’m dating him because I love him. And he makes me happy, which is something I hadn’t been in a really long time. I mean, I love my job, truly, but I wanted a life outside of work as well. Someone whom I could be vulnerable with, someone whom I could love, support, and compete against somewhat, someone who would hold me when I cry, someone whom I can share my hopes and dreams with, someone I can raise a family with, and someone I can spend the rest of my life with. And I know this is the most cliché phrase on the planet, but when you know, you know,” Lim stood and opened the door, “Now get out of our house.” Melendez and Lim both liked the sound of it: our house.

Josh scowled, “Aren’t you going to drive me to the hotel.”

“That’s what Uber’s for; you’re not behaving, GO!” Lim ordered.

Josh shook his head and silently left, Melendez thoroughly impressed at how much of a boss woman Lim could be, even with her own brother. It's honestly what made him fall for her in the first place, “Did you really mean all that?”

“Mean what?” asked Lim.

“About us…spending the rest of our lives together, raising a family, eventually marrying, supporting and competing with each other at the same time. You really meant all of that?” asked Melendez.

Lim thought about it and smiled, “You know, I might have been rambling because I was pissed at my brother, but I meant every word I said. So…now that we don’t have to keep Josh entertained for the night, what did you want to do?”

Melendez knew exactly what he wanted to do. He didn’t know why, but Lim being overly bossy and assertive turned him on tremendously. Not always ideal at work, but useful behind closed bedroom doors. He stepped a little closer to her, a look of hunger in his eyes, “Well, there is one thing I had in mind.”
Lim looked at Melendez skeptically. She knew his eager ‘look’, “Neil…”

“What you asked me what I wanted to do,” Melendez swept his lips against hers to which she made no hesitation to kiss him back, “When you get all bossy and assertive like that, you also become so…sexy,” he groaned.

Lim went to say something more, but it came out as a surprised squeal when Melendez swiftly lifted her into his arms and carried her to their bedroom.
Melendez awoke the next morning and rolled over to face Lim, though she wasn’t lying next to him at the moment, “Audrey?”

“In the bathroom!” she called.

Melendez smiled to himself as he pulled Lim’s birthday present out from under the bed. She came out and he smiled, “Happy birthday, Audrey,” he handed her the package.

“Neil,” she blushed, “You better not have paid a lot of money for this.”

“Well, then you’ll be severely disappointed,” he admitted. She gave him a skeptical look as she unwrapped the gift, a 2014 San Francisco Giants World Series Champions autographed picture, “Figured it could be hung on the wall of that shrine to the San Francisco Giants you call a basement.”

“Maybe on the wall of the living room for all to see would be better,” she kissed him, “Thank you,” she began to get dressed, though she noticed her jeans were a little tight, so she switched to her jogging shorts, “I have to run to Walgreens to pick up some prescriptions. Josh should be over soon. Please don’t kick his ass no matter what he says. He’s still my brother,” warned Lim.

“Okay, I’ll see you later,” said Melendez. After Lim left, it wasn’t long before Josh arrived, so Melendez answered the door when he knocked, “Josh.”

“Neil,” he greeted. Melendez stepped aside to let him into the house, “Where’s Audrey?”

“She had to run to Walgreens to get some prescriptions filled. She has inhalers and other stuff she has to use.”

“Got you,” said Josh. He stuck his hands into his pockets, “Listen…about last night, I was way out of line with what I said to you. Audrey had every right to throw me out of the house.”

“Apoloity accepted,” said Melendez, though there was still tension between the two of them, “You want some beer or something?”

“You have coffee?” asked Josh.

“Sure do,” said Melendez and went to start a pot, “So Audrey tells me you work for an advertising company in Dallas?”

“Mmhm,” confirmed Josh, “And you do cardiothoracic surgery, correct?”

“Yes sir,” answered Melendez, “A lot different from trauma surgery, that’s for sure.”

They both sat down on the couch and stayed silent, before Josh said, “You’re a good guy, you know? It’s not that I’m upset that you and Audrey are seeing each other…I just don’t want to see her get hurt again.”

“I know,” said Melendez.

“I mean, me and Kelly, we sucked as a couple, but we’re still on amicable terms. Kashal and Audrey? That was just ugly. She swore she was never going to fall for anyone again. Not to try to scare you off or anything.”
“No, she said the same thing to me,” Melendez remembered, “One of the reasons I never really told her how I felt until…” Melendez didn’t finish his thought.

Josh nodded understandingly, “Thank you…for saving her,” said Josh.

“It wasn’t just me. If it hadn’t been for two of our quarantined residents, we would’ve had a different outcome,” admitted Melendez.

Josh’s face looked grim, “I guess I said what I said last night because I feel guilty for not coming to see her.”

“You wouldn’t have been able to get near her while she was in isolation. After she was moved to the ICU and then a regular room, she still really wasn’t up for visitors,” said Melendez.

Josh didn’t say anything for several moments, “I never thought it could happen to Audrey like it did my friend.”

“I’m sorry?” asked Melendez for clarification.

Josh took a deep breath, “During the SARS epidemic in 2003, a friend from primary school in Taiwan got SARS. He didn’t make it. Audrey and I were so scared for our family and friends back home. We were grateful to be living here in the United States. I never dreamed that Audrey would get SARS stateside. Since I’m considered her next of kin at the hospital, when Dr. Andrews called me and told me about her condition…” Josh stopped to compose his thoughts, “Sure we both fought like cats and dogs, sometimes physically even, but I just couldn’t imagine her dying. But at the same time, I was petrified to come to San Jose because I didn’t know if I would be able to handle seeing my badass sister so frail.”

Melendez didn’t say anything, but smiled sadly, “When I was seven and my sister, Gabi, was four, we were playing in our backyard. There was this one really tall tree that our parents told us not to climb, that it was too risky for us. I started climbing it anyways and I was making fun of Gabi for not following suit. Finally, she started climbing so I’d stop teasing her,” Melendez held back tears, “But it was too high for her. She fell out of the tree and suffered a traumatic brain injury. My family grew up with nothing, so we couldn’t afford her treatments or medication. She now lives in a residential care facility here in San Jose. I remember seeing her lying in a hospital bed, wondering if she was going to live or going to die. I’ve never forgiven myself for teasing her about climbing that tree.”

“It’s why you became a doctor,” commented Josh.

“One of them,” admitted Melendez, “I think no matter how old they are, us older brothers feel the need to protect our little sisters.”

Josh chuckled a little and nodded, “I feel like I didn’t because I was too scared to come.”

“Your sister’s a fighter, Josh. There was no way she was going to let a deadly respiratory virus kill her.”

Josh couldn’t help but smile, “Well, I can’t say I’m ever not going to be protective of Audrey, but I’m glad she has a man like you in her life.”

“Believe me, she doesn’t need me, she chooses to be with me. I will never do anything to hurt her. As an older brother myself, I can’t even begin to imagine what I would do to someone who hurt Gabi. I expect you to be the same way with Audrey or you’d suck as a brother.”
“Neil, I’m home,” Lim said as she opened the front door. She took a whiff of the air and wrinkled her nose, “What the hell is that smell?”

“Coffee,” answered Melendez.

“Oh,” she said, “Well are you boys okay?”

Josh and Melendez glanced at each other, “We’re good,” said Josh.

“Okay, well before we head to lunch, I have to pee again, even though I just went at the Walgreens, so if you’ll excuse me.”

Lim went upstairs and Josh turned to Melendez, “She’s always been a little TMI on things.”

“I’ve noticed,” mentioned Melendez.

At the end of the day, after they had done Lim’s birthday dinner and driven Josh back to the airport, Lim and Melendez arrived home to settle down for the night, “Did you have a good birthday?”

“Yes, thanks to you and it was nice that Josh flew in for it. Glad to see you both getting along better,” she smiled.

“I think if you hadn’t chewed him out, that might not have been the case. But you must’ve enjoyed that chocolate cake because you wolfed it down faster than both of us combined,” said Melendez. Lim smirked again and kissed him.

Melendez deepened the kiss, but Lim pushed him off, “Neil, not tonight. It’s been a really long day and I’ve been kind of run down all week. Doctor said it could sometimes be a side effect of having had SARS.”

Melendez was disappointed, but nodded understandingly, “Alright, good night, Audrey. Happy birthday and I love you.”

“Thank you, and I love you too.”
Chapter 33

She normally thrived on working the graveyard shift in the emergency room. While it was usually somewhat peaceful more often than not, it seemed some of the most exciting and unique cases always came into St. Bonaventure’s emergency room during the wee hours of the night. But instead of wanting to jump right into the action, all Lim wanted to do was collapse from exhaustion. The fatigue that had been plaguing her all last week had not improved and had actually increased tremendously. She had tried to do laundry and other household chores, but she had ended up napping most of the day (that is, if she wasn’t in the bathroom for one reason or another). She wanted so desperately to take the day off, but she had already burned through enough time between the virus, the PTSD, and the pneumonia, so she decided she was going to power through tonight.

She ran into Morgan in the locker room, though neither surgeon said anything to each other than Lim mentioning she had to use the restroom (again). When Morgan reported to the ER, Shaun was pacing around the room while Claire was leaning against the nurses’ station, “Where’s Dr. Lim?” asked Claire in curiosity.

“She had to use the bathroom and then she’ll be in,” answered Morgan.

“Okay, let’s get this shift over with,” said Lim irritably as she entered the emergency room, pulling on her lab coat.

Claire couldn’t help but smirk a little to herself and went to hand Lim a cup of coffee, “Sounds like you need a cup of coffee to wake yourself up, Dr. Lim.”

Lim’s stomach churned from the odor, so she gestured to take it away and shook her head, “No thank you, Dr. Browne.”

“I’ll take it,” said Morgan as she snatched the beverage out of Claire’s hands.

“So what do we have?” asked Lim and she yawned.

“Nothing significant so far. It’s dead in here,” said Claire.

Lim sighed, “Not that I wish harm on anybody, but I was hoping we’d be busier so it would keep me awake.”

“That’s what the coffee is for,” mentioned Shaun casually, “Even though I don’t like coffee.”

Lim’s stomach would give a flip every time someone would mention the word coffee. She didn’t know why, but for the past week the smell of it just made her feel queasy. Luckily, Lim got her wish when a patient suffering a stroke and another patient suffering some sort of overdose were brought in by ambulance. Morgan and Shaun went to treat the woman suffering a stroke while Claire and Lim worked on the OD victim, which kept all four physicians busy for a while. When they all got the chance to take a break, the three residents didn’t fail to notice that Lim wasn’t eating much again. Claire knew she would probably get scolded for her question, but she still asked, “Are you alright, Dr. Lim?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” answered Lim, “Just haven’t been really hungry, like I have some sort of stomach bug or something.”

Claire and Morgan glanced at each other, “As long as you’re okay. Dr. Browne and I have just noticed you’ve been acting a little…differently all week,” commented Morgan.
Lim scowled, “What do you mean?”

Claire hesitated before she said, “Dr. Lim, you’ve been avoiding the coffee machine in the break room all week. When we got out of surgery the other day, you were in the bathroom for ten minutes because you were vomiting. You’ve been taking little cat naps in the break room; I know because Dr. Park caught you the other day, but he didn’t want to wake you, and you’ve been eating either Snickers Bars, pineapple, Oreos, or chocolate pudding for three days straight,” she listed, “Have you had any other symptoms, Dr. Lim?”

Lim thought about what Claire said. She had been awfully tired lately to the point of sheer exhaustion, but the doctors mentioned it came with having had survived SARS. The coffee machine part, she couldn’t deny; she had been avoiding it both at work and at home. But she wasn’t always nauseous. Just when she was around coffee. And hamburgers, scrambled eggs, and microwave popcorn, but she hadn’t vomited other than that one time a couple days ago. No, that was also wrong. She had gotten sick earlier today, plus a few other mornings this past week. But she could eat…as long as it was certain foods. And funny, she was never a fan of Snickers Bars until a few days ago. She usually preferred Reese’s Cups. But that’s where the similarities to…stopped.

Well, not completely. She was visiting the ladies’ room an awful lot recently. But she had been completely chill and mood swings were a sign of it. Except for that dreadful argument with Neil the other day. But she was just sick of him leaving his dirty laundry on the bedroom floor instead of putting it in the hamper. She had every right to be tired of picking it up herself, right? It might have been a bit much to make him drink orange juice with pulp (he preferred orange juice without it) and slightly burnt pancakes, but he had forgiven her the next day and showed it to her. The symptoms ended there. Except during that romantic make-up sex. There had definitely been something more sensitive about a certain set of body parts. And then another thought suddenly hit Lim. She had been expecting her period last week and it still hadn’t come. It couldn’t be, “Fuck,” she thought to herself.

“What are you trying to say to Dr. Lim?” Shaun interrupted the silence.

Lim wondered how long she had been lost in her own thoughts, but she swallowed nervously, “Dr. Browne and Dr. Reznick think I’m pregnant.”

“Oh,” Shaun responded and then nodded eagerly, “Yes that would make sense. The avoidance of the coffee machine, the food cravings, and the vomiting would be because of morning sickness, the fatigue because of the hormones causing exhaustion. Not to mention the buttons on your blouse the other day were straining, which indicate growing breasts, and you’ve used the restroom,” Shaun stopped to do the math in his head, “Sixteen times in four hours and frequent urination is also an early sign of pregnancy.”

“Got anything else, Murphy?” asked Lim sarcastically.

“Yes, you’ve been irritable all week with us, which would be due to mood swings,” he finished.

Claire leaned in closer and asked, “Dr. Lim, do you want me to do a blood test? I can make sure Dr. Lever keeps it a secret.”

Lim really didn’t want too many people involved, but she nodded anyways. She had four hours left in her shift and she had to know soon that way if she was pregnant, she could build up the courage to tell Melendez. Claire took Lim into a triage room and drew the blood, “Dr. Browne, I want you to take that straight to the lab and instruct Dr. Lever to call my cell phone with the results. And I don’t want her, you, Murphy, or Reznick telling anyone, especially not Dr. Andrews, Dr. Han, or
Dr. Melendez. Understand?”

“I promise, Dr. Lim,” agreed Claire.

“We have an ambulance with a drive-by shooting victim five minutes out,” called one of the nurses.

“I’ll be right there, Petringa,” called Lim.

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Once Lim’s shift ended, she debated on whether or not to stop by the drug store since Carly still hadn’t called her with a definitive answer. She finally stopped by Walgreens to pick up a pregnancy test so her nerves would lessen just a smidge. When she got home, she did her business (thankfully, a task that was no longer a challenge), and set her iPhone timer for two minutes. She paced her bathroom before the alarm went off; she took a deep breath and whispered, “Here we go.” She picked up the test and found one word on it: Pregnant.

Lim wasn’t sure what to feel and whether to laugh or cry, so she did all of the above. Carly called a few minutes later confirming what the Clear Blue test had already told Lim: she was going to become a mother. Lim quickly composed herself, but a flood of emotions continued to course through her. She was pregnant. She was going to have a baby. She was going to become a mother. Naturally, her take charge attitude began making a mental list of what she needed to do, who she needed to tell, and in what order. Neil would obviously have to be told first, followed by Andrews and Han, though she started to wonder if she could wait until closer to the end of the first trimester to tell them. She was sincerely hoping Morgan, Shaun, and Claire could keep the secret. Given her age and the fact that she had previously had a miscarriage, she knew she was at a higher risk for having one again. She tried to push that thought from her mind and think optimistically. She also needed to schedule an appointment with Dr. Bradley and schedule an ultrasound. There was so much to do. But for right now, all she could think about was a nice, long nap followed by finding something to eat that she could hopefully keep down. She stuck the pregnancy test in her nightstand drawer, figuring she could find a way to tell Melendez when she woke up again.

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Melendez had had to work the 7 AM-7 PM shift that day, but the surgery he had been performing had taken longer than Park and he had expected, so he didn’t leave the hospital until 8:30 PM. He stopped by McDonald’s to grab dinner before heading home, though it was dark and quiet when he entered the house. He went upstairs and found Lim asleep, which was a little strange; it was only 9:00 and Lim usually didn’t turn out the light until 10-11 PM. He quietly changed out of his dress clothes and into pajamas. He crawled into bed, kissing Lim’s temple in the process. She stirred, but didn’t open her eyes, though Melendez could tell she knew he was there when she snuggled closer to him. She was aware that Melendez couldn’t see it, but there was a small smile plastered across Lim’s face knowing she was going to soon give Melendez the surprise of a lifetime.
Chapter 34

Lim was the first person up the next morning, no thanks to her now constant need to pee. She didn’t get out of bed for a few minutes though. She had slept just fine, but as she began to remember the events from the day beforehand, the initial shock and excitement about the baby was quickly being replaced by many other emotions. Quite frankly, the news still hadn’t quite sunk in yet. She threw off the covers and sat up in bed, immediately regretting doing so as quickly as she had. She hastily ran to the bathroom, doing her best to keep quiet as not to wake Melendez, though it didn’t work. Melendez quickly jumped awake when he heard Lim retching, which sadly wasn’t a new occurrence as of recently. He had woken up to the sound of her vomiting several mornings this week and occasionally in the middle of the night and he was starting to get a little concerned. He got up out of bed and knocked on the bathroom door, “Audrey, are you alright in there?”

“I’m fine, Neil!” she shouted in frustration.

Melendez sighed, pondering on whether or not to go in and comfort her, but he didn’t want to risk being served burnt pancakes again, so he stopped himself and went to get dressed for work, “Alright.”

Lim finally came out of the bathroom fifteen minutes later, though she had showered in the process. She could hear Melendez making coffee downstairs, so she came up with an excuse not to drink it before joining him, pouring herself some water instead. They left for work, Melendez being thoroughly surprised that Lim was acting like nothing was wrong. Then again, Lim wasn’t one to complain about ailments much unless it was truly an emergency, but he still knew deep down there was something she wasn’t telling him.

They both arrived at work and went their separate ways, Lim having a repair surgery from the GSW victim and Melendez having a coronary bypass surgery scheduled for the day. A million thoughts were still running through Lim’s head: would Neil even be happy about the baby? She was fairly certain he would be; he had always talked about wanting a family someday, even when they were residents. Granted, Lim never dreamed she would be the one to end up carrying his child, but none the less, he wanted children. But it was still so early in their relationship. Sure, they had hypothetically talked about kids, but she figured that they had both assumed they meant further into the future. Then again, neither one of them were exactly young. Maybe this pregnancy was the universe’s way of telling her it was time. Still, what if there was that ever so slight chance he wasn’t happy? No, he would be over the moon. She was confident in that fact.

On top of everything else, she had the added worry about growing a new human being from scratch, not to mention its exit strategy and then raising it into a fully functioning adult. When the day ended, Lim was drained but she knew she had to tell Melendez tonight. She had already gotten everything gathered to tell him. They arrived back at home and Lim obtained everything from her nightstand drawer. She came back down the stairs and announced, “Neil, we need to talk.”

Melendez quickly turned towards her, a look of concern on his face. He just knew something was up and clearly, he was right about that fact, “Is it about us or something different?”

“You and me,” she asserted. She walked over to him and handed him a card, “Read that first.”

Melendez opened the card, wondering what on Earth was going on with Lim. He read her messy scrawl, though the message was clear, “Paging Dr. Melendez to fatherhood. I can’t wait to meet you Daddy.”

“Daddy?” Melendez questioned to himself and then glanced up at her, looking for signs of doubt.
Her face remained stoic as she handed him the object in her hand: the pregnancy test from the day beforehand. Lim couldn’t quite determine what Melendez was feeling. He was just staring at the little white stick. He stepped a little closer to her before he asked, “Are you sure?” Lim nodded. A few tears formed in Melendez’s eyes; he hadn’t nearly cried since he had been watching Lim lie unconscious several months ago. He wrapped his arms around her and whispered in her ear, “This is the greatest day of my entire life.”

Lim pulled back, but her face remained stern, “To answer your question from this morning, I’m perfectly fine,” her hand drifted to her abdomen and a smile finally broke through her firm expression, “We’re fine.”

Instantaneously, it hit Melendez like a ton of bricks. Audrey Lim was having a baby, HIS baby! He was getting his greatest wish in life. He was going to be a father. So why was he suddenly so terrified, while Lim seemed so…calm?! He wasn’t even the one who had to deliver the baby. And now that he thought about it, he could’ve sworn Lim had told him that first night they slept together that she was on the pill. He finally gained the courage to ask, “How did this happen?”

“We’ve been having sex. Sometimes sex leads to pregnancy, so…ta-da,” she answered.

“I know that,” he smirked, “I just thought you were on the pill, that’s all.”

“I was. But my doctor told me with my lungs and the mood changes from the PTSD, it was best to use another form of birth control for the time being. That’s why I was making you wear condoms, remember?” explained Lim.

Melendez had been obediently following her order, but then he remembered the day they had traveled to San Francisco. Or maybe it had been a different day around that time, he couldn’t remember for sure. All he did remember was that there had been a tear in one of the condoms when he went to remove it. He didn’t think much of it at the time, because he thought Lim was still using birth control. But now that she mentioned it, he recalled her saying she was off the pill and it must’ve slipped his mind. Not that it mattered much. He was beyond thrilled for this new adventure. He looked into Lim’s eyes and she was trying so hard to remain hard-nosed, but the hormones were obviously getting the best of her. She composed herself again and said, “Well, I guess I need to schedule doctor’s appointments.”

“Oh kay,” he said and let her go. She went to go call Dr. Bradley when Melendez said, “Hey, Aud?” she stopped, but didn’t turn to face him, “It’s okay to be excited and enjoy the experience.”

She turned to face him, “I know; I think I’ll feel better when I know everything is okay,” she said in a matter of fact manner.

Melendez came back over to her, took her hands in his, kissed her forehead, and then kissed her abdomen, “Well, no matter what happens, we’re in this together.”
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

A/N: Now that they have given the name of Lim's ex-husband on the show, I have changed this story to include him.

Lim was able to schedule an appointment with Dr. Bradley for the following Friday, though Dr. Bradley had also advised to make an appointment with an OB/GYN soon after the initial prenatal check-up for a follow up ultrasound between eight to ten weeks and also since her pregnancy would be considered high risk. In the meantime, the reality that they were going to be parents began to set in for both Lim and Melendez. The couple wasn’t quite sure what to feel; no matter what happened between them in the end, this baby was their own flesh and blood, a perfect combination of the two of them. It would link them forever. Sure, they had both dealt with pregnant and infant patients, but for it to suddenly be the two of them expecting filled them with a sense of awe. They would spend their nights imagining what the baby would look like and wondering what kind of parents they’d be. Lim wasn’t that far along, but somehow, this baby was already bringing them closer together.

Of course, Lim and Melendez were quickly discovering that pregnancy wasn’t all rainbows and unicorns. Lim always believed that when she became pregnant, she would be one of those women who skated through pregnancy like it was nothing. Unfortunately, she had learned in one week that clearly wasn’t going to be the case. She felt so bloated that she didn’t feel like wearing anything other than baggy sweatpants, she would nearly burst into tears every time she put on a bra, she was so tired she was struggling to keep her eyes open (not ideal for a surgeon), she was in the bathroom more than out of it, and she could pretty much time when the ‘morning’ sickness would come, whether or not she ate something to ward off nausea (she was seriously about ready to go back in time and injure the person who came up with the term morning sickness because she was nauseous all day).

Thankfully, at work, Morgan, Shaun, and Claire were keeping their mouths shut, though Lim supposed it was because they didn’t want to incur the wrath of their pregnant and hormonal supervising surgeon. Quite frankly, she would’ve never told any of them something that personal in the first place if it wasn’t for the fact that they had basically figured it out themselves. The only disadvantage of them knowing was the fact that Shaun would stop by her office at least once a day with the latest morning sickness remedy and it took all Lim could muster not to lash out on him. She knew he meant well, but she was already trying everything, and nothing was really working. The only thing that was getting her through the day was knowing all of her current misery would be worth it in the long run.

Melendez had become an absolute saint for the past week, which Lim truly appreciated, even though she was too tired and sick to show it. He was doing everything to try to make her feel better, from holding her hair back when she was vomiting to running to the local convenience store at 2 AM to get whatever weird food combination she was craving (evidently apples, salt and vinegar chips, crackers, and ginger ale had become staples) to completing household chores he normally despised doing while she napped. The day of Lim’s first prenatal appointment finally arrived, but despite the fatigue, she hadn’t really slept well that night. She was terrified that Dr. Bradley would perform the ultrasound, only to tell her there was no heartbeat. She woke up queasy, no shock
there, so she tried to keep the nausea at bay with the ginger ale and crackers on her nightstand, though it didn’t work. Before she knew it, she was in the bathroom hugging the toilet. It wasn’t long before Melendez was helping her, holding her hair back with one hand and rubbing her back soothingly with the other. Lim laid her head on the side of the toilet and Melendez asked, “I probably know the answer to this question, but are you alright?”

“No,” Lim quipped, “Pregnancy is kicking my ass.”

Melendez couldn’t help but smirk at her honest answer. He kissed her clammy forehead and said, “Well at least we get to see the baby today.”

Lim couldn’t help but smile to herself at the prospect, “Well, then we better get ready to go,” she stood, “Right after I finish throwing up some more.”

Melendez sighed, but left Lim alone for her privacy. He couldn’t stand watching her go through such misery, no matter how much it was going to pay off in the end. They arrived at the doctor’s office and waited a bit before one of the nurses came and did a battery of tests. When Dr. Bradley entered the room, she looked over at Lim, took a deep breath, and beamed, “Well, I guess the first thing I’d like to say to you is congratulations, Audrey!”

“Thank you, Dr. Bradley,” smiled Lim, “Dr. Bradley, I’d like to introduce you to Neil Melendez.”

“Nice to meet you,” Melendez shook Dr. Bradley’s hand.

“Nice to meet you too. I’m assuming you’re baby’s Dad?” ventured Dr. Bradley.

“You would be correct in that assumption,” he confirmed.

“Well, we have lots to do today, so I’m going to ask you some questions, perform an exam, and then I’ll do the ultrasound,” said Dr. Bradley. Lim nodded in agreement and Dr. Bradley sat down at the computer in the room, “Alright, Audrey, can you tell me the start date of your last menstrual period?”

“June 1st,” answered Lim. Thankfully, her periods came like clockwork, so it was easy to remember her last one.

“And I know you’ve been hospitalized within the past year. How has everything been going with the pulmonologist?”

“Fairly well. My last exam, my lung capacity was up to 80%, though they don’t know if it’s going to improve any further.”

“Any other medications besides your inhaler used in case of emergencies and the Advair taken in the morning and evening?” questioned Dr. Bradley.

“Sometimes I use the oxygen concentrator if I’ve had a really stressful day,” mentioned Lim, “And if my inhaler doesn’t work, I use the nebulizer.”

“And you were told to stop taking the pill, yes?” asked Dr. Bradley softly.

Lim looked at Melendez and nodded, “We were using condoms instead.”

“Okay, I see you were hospitalized for pneumonia in May which was treated with antibiotics, that covers physical health history…” the doctor trailed off, eyes flickering over the monitor screen, “As for mental health history, have your PTSD symptoms been under control?” she asked
empathetically, “I need you to be honest with me, Audrey.”

Lim took a deep breath, but nodded, “Mostly. The main issue I still struggle with sometimes is nightmares.”

“Well, a history of mental illness can increase your risk for postpartum depression, so if you need to go back to your therapist, don’t hesitate to do so,” said Dr. Bradley. She began examining Lim, “So how have your pregnancy symptoms been?”

Lim groaned, “Morning sickness, fatigue, frequent urination, tender breasts, bloating, food cravings and aversions, you name it, I have it. I always imagined myself as being one of those women who would barely know she was pregnant; instead, I’m feeling it and then some.”

Dr. Bradley chuckled a little, “All of that is perfectly normal. Now I’m going to go get the ultrasound machine and we’ll get started,” Dr. Bradley left momentarily and Lim shimmied her pants down lower and hiked up her shirt. Melendez walked over to her. He grabbed her hand and squeezed it and she squeezed it back, “Alright, let’s take a look at your baby,” smiled Dr. Bradley, squirting the gel onto Lim’s abdomen and maneuvering the probe. She softened her voice a little and asked, “Now, correct me if I’m wrong, your last pregnancy ended in miscarriage, correct?”

Lim nodded, “Yes,” she answered sadly.

Dr. Bradley smiled when she found something on the screen and spun it towards the expectant parents, “There’s your baby and there’s the heartbeat,” she pointed.

Lim’s breath caught in her throat and Melendez held back a few tears. Sure, the baby looked like nothing more than a circular blob on the screen, but it was still surreal to know they created that baby with their love, “Neil,” Audrey sighed with tears in her eyes.

“Well, I’d say by the size of the baby and the start of your last menstrual period, you’re at about seven weeks. Also, Neil?” Melendez looked up at Dr. Bradley, “Is there any history of physical or mental conditions on your side of the family?”

Melendez shook his head, “No, well, at least not genetically.”

“Well, everything looks good, Audrey. It’s a little early to hear the heartbeat, but you’ll probably be able to hear it at your appointment with Dr. Garcia in a few weeks. I’ll give you a prescription for prenatal vitamins, continue to take care of yourself, get lots of rest, eat and drink what you can keep down for now, but in the future, make sure you take in lots of nutrients for you and your baby,” she handed Lim copies of the ultrasound and a script for the vitamins, “Have a nice day, Audrey, Neil.”

Later that night, after Melendez and Lim settled down, Melendez came out of the bathroom and found Lim staring at the sonogram printout. He smiled to himself and crawled into bed next to her, “Do you feel better after today’s appointment?”

Lim sighed, “A little bit. I’ll be even calmer once I’m out of the first trimester. I never realized I could fall in love with someone so fast.”

Melendez took the laminated photo from Lim and gazed at it himself, “Do you think it’s a boy or a girl?”

Lim chuckled, “I’ll love either, but I think it’s a boy,” Melendez raised his eyebrows in surprise,
“What?”

“I’m almost positive that this is our daughter,” Melendez pointed to the image.

“Mmhmm,” Lim muttered, “Well, I guess we’ll see.”

Melendez gave her back the ultrasound and turned out the light, “Yeah, we will,” he snugged next to Lim and kissed her, “Good night, Audrey. I love you.”

“I love you too, Neil,” she relaxed in his embrace.

Melendez leaned over to kiss her abdomen, “And Daddy loves you too, Little One. Mommy and I can’t wait to meet you.”
Chapter 36

It was the end of her shift and one thing was standing in between her and leaving St. Bonaventure for the weekend. The bag of Doritos trapped in the vending machine. Of course, the time the snack would get stuck inside the glass would be when the baby wanted a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos, “Dammit,” Lim muttered to herself, pounding on the glass as hard as she could; the bag didn’t budge. She gently kicked it for good measure, though she didn’t want to physically exert herself too much.

Lim didn’t even notice Morgan and Park come out of the locker room and come up behind her, “Dr. Lim?” questioned Park in confusion.

Lim jumped and turned to face her residents, “Dr. Park, Dr. Reznick…I was just getting ready to leave.”

“Did you get something stuck in the vending machine?” Park looked curiously, “Because we could hear the noise from the locker room.”

“Yes, and since I can’t seem to get it to move, how about you try?” asked Lim in more of a command than a question.

Park scowled a little, “Why don’t you just go to one of the administrative desks and get your money back?”

“Because I don’t want my money back, I want my Cool Ranch Doritos,” she said snippily.

Morgan snickered to herself and laid a hand on Park’s shoulder, “Just try to get Dr. Lim her Doritos. Trust me on this,” she walked away from the two physicians.

Park was still bewildered, but with his brute strength as the result of being an ex-cop, he was able to retrieve the bag of flavored tortilla chips. He picked them up and handed them to Lim, “With all due respect, Dr. Lim, I think it would’ve just been easier to get your money back.”

Lim grinned and took the bag from him, “Thank you, Dr. Park, I appreciate your help. Enjoy the rest of your day,” once Park was out of earshot, Lim glanced down towards her abdomen and laid a hand on her belly, “He had no idea how badly you want Doritos.”

It was a Friday evening and Melendez had to work overnight, so Lim had decided to meet up with her friend, Laura, at her house and to see baby Everly. Lim figured she needed the practice of caring for an infant outside of a medical context and what better way than to dote on her best friend’s baby. When Lim arrived at Laura’s house, she quietly knocked on the door just in case Everly was asleep. Laura smiled when she saw her friend, “Hi Audrey?”

“Hi Laura,” Lim smiled and entered the room. Everly was asleep in her playpen, “And how has little Everly been doing since the surgery?” Lim smiled at the baby.

“She’s been doing well. But she’s been teething, so she has been fussy a lot,” Laura commented and headed towards the kitchen, “Did you want anything to drink?”

“Um, just water, please?” asked Lim.
Laura nodded and handed Lim a bottle from the refrigerator. The two women sat down on the couch and Laura turned to Lim, “So how have things been at work?”

“They’ve been alright. The new chief of surgery is a real piece of work, but other than that, nothing really to complain about. How has motherhood been treating you?”

“I’ve been loving every minute of it,” Laura smiled, “I waited so long for it. It’s been worth the wait though.”

Lim wasn’t quite sure how to bring up her own pregnancy to her friend. Just months ago, she had believed Laura had been abusing her baby, though Shaun had determined her injuries had been a result of a vacuum birth. Laura hadn’t been afraid to tell it like it was to her about not allowing herself to be vulnerable and that she didn’t know love. Sure, she had already started dating Melendez, but she had been holding back and was hesitant about going public with their relationship out of fear of being hurt again. It wasn’t until the gala night was she finally comfortable with other people at St. Bonaventure knowing Melendez and she were a couple, “I’m pregnant, Laura,” Lim spit out unintentionally. Shit. Where did that come from?

Laura shot her head up and looked at Lim, “Wait, you’re what?”

“Pregnant, with child, gestating, having a baby, going to be a mother…how do you want me to describe it?” rambled Lim.

“Hold on, slow down, Audrey,” Laura grabbed her friend’s hand, “Are you really pregnant?”

Lim pulled out the sonogram she kept in her bag. She had plenty between her visit to Dr. Bradley and her appointment with Dr. Garcia at the hospital, “Is that enough confirmation for you?”

Laura grinned broadly, “Oh my God, Audrey, congratulations!” Laura embraced her.

“Watch the girls, Laura,” Lim winced in pain.

“Right, sorry. It hasn’t been that long since I was pregnant. I should remember how awful the first trimester is,” she sympathized.

“Yeah,” Lim took a deep breath as the tingling slowly dissipated.

“So how far along are you? When are you due?” Laura questioned, “And you’re seeing someone?” she asked once the thought hit her.

“Eight weeks, due in early March,” Lim answered the first two questions before she smiled softly, “His name is Neil. He’s also an attending surgeon at St. Bonaventure.”

“Wait a minute? Surgeon at St. Bonaventure…do you mean Neil Melendez? The guy that you had a crush on during your residency before you started seeing Kashal? The one who was always competing against you and the one who was with the blonde lawyer that you complained to me about every chance you got?” questioned Laura in mock astonishment.

Lim glared a little, “Yes, he’s the one.”

Laura chuckled, “I can’t believe you and Neil finally got together. How long have you been seeing each other?”

“Since February,” answered Lim.
“February?!” Laura’s eyes widened in surprise, “So you were in a relationship when I brought in Everly for that subdural hematoma?”

“I was,” Lim admitted, “Neil and I were keeping it a secret but after that discussion with you and after I examined a couple of my own personal issues, we went to the hospital’s charity gala as a couple and have been open about us ever since then.”

“Well, I’m so happy for you,” Laura smiled softly, “So, now that you’ve learned to let yourself be a little vulnerable, how has it been?”

Lim sighed, but smiled, “Sometimes showing vulnerability is awkward for me, I’m not going to lie; but I haven’t been this happy in a really long time. To know someone loves me for who I am, all of me, even my flaws and my bad qualities, it’s one of the best feelings in the world. Like my first day of residency, my first successful surgery, and every time I save a patient all combined.”

Laura smiled at Everly and said, “And now you’ll get to know the truest love of all; a mother’s love for her child,” Lim swallowed a little, still not quite believing that part was truly happening. Everly started to cry, so Laura cradled her in her arms, “What’s wrong sweetheart? Are you hungry?” Laura glanced over at Lim, “Can you hold her while I go warm a bottle for her?”

“Of course,” Lim smiled softly and took the whimpering bundle from her friend. Laura disappeared into the kitchen and Lim did her best to soothe Everly, though it wasn’t coming as naturally as she thought it might. It did scare her a little knowing that in seven months, she would be the one with an infant, but at the same time, she was excited. Laura came back into the living room with the bottle and Lim looked up at her friend, “Can I do it? I could use the practice.”

Laura laughed a little, “Sure,” she handed Lim the bottle and Everly took the offered milk right away.

“Mm. Is that good?” Lim cooed at the baby.

“You look so natural, you know?” smiled Laura at her friend with her daughter.

“Believe me, it feels far from natural right now. It still hasn’t quite sunk in yet,” admitted Lim.

“I know. I don’t think it ever really hits you until you’re holding your baby in your arms. And it might not be natural to you at first, but you’ll get the hang of it,” Laura comforted.

Lim nodded, “I just don’t want to mess up or make a mistake. I mean, I know I will, it’s inevitable, but I already love him or her so much. I have all these hopes and dreams for him or her. I picture what the baby will look like, if it’ll have my or Neil’s personality; either way, this baby will be pretty stubborn,” she laughed to herself. Lim glanced at the time and passed Everly to Laura, “Well, I really should be getting home. I’m sure you have to start getting her ready for bed,” she whispered quietly.

Laura nodded and began to burp Everly, “Well, if you need to talk about anything, I’m here for you,” Lim went to leave the house, “So are you finally going to give up your motorcycle?”

“Still going to put a car seat on the back of a Ducati,” she joked. She got into her car and thought to herself, “I think I could really go for a strawberry milkshake right about now.”
A few weeks had passed and Lim was now ten weeks along in her pregnancy. The ultrasounds looked good, everything was stable, and the fetal heartbeat was strong (a sound neither one of them got tired of hearing), so Lim and Melendez both decided it was time to tell Andrews about the baby. That is, if Lim could ever get out of the bathroom since her morning sickness was reaching its peak in intensity. Lim finally came out of the bathroom looking miserable and Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle a little, “Are you alright?”

“No,” she moaned, “I’m about ready to kill the bastard who decided to call pregnancy nausea ‘morning’ sickness because I deal with this crap all damn day. Do I at least look presentable for Andrews?”

“You look fine,” Melendez stated stoically.

Lim shook her head at him and said, “You really would be a horrible poker player. Let’s go get this talk with Andrews over with before this kid of yours decides to make me sick again.”

The couple made their way to Andrews’s office and Lim knocked on the door, “Come in,” Andrews called. The pair entered the room and Andrews smiled, “Dr. Lim, Dr. Melendez, what brings you by today?”

“Sir, we need to talk,” Lim said, doing her best to hide the nervousness in her voice.

Andrews sat up straighter and motioned for his employees to take a seat. He folded his hands on his desk and gave them his full attention, “Is there a cause for concern amongst one of the residents or a patient or anything else in the running of the hospital?”

“No, sir, I assure you, it has nothing to do with our residents or anything like that,” Lim held up her hand, “Dr. Melendez and I needed to inquire about personal leave; namely, maternity and paternity leave,” Andrews raised his eyebrows, but didn’t say anything, “I’m pregnant, sir.”

Andrews was silent before he smiled politely, “Congratulations Dr. Lim, Dr. Melendez, I’m very happy for you both. How far along are you?”

“I’ll be ten weeks along as of this Saturday,” Lim pulled the sonogram out of her jacket pocket for confirmation, “My due date is March 7, 2020. I promise you sir, I will continue to work as long as I am able to do so and I will keep you up to date about anything important my OB/GYN tells me.”

“Same with me, sir,” confirmed Melendez.

Andrews nodded, “Well, I appreciate you both coming to tell me. Dr. Lim, we can talk sometime next week about any restrictions you need and your maternity leave. Dr. Melendez, I will do the same with you not long after. Good luck to you both.”
“Thank you, sir,” Melendez said gratefully.

They both stood to leave when Lim turned back to face Andrews, “Sir, is Dr. Han in his office?”

Andrews face gained a look of concern, “He is currently in a board meeting right now. I will let him know you both would like to talk to him about something personal,” Andrews seemed worried about having them tell Han their news and Andrews rarely gave a crap about anybody other than himself.

Melendez scowled a little, “Will telling Dr. Han be a problem, sir? He will eventually find out,” Melendez stated the obvious.

“Well, he does come to me often about you both,” Andrews admitted.

“Does it have to do with Audrey’s PTSD?” asked Melendez as he gained a look of protectiveness on his face. Andrews raised his eyebrows, “Sir.”

“No, once I scolded him about the fact that Dr. Lim or Dr. Murphy could easily file a discrimination law suit, he let that go. It has more to do with the fact about you both having a personal relationship,” admitted Andrews.

Lim and Melendez looked at each other, “Sir, we’re not breaking hospital protocol,” Lim stated.

“I know that, Dr. Lim. I am just going to caution you both to tread carefully given the fact that you will both be telling Dr. Han about…visual proof of your relationship,” Andrews did his best not to make things any more awkward than it already had become.

The two surgeons really didn’t know how to respond, “Well, we appreciate your help and understanding. Have a good night, Dr. Andrews,” said Melendez.

“Yes, have a good night, sir,” said Lim.

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Melendez and Lim weren’t really sure about what to think about their conversation with Andrews. Quite frankly, they were now more nervous about talking to Han than they had been about talking to Andrews. Lim wasn’t quite sure whether it was the morning sickness or her nerves, but she couldn’t eat much for dinner that night, and even then, she promptly expelled everything she ate. Melendez was just getting ready for bed when Lim came out of the bathroom, “This is one part of pregnancy I could definitely live without,” she groaned in frustration.

Melendez sighed, hating to watch what Lim had to endure in order to bring new life into the world, “I know, but hopefully it’ll pass soon,” Lim crawled into bed and opened her laptop, not really bothering to converse with Melendez, “What are you doing, Aud?”

“Checking off the fact that we talked to Andrews off of my pre-baby checklist of things that need to be done,” she explained.

Melendez chuckled and asked, “You made a list of things that need to be done?”

“Baby’s coming in thirty weeks,” Lim reminded him.

“Audrey,” Melendez closed her laptop, “Didn’t I tell you to enjoy the experience?”

“Yes. And being organized is me enjoying the experience. We have a lot to do, Neil. We have to
clear all of the junk out of the spare room to create the nursery, we have to buy supplies, we have to do childbirth classes, we have to work out the details of our maternity and paternity leave, not to mention our schedules after the baby gets here, there’s all of the doctor’s appointments…” listed Lim assertively.

“I know, Audrey. And we’ll get it done,” assured Melendez, “But you heard what both Dr. Bradley and Dr. Garcia said about not stressing too much. It’s not good for our Little Champion.”

Lim looked at him skeptically, “You’ve already given it a nickname?”

Melendez shrugged, “It was better than my other option.”

“Which was?” Lim raised her eyebrows.

“Little Tadpole because it has no visible arms and legs yet.”

“Good thing we both get a say in the baby’s final name.”
Chapter 38

Lim and Melendez told Han about the baby the next day, but to be honest, they weren’t quite sure how he felt. He had reacted in a stone cold manner, but that wasn’t unusual for him. Everyone else at the hospital was extremely thrilled for the expectant parents. Andrews had been very accommodating about everything they needed and the residents were beyond excited for their mentors (Claire, of course, being elated about anything to do with children). Park had even offered Melendez some advice for becoming a first time father and Shaun was more than willing to keep them up to date on the latest research (they were proud of him for keeping their secret for six weeks, though Lim and Melendez had gently told him they didn’t need nearly as much help as he was offering). The weeks passed and Lim’s first trimester symptoms began to lessen some, much to her relief. She could get through the day without feeling like a zombie, the morning sickness was gone (well, for the most part; not completely), and she was slowly starting to feel like herself again. She was thirteen weeks along and just starting to show; naturally Melendez and she were mesmerized with the protrusion in her abdomen and the growing baby (or the Little Champion as Melendez liked to call it). Overall, things were going smoothly after a rough first trimester.

Lim was just getting ready to meet Park and Claire in the operating room for a surgery, but she was surprised to find Han scrubbing in as well, “Dr. Han,” Lim acknowledged her superior.

“Dr. Lim,” he replied.

“Is there some emergency with the patient? I’m supposed to be the one performing the surgery,” she stated in confusion.

“I know, but I decided to do this surgery myself,” he answered her.

Lim did her best not to scowl in front of her boss, but this was the second time this week Han had performed one of her surgeries for her, “Sir, I promise you, I’m perfectly capable of doing surgeries at this point in my pregnancy. In fact, probably more so since I’m not urinating or vomiting every few minutes.”

“I’m just being cautious for the patients’ sake,” explained Han, “Now if I recall correctly, I gave you some paperwork on a few of cases that were reported in the ER last week. I need them filled out and put on my desk for my signature by the end of the day.”

Lim did actually scowl this time, “Sir, I’m perfectly capable of performing the surgery; I’m not an invalid.”

“It’s an order, Dr. Lim,” said Han sternly and went into the operating room.

Lim stood in place confused for another minute before going back to her office. What was up with Dr. Han lately? First, he kicked her out of two of her surgeries, yet still allowed her to see the patients and he also seemed to be assigning her more and more of his paperwork lately. Not that she wasn’t capable of filling out mindless forms, but she was a trauma surgeon for God’s sake, not an administrator! Now that she thought about it, all of this nonsense had started three weeks ago, after Melendez and she had told him that she was expecting. And she couldn’t argue with Han too much because he had the power to fire her for disrespecting authority. She left the scrub-in area of the OR, an anger building up inside of her. Instead, she made her rounds with her other patients before going back to her office. She didn’t have much else to do if she wasn’t performing surgeries, so she spent the day doing paperwork and updating patient reports. Melendez walked by her office on his way to visit a patient, but stopped when he noticed Lim in her office. He knocked on the
door and she ushered him into the room, “I thought you were supposed to be in surgery?”

“I was, but Han is covering for me,” quipped Lim bitterly.

“Again? He took over one of your surgeries on Monday,” commented Melendez.

Lim shrugged, “I don’t know what’s going on,” she admitted.

“Alright, well let me know if you need anything,” said Melendez.

Lim looked up at her boyfriend and stood. She gave him a charming smirk and asked, “Well, now that you mention it, are you going to the fifth floor?”

Melendez wasn’t actually going to the fifth floor, but he didn’t want to tell Lim that; he knew the cafeteria was on the fifth floor and he had already briefly observed the half-eaten Big Texas cinnamon roll, the empty bag of Cheetos, and the now consumed cup of vanilla yogurt on Lim’s desk, “What does the baby want now?”

“He or she was thinking a mango smoothie,” Lim said and smiled broadly.

Melendez sighed, but chuckled, “I have a patient consult first and then I’ll see about getting our Little Champion that smoothie.”

“He or she will thank his or her Daddy,” Lim grinned in satisfaction.

Melendez quickly kissed her and left the office. Lim glanced back over at her desk and the mound of paperwork on it, secretly wondering to herself if there was more to Han’s motives than concern for her wellbeing.

Later that night, after their shifts ended, Lim placed the papers on Han’s desk and thankfully, he wasn’t there for any more awkward encounters. Lim swung by Melendez’s office and the two surgeons decided to have dinner out that night since they were both off the next day and also the fact that Lim was no longer too sick to eat heavier meals. They stopped at Red Robin and placed their orders before Lim asked Melendez, “Hey, has Han been acting differently around you?”

Melendez sighed, but nodded, “A little. He doesn’t seem as willing as Andrews to take into consideration things that’ll have to change once the baby comes. You?”

Lim nodded adamantly, “Like you mentioned, he’s booted me from two of my own surgeries this week. I’m no longer falling asleep mid-afternoon; I’m not puking every other hour. I’m still perfectly capable of treating late night drunken head injuries and carefully fixing a human body. I don’t see why he needs to take over.”

Their food arrived and they began to eat, “Do you think it has something to do with the fact that you’re pregnant?”

Lim sighed, but shook her head, “I don’t know, maybe I’m overthinking things. I was pretty sick and tired my entire first trimester. Sometimes I still get sick if I’m not careful.”

Melendez knew by now not to question Lim’s instincts, so he nodded and let it go. Though for the first time, it was him that had a bad feeling about Han’s ulterior motives.
Chapter 39

For the first time in eleven years, Lim had to admit to herself that Melendez was right: Han definitely had an ulterior motive for keeping her out of the OR. He would take over nearly every single surgery and those that he couldn’t, he would have one of the other surgeons cover for her. Melendez’s heart broke for her; she was always so strong in front of him and their co-workers, but he had caught her crying a couple times and, despite what she would always adamantly claim, he knew it wasn’t because of the hormones. Her PTSD symptoms were returning; everyone noticed she was always on edge and the nightmares were more vivid again (also, no thanks to the hormones). Her rational side knew not to doubt her abilities as a surgeon and that Han was just an asshole, but she just couldn’t figure out how to control it.

Even the residents could tell something was up and they weren’t okay with it. Their supervisor was much more irritable, none of them enjoyed working with Han (he was much more demanding than Lim or Melendez were), and even though no one dared to say it, they all knew deep down why Han had it out for Lim.

It had been a quiet evening for Lim and Melendez and Lim chose to pretend as if nothing was wrong, instead, deciding to bring up ideas for the nursery and supplies they would soon need to start obtaining for the baby. Melendez’s heart leapt with joy as he listened to Lim excitedly talk about the baby; he knew how badly she wanted to be back in the operating room and that she was trying to make the best of it. If he didn’t know any better, it seemed like Han was punishing Lim for becoming pregnant. No, that couldn’t be it; pregnancy discrimination was against the law. Then again, Han had had it out for both Lim and Shaun on the grounds of them having PTSD and autism. Lim hadn’t been saying anything to anyone. Maybe she was still in denial herself. Melendez didn’t want to bring it up just in case they weren’t on the same page. They both dressed in their pajamas and crawled into bed for the night, Lim still perusing the internet for decent prices on cribs. She shut down her laptop and turned off the light, staying silent for a while to the point where Melendez thought she had fallen asleep. He was a bit startled when she asked, “It’s because I’m pregnant isn’t it?”

“Say what?” asked Melendez sleepily.

“The reason Han is keeping me out of the OR. It’s because I’m pregnant isn’t it?” she asked again. Melendez sighed and answered, “I don’t know.”

“The bastard’s had it out for me since he set foot in St. Bonaventure. Me and Murphy,” vented Lim, “Keeps claiming it’s for the good of me and the patients. I mean, just because I’m soon going to have an abdomen the size of a watermelon on the front of me soon doesn’t mean I can’t hold a scalpel. Remember his very first speech or whatever, he kept claiming about changing things and eliminating distractions? I bet you he thinks I’ll be distracted once the baby comes along.”

“He can’t do that though; that’s discrimination,” scowled Melendez.

“My point,” stated Lim firmly, “Instead of working with me, he’s just forcing me out of the OR. Plus you got a raise recently and I didn’t.”

Lim was making a very good case, but Melendez knew they couldn’t go up against Han alone, “Well, we’d probably have to talk to a lawyer about what the next steps would be. This isn’t an issue we can handle ourselves or we both could receive serious repercussions.”
“Yep,” uttered Lim.

A thought hit Melendez, but he immediately pushed the thought from his mind. There was no way on Earth Lim would agree to it. But before he could stop himself, he said, “I know someone we could ask.”

Lim rolled over to face him and widened her eyes, “Neil, no!”

“Audrey, you know she’s good with what she does,” Melendez protested adamantly, “Plus she knows you and your work ethic. She knows others at the hospital; I think it would work to our advantage.”

“Neil, think about this for a second? You’re seriously considering asking your ex-fiancée to defend your current girlfriend who is pregnant with your child,” listed Lim, “There’s no way she’d take on a case for me.”

“You don’t know if you don’t ask,” said Melendez.

“Neil, drop it,” ordered Lim, “Or your ass will be on the couch in about thirty seconds.”

“Okay, sorry,” he apologized, “That went well,” he whispered to himself.

As Lim was kicked out of more surgeries that week, she seriously started to consider Melendez’s proposal, chastising herself for even doing so. Then again, Jessica had helped her win two medical malpractice lawsuits while she had worked at St. Bonaventure and they had known each other for years. She knew Neil wouldn’t leave her; that wasn’t what she was worried about. She was a tad apprehensive of what Jessica would think, but then again, she didn’t give a damn what Jessica thought. She loved Neil and this baby and Neil loved her and their baby and that’s all that mattered. Jessica would just be used for professional services, period. When they arrived home that Friday night, Lim set her bag down in the corner and turned to Melendez, “Call her,” Lim demanded.

“Call who?” asked Melendez in confusion. Lim raised her eyebrow and they were both in sync enough that he knew whom she meant.

“I’ll leave you alone,” said Lim and disappeared upstairs.

Melendez nervously took out his cell phone; he had deleted Jessica’s number a long time ago, but he still knew it by heart. He dialed slowly and waited for a few rings before she answered, “Jessica Preston,” she joked to try to break the tension.

He chuckled a little, “Listen Jess, I know I really have no right to ask any favors from you, but you’re the best lawyer I know,” started Melendez.

“I’m probably also the only lawyer you know,” she joked to try to break the tension.

He chuckled a little, “That too. I was wondering if you could help me with a pregnancy discrimination case? Or at least talk about the details?”
“I don’t see why not? Are you referring a patient to me?” inquired Jessica.

“No, an employee of St. Bonaventure,” Melendez answered.


Melendez took a deep breath before he said, “Dr. Lim.”

There was a long moment of silence and all Melendez heard was Jessica’s breathing. After what seemed like forever, Jessica finally broke the silence, “Well, congratulations, Neil. I’m really happy for you both. You will make an incredible dad.” Jessica didn’t sound jealous per se, but definitely shocked.

“Thank you,” Melendez acknowledged politely, “If you don’t want to do it, I understand…”

“No,” Jessica interrupted, “I may have chosen not to have children, but no woman should have to worry about choosing between her career and motherhood. I’ll take the case.”
Jessica had been over to Lim’s house a couple of times, but she had been dating or engaged to Melendez whenever she had. It felt strange to know the roles would suddenly be reversed, but she had an important job to do. She couldn’t blame Melendez and Lim for having a child though; none of them were exactly young when it came to childbearing. Jessica grabbed her bag and knocked on the door; Lim answered a few moments later, “Hi Jess.”

“Hi Audrey,” smiled Jessica politely. Lim moved aside to let Jessica into the house. Jessica looked around, though Lim’s house didn’t look any different than the last time she had been there when she was engaged to Melendez. She didn’t know why she had expected it to look any different; she had expected to see a truckload of baby supplies, but there was nothing to be found as of yet. The only sign of any baby was that despite Lim wearing a baggier blouse, Jessica could clearly see a baby bump under her shirt.

“Did you want anything to drink: water, tea, coffee?” asked Lim.

“Coffee would be nice,” answered Jessica.

Lim went to go start a pot, “I also made snicker doodles. Neil mentioned they’re your favorite. Then I proceeded to eat about five of them,” Lim admitted truthfully.

Jessica chuckled, “Are pregnancy cravings as powerful as women claim?”

“Oh yes,” Lim stated, “And they change all the time. One day I’m craving Poppin Jalapeno Doritos, the next day it’s broccoli, two days after that it’s Ben & Jerry’s Chocolate Fudge Brownie ice cream.”

At that moment, Melendez walked through the front door, “Hey Audrey, they didn’t have the Dill Pickle potato chips at the grocery store, so I just bought a jar of pickles and a bag of regular potato chips and figured you could just dip them in the juice,” he stopped talking when he noticed they had company, “Jessica?”

“Hi Neil. I called ahead of time and Audrey said you were out. I wanted to be able to talk to the both of you and gather some information to see if you have a good case,” she explained.

“Of course,” Melendez said and nodded in understanding.

They all sat down at the dining room table, “So what had exactly been going on at St. Bonaventure?” asked Jessica.

Melendez and Lim looked at each other and Lim said, “It’s a really long story. Well, after Dr. Glassman resigned, Andrews took over as president. He was going to find a new chief of surgery; we both thought for sure it was going to be one of us. Well, for a while, he kept it for himself.”

Why does that not surprise me?” asked Jessica, more to herself than to Lim.

“Exactly,” said Lim, “Well, at Christmastime, we had…. Lim trailed off and she started breathing faster and sweating.

“There was a quarantine because of a respiratory virus,” Melendez took over the explanation.

Jessica nodded. She had read about the quarantine and subsequent investigation, “So what
“I got the virus during the quarantine,” Lim finally spoke, her voice barely above a whisper, “I had to stay in the hospital for a couple months and go through pulmonary rehab.”

Jessica’s eyes widened in surprise; the report had mentioned three deaths and one physician whom had gotten infected, but she never dreamed it was Lim, “So then what happened.”

Lim tried to calm herself, but she just couldn’t right now, “I’m sorry, I can’t talk about this right now,” she stood and left the room.

Jessica watched her go upstairs and she turned back to Melendez, “Is it something I did?” she asked worriedly.

“No,” assured Melendez. His face fell a little and he said, “Shortly after Audrey was released from the hospital, she was diagnosed with PTSD. Had a flashback at work and everything,” he explained.

“Oh, I see,” said Jessica.

“I’m sorry, if I had known you were coming by, I would have warned you,” said Melendez, “Anyways, we got a new chief of surgery a few months ago, Dr. Jackson Han. He doesn’t like that we’re together but can’t do anything about it since it’s not against the rules for two people equal in rank to date each other,” Jessica nodded, as she was familiar with all of St. Bonaventure’s policies and procedures, “He’s biased against Audrey because of her PTSD, he’s also biased against Shaun because of his autism…tried to send him to pathology before Andrews overrode it. Now that Audrey is pregnant, he’s been taking over all of her surgeries or having one of the other surgeons cover for her. He’s been doing so since we told him about the pregnancy. I also got a raise and she didn’t.”

“Have you talked to Andrews about it?” asked Jessica. Her heart was breaking for Audrey and she never believed she could feel sorry for any ex-partner’s current girlfriend.

Melendez shook his head, “We know Andrews can only do so much. We wanted to talk to a lawyer first to get his or her opinion.”

Jessica smiled softly, “Well, I’ll need to do a little research and I’d need you to get me some information: a list of surgeries Audrey’s been removed from, the proof of your raise, maybe a few of the other surgeons, especially non-pregnant female surgeons. I can talk to Andrews and see if he’ll work with us,” she stood. She glanced down, “I’d need to talk to Audrey about a few things, but since I…now might not be a good time, since Audrey…”

“It’s not your fault, Jess. The symptoms can just come on suddenly sometimes,” said Melendez.

“Well, I’ll call you once I have everything put together,” said Jessica and left.

Melendez shut the door behind her and went upstairs to find Lim lying on their bed, curled around a pillow. Melendez came into the room and lied down next to her, but didn’t say anything. They stayed silent before Lim asked, “How am I going to defend myself against Han when I can’t even keep it together in front of Jessica?”

Melendez took her hand and she squeezed it, “You will, because you fight for things your passionate about.”

Lim chuckled a little, “It’s been eight months. I thought I’d be able to talk about it by now. How
am I supposed to raise a child if I can’t work through my own problems?"

Melendez rubbed her growing abdomen and smiled as he thought about the developing life within her, “You’ll find a way. She’s going to be strong and smart, just like her mom.”

"You’re still convinced it’s a girl, huh?” she laughed.

“Mmhm,” Melendez confirmed, “Though I don’t know if I could handle two of you.”

Lim smirked at Melendez, “Two of you wouldn’t be pleasant either.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asked jokingly.

Lim smiled, “Either way, we’ll have one stubborn kid.”

“Yeah, we will,” he kissed her belly.
“How about this outfit? The baby would look adorable in it!” Laura squealed excitedly, holding up a pair of jeans and a white shirt with little hearts on it.

“Laura, it’s a pair of jeans shrunk. You don’t need to get that excited,” said Lim and chuckled lightly.

“But it’s still adorable! Tell Auntie Audrey it’s adorable,” Laura cooed at Everly. Everly giggled with delight.

“You know I’m not a shopper,” admitted Lim.

“I know. But honestly, how can you not just melt over these tiny clothes?” asked Laura.

“Laura,” scolded Lim lightly.

“Sorry,” Laura apologized, “So how has everything been going with you and Neil?”

“They’ve been going well. Thankfully, the only fights we’ve had as of recently is over baby names and nursery themes. And whether the baby will be a boy or a girl,” admitted Lim, “He is fully convinced it’s a mini-Audrey growing inside of me.”

“And you don’t?” questioned Laura.

Lim smiled and shook her head, “Don’t get me wrong, I’ll love either. I’m just a little nervous about the idea of having a girl. I was such a tomboy growing up, I was always playing outside, getting dirty, roughhousing with Josh. I feel like I wouldn’t have a clue on how to take care of a girl.”

“Well, that’s where Auntie Laura comes in, because mini-Audrey and Everly will be best friends, just like their mommies. Right sweetheart?” she asked Everly, “Okay, so other than minor fights over the baby’s name and the nursery, how have other things been with…you know?” asked Laura softly.

Lim sighed and said, “I think it’ll be better to talk about all of that at lunch.”

Laura nodded and went back to scouring the plethora of baby clothes, “How about these cute little dresses?”

“How about these cute little dresses?”

“Laura, we don’t know what it is yet,” Lim reminded.

“Alright, alright,” Laura said, “I’ll help you find some gender neutral stuff. But I’m with Neil; I think it’s a girl. Everly needs a best friend.”

Once the two women had bought a few onesies and a small assortment of toys (Laura picked out most of them because Lim was somewhat overwhelmed with everything), they stopped by Dairy Queen for lunch, “Finally, this whole concept of eating for two is catching up with me,” Lim said and laughed, “I feel like I’m always hungry now that the hell that was known as morning sickness has passed.”

Laura laughed, “I was starving all the time when I was pregnant with Everly,” she said and settled Everly into her arms so she could give her a bottle. Lim smiled at the baby and went back to her
“Nothing,” Lim lied.

“Audrey, we’ve known each other since we were fourteen. You can’t hide things from me,” Laura mocked jokingly.

“Just so overwhelmed with everything right now. My last doctor’s appointment, seeing the baby on the screen, hearing his or her heartbeat; as exciting and comforting as it was, it just hit me that this human being is going to call me Mommy! There’s so much to do, so much to buy, so many things to take care of before his or her arrival. I have my list, but it seems like I’ve always forgotten something thanks to the pregnancy brain. Then, of course, I’m naturally nervous about the birth, because no matter how tough I am, I know it’s going to hurt like a mother….,” Laura raised her eyebrows and gestured her head towards Everly, “Trucker. On top of all of the normal pre-baby tasks that need to be accomplished, we’ve got this whole lawsuit thing against my boss, and it’s not exactly pleasant spending a large amount of time with my boyfriend’s ex-fiancée. Granted, she’s been really helpful but still…I can’t help but feel a little satisfied by the look she gives every time we kiss in front of her,” she said and grinned proudly.

“Well, in regards to everything happening at work, that’s completely unfair. But in regards to everything else you’re feeling, I felt the exact same way, and I wanted to be a mother so badly for years. I went through all of the treatments, conceived via a donor, she was completely planned, yet when it finally happened, I was scared to death. And I know you can’t help the way you are, but you don’t have to be Superwoman. You have me, you have Neil, you have Josh; you’ve already told me how excited he is to become an uncle,” Lim smiled and nodded. Sure, Josh had been a bit surprised that Lim was expecting, but never the less, he was thrilled at the prospect of a niece or nephew, “And about the birth? Well, I’m not going to lie, even the super strong chick you are will probably experience some pain. But the second your baby is in your arms, you’ll forget all about it,” Laura smiled at Everly, “You’re going to be a great mother. I have no doubt about that.”

“Thanks Laura,” Lim said and smiled gratefully.

The women finished their meal and Laura asked, “So do you want to do some more shopping?” Lim turned to her friend and raised her eyebrows, “Take it that’s a no?”

“Neil does want to be involved in some aspects too, Laura,” said Lim.

“Right, of course,” Laura smiled and nodded. Laura drove Lim home and Lim was getting out of the car when Laura said, “Let me know when you and Neil finish your baby shower registry.”

“No one said anything about a baby shower,” Lim answered honestly, “Laura went gaga over every single baby outfit in Target. But we did get a few nice gender neutral outfits and some toys. Now, she’s talking about a baby...
“It’ll help us get stuff,” Melendez said.

“They can just give it to us. I don’t need to sit around with a bunch of women oohing and aahing over the outfits we all wear only tinier. And don’t me started on the games,” shuddered Lim.

“Well, that can be discussed with Laura later,” said Melendez, his face becoming more serious, “Jessica stopped by earlier today.”

“When?” asked Lim.

“Shortly after you left,” said Melendez, “Everything has gone through the EEOC, we have the right to file a lawsuit.”

Lim nodded, not showing any emotion, though Melendez knew how hard this was on her, “Good. Andrews already told me he’s willing to fight for me.”

Melendez took her hand, “We’ll get him, Audrey. You’ll be back in the operating room before you know it.”

Lim smiled and looked at their entwined hands, “Not to change the subject, but my next ultrasound…”

“What about it?” asked Melendez.

“Dr. Garcia said we could find out the sex of the baby,” said Lim.

“Did you want to?” asked Melendez.

“Maybe,” said Lim, “It would help us pair down names, some nursery themes, and clothes.”

“There’s a but, isn’t there?” questioned Melendez.

Lim nodded, “If our baby’s a girl…I don’t know, with me being such a tomboy, would I even be good with a girl? I never played with dolls or held tea parties and dress up sessions growing up; I was always playing sports outside with Josh. And even if it is a boy, I recently realized, I have no idea how to be a mother.”

Melendez chuckled and squeezed her hand, “Other than maybe Dr. Browne, you’re one of the most maternal women I’ve ever met.”

“How so?” asked Lim in curiosity.

“You’ve always been good with your child patients, you’ve always had a good connection with Dr. Murphy, which I am ashamed to say, I did not when he first started at St. Bonaventure, you’re great with Gabi, and…” Melendez stopped briefly, “During the quarantine, you remained calm and put everyone before yourself, even though it could have cost you your own life. If that isn’t a motherly attitude, then I don’t know what is. And the parts you don’t know how to do, you’ll learn, because you can do anything you set your mind to do.”

Lim smiled and said, “You will come up with absolutely anything to make me feel better, won’t you?”

“Did it work?” he ventured.
Lim smiled and laughed, “Yes.”

“This baby is incredibly lucky to have you as his or her Mommy,” said Melendez.

Lim kissed Melendez and said, “And he or she is just as lucky to have you for a Daddy.”
Chapter 42

Han glanced up from his work when he heard a knock at the door. Andrews, Melendez, Lim, and Jessica were all standing outside of his office, so he motioned the group of four into the room, “Dr. Andrews, Dr. Melendez, Dr. Lim,” he greeted, “And you ma’am?”

“Jessica Preston, Attorney at Law,” she shook his hand and then handed him an envelope.

Han looked at her confusingly and opened the envelope and looked over the paperwork, “Wait a minute? You’re suing me?”

“Yes, for pregnancy discrimination,” said Lim.

“Dr. Andrews, it’s my responsibility to oversee those surgeons under my command,” Han tried to defend himself.

“It is also illegal to demote a pregnant employee and to limit her job unless she has specifically requested such accommodations,” defended Andrews, “Not to mention it is illegal to punish an employee on the grounds of pregnancy, which you appeared to do by awarding raises to every surgeon in the department expect for Dr. Lim.”

Han stood and crossed his arms over his chest, “She has missed a lot of time within the past several months.”

“Because she was recovering from a deadly virus and then seeking treatment for PTSD,” said Melendez.

“Also illegal to penalize someone because of a health issue, whether it’s physical or mental,” added Jessica.

Lim slid a typed list across his desk, “I have a list of every surgery that I was scheduled for where you somehow removed me. They’ve all been since I told you I was pregnant.”

“Like I said, I’m in charge of all of the surgeons under my command. I have the power to reassign surgeons as I wish,” said Han sternly, not showing a hint of remorse.

“Dr. Han, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. You will be given time to review the documents before the settlement at Ms. Preston’s office. You can do it the easy way where you simply pay the settlement and let Dr. Lim back into the operating room or we can do it the not so easy way where you pay the settlement and I fire you for discrimination,” warned Andrews.

Han didn’t say anything, but simply sat down, reviewing the paperwork once again, “I’ll see you all next week.”

Everyone left Han’s office, not quite sure what to make of the conversation, “Well, I better get back to my office. I do have a client meeting at 3:00,” said Jessica, “I’ll see you both next week, one way or another,” Jessica walked away from everyone.

Melendez and Lim turned to Andrews, “We appreciate your help, Dr. Andrews,” said Melendez.

“It’s my job, Dr. Melendez,” said Andrews.

Lim looked at her watch, “Well, thank you for coming with us, Dr. Andrews, but if you remember,
I have my twenty week scan today.”

“Of course, you both go, I’ll see you tomorrow,” said Andrews and began walking towards his office.

Lim went to the locker room to change out of her scrubs and Melendez waited for her. They went to the obstetrics unit and checked in, waiting for what seemed like forever before one of the nurses called Lim back. The nurse took all of Lim’s vitals and the couple waited some more before Dr. Garcia came into the exam, “My apologies Neil, Audrey; I had a c-section earlier today and got behind schedule.”

“We both understand,” said Lim.

“Well, Audrey, you’re officially halfway through your pregnancy; how have you been feeling?” asked Dr. Garcia.

“Big,” Lim admitted honestly and chuckled lightly, leaning back on the exam table.

“Actually, you’re pretty small right now for being twenty weeks, probably because you have a fairly athletic build,” Dr. Garcia comforted her. She fired up the ultrasound machine while Melendez sat down next to Lim and took her hand. Dr. Garcia squirted the gel and placed the probe on Lim’s abdomen and a strong heartbeat was immediately heard through the doppler, a sound the expectant parents would never tire of hearing, “Now, I’ll probably be able to see the baby’s gender on the ultrasound; did you want me to tell you or no?”

Lim and Melendez looked at each other, “Actually, we want you to write it down so we can have a gender reveal cake done. My friend had one done when she was pregnant and she recommended a good bakery to use. Dr. Andrews is allowing us to cut the cake in the conference room so we all find out at the same time. We’ll also see who won the resident’s bet.”

“Resident’s bet?” Melendez asked and raised his eyebrows.

Lim rolled her eyes in amusement, “I saw Dr. Park walking around with a jar of money and I heard him ask Dr. Reznick boy or girl. I can only imagine he meant our kid.”

“Oh,” Melendez answered and laughed. Their residents were all thrilled for them (even Shaun in his own little Shaun way) and had affectionately nicknamed the baby ‘baby Limlendez’, though they wouldn’t dare say it in front of their supervisors; both Melendez and Lim had heard about the term of endearment.

“Okay, then I’ll do so,” acknowledged Dr. Garcia as she placed the probe for the ultrasound machine again. At twenty weeks, the baby was easily recognizable and both Lim and Melendez’s hearts absolutely melted whenever they saw the ultrasound images. It was times like this one when Lim would wonder why she was so worried about motherhood because she knew no matter how scary it seemed, she loved this little human growing inside of her more than life itself, so she knew everything would be okay. She briefly glanced over at Melendez and he was holding back tears. She knew how much he wanted a family and she still couldn’t believe she was the lucky woman who was making his dream come true. They watched Dr. Garcia point out all of the facial features and body parts and turned away when she went to confirm the gender. After their appointment, they stopped by the bakery Laura had told them about and went to the grocery store to pick up a few ingredients for dinner before they went home. They both started on dinner and while they were waiting for the spaghetti noodles to boil, they sat down at the dining room table to finish the list of furniture and supplies they would need for the nursery and some items for their baby shower registry (Laura had finally convinced Lim to have one and promised no games at it).
They decided to spend the night watching TV in their room, but it had been a long day, so they turned out the lights early. They hadn’t been asleep more than thirty minutes when Lim jumped awake, startling Melendez in the process as he was snuggled next to her supporting her back, “Audrey? Is something wrong? Did you have nightmare?”

Lim jumped when she felt it again, though this time, she grinned from ear to ear, “Give me your hand, Neil,” she instructed.

Melendez did and she laid it on her abdomen. He soon felt a gentle jab against the palm of his hand, “Audrey, is that?”

“Yes,” she answered and nodded eagerly. Oh, she had been waiting for this moment ever since she had held the positive pregnancy test in her hand. They both felt the kicking again and laughed, Lim holding back a few tears. When Laura had been pregnant with Everly, of course, she had been thrilled to feel her movements, but now that it was her own child kicking the inside of her, the sensation was truly magical. She looked over at Melendez, who was also at a loss for words. He didn’t need any though. The look on his face told her everything she needed to know.
Chapter 43

Today was the big day for Lim and Melendez. Today, they would be finding out whether they had a son or a daughter. Almost everyone at the hospital knew Melendez was hoping for a little girl and Lim had finally been able to picture herself with either (she had to admit, picturing Melendez with a little girl made her heart melt). They were meeting Laura and Everly out for dinner later that night to let her know what the baby was. Melendez picked up the cake and they kept it in one of the break room refrigerators until it was towards the end of the day when most of the staff was changing shifts. Before they knew it everyone was gathered in the conference room, Park taking final bets for the gender, “Betting is about to close, last call! I will be sealing this jar in a few moments.”

Melendez and Lim smiled at each other as the room quieted down some, “Thank you all for coming. You have no idea how much we appreciate your support throughout this whole journey. I know everybody is dying to know what baby Limlendez is going to be, so here we go,” Lim and Melendez grabbed the knife and he smiled at her, “Are you ready, Audrey?”

Lim smiled and nodded, “Mhm,” she whispered softly. They both cut off a piece and looked at the icing inside the cake. Lim looked up at the crowd and announced, “It’s pink!”

“YES!” Shaun cheered loudly.

“Pay up,” Morgan motioned towards Park and Claire.

The two residents chuckled and Park handed the money jar to Morgan, “Make sure you split that evenly you two.”

“A baby girl, Neil,” Lim said a smiled, a few tears in her eyes, “We have a daughter,” she embraced him.

“Oh boy,” Melendez said when the news sunk in for him.

Lim pulled out of his embrace, “What?”

“I know I said I wanted a girl, and I’m happy, but I just realized I now have to deal with two of you,” he said jokingly.

Lim widened her eyes, smiled, and smacked his chest playfully, “Alright, who wants cake?”

“I want an inside piece with no icing,” stated Shaun.

“Okay, well let’s cut some of the cake and then we’ll work on that slice without icing,” said Lim.

“Okay,” Shaun answered and nodded.

Melendez cut up the cake and handed out slices, making sure to cut off the icing for Shaun. Andrews came up beside Melendez, “So, two Audreys?”

“Yes, sir,” said Melendez, “But we’re looking forward to it.”

“I’m sure you are,” Andrews pulled Melendez aside, “So we all meet in Jessica Preston’s office on Monday?”

Melendez nodded nervously, “Yes sir. Or I can have her come to the hospital and we can settle in
Andrews nodded, “We’re going to win, Dr. Melendez. Dr. Lim deserves to be in the operating room.”

“Thank you sir,” Melendez acknowledged.

“Well, shall we have some more cake?” asked Andrews.

Melendez nodded. After the work day ended, the couple went home to change for dinner before meeting up with Laura. Naturally, Laura was thrilled at the concept of a baby girl and had already sworn that Everly and their baby would grow up to be the best of friends. When Lim and Melendez arrived home after dinner, Melendez went to shower while Lim couldn’t help but gaze into the spare room. Sure, she used it for nothing more than storage right now, but she was already fantasizing about what color the walls would be (she knew she didn’t want pink; that was so clichéd) and what the furniture would look like. She could already imagine nursing her sweet little girl and then rocking her to sleep. A small smile crept onto Lim’s face as she thought about her very near future, “Audrey?”

Lim jumped a little, but turned around to face Melendez, “We should probably get to work on the nursery now that we know the gender.”

“Well, you can make all the design choices and Tom and I will make sure they happen,” Melendez said and kissed her temple.

She glanced up at him, “You think I know anything about designing rooms? There’s a reason the walls in this house are all white.”

“Okay, we’ll design it together then,” Melendez said and took her hand. She smiled and followed him to their room.

“Oh, Neil?” Lim asked.

“Hmm?” he muttered.

“We also need to talk about…the day this baby comes,” said Lim.

Melendez nodded. Lim was twenty weeks along, so it was probably time to start thinking about childbirth classes, “What were you thinking?”

“I was hoping to have a natural birth,” she admitted.

Melendez wasn’t entirely surprised by this assertion, given Lim’s personality, but he was also worried about her attempting a natural birth given the fact that her lungs weren’t as strong as they once had been. Melendez squeezed her hand and asked, “Are you sure, Audrey? You know your lungs are weak and that it will be painful. It might be easier on you if you get the epidural.”

“I know,” she mocked a little, “I’ve thought about it and I want to at least try. If I need the epidural, I’ll have the option.”

Melendez smiled and kissed her abdomen, “Well, no matter how she comes into the world, I can’t wait to meet our little girl.”
Melendez and Lim went to visit Gabi the next day and Melendez had made sure to save a piece of cake so they could reveal the gender to her. Lim had also found a ‘World’s Greatest Aunt’ shirt for her and made sure it was purple (Gabi’s favorite color). They arrived at the group home and checked in at the front desk before being directed to the room where Gabi was currently. Moana was playing in the background, though Gabi was sitting at one of the tables coloring in a coloring book, “Hey Kid!” Melendez smiled.

Gabi looked up and smiled back, “Neil, Audrey!” she smiled back and hugged them both.

“Mi amorcita,” Melendez kissed her forehead.

“Hi Gabi,” Lim kissed her cheek, “We have a big surprise for you today.”

“What’s that?” asked Gabi.

“We found out what the baby is yesterday,” said Lim.

“And we have a surprise for you,” Melendez handed her the bag.

Gabi pulled the shirt out of the bag and grinned, “Thank you!” she hugged them both again.

Melendez and Lim sat down on each side of Gabi and Melendez set the solid container in front of her, “Okay Kid, there’s a piece of cake in here that will tell you what the gender of the baby is. Blue means it’s a boy and pink means it’s a girl. I want you to open the container and tell us whether it’s a boy or a girl. Alright?”

Gabi nodded and Melendez helped her open the lid. Gabi peeked inside and looked over at Lim, “It’s a girl?”

Lim smiled and nodded, “Yes.”

Gabi beamed, “I can share my puzzles and coloring books with her. And we can play dress-up and watch Disney movies.”

Melendez smiled at his sister’s enthusiasm, “Maybe when she’s a little older, amorcita.”

Melendez and Lim played a board game with Gabi for the rest of the morning and baby girl Limlendez was kicking quite a bit, so Lim let Gabi feel her niece’s movements. Gabi was absolutely mesmerized. Once the caretakers began gathering the residents for lunch, Lim and Melendez bid Gabi farewell and stopped for lunch themselves before heading to Target to put all of the items they needed on their baby shower registry now that they knew what they were having. Lim chuckled at the fact that Melendez was having a little too much fun with the registry gun, pretending like he was some sort of secret agent. She didn’t mind though. His childlike sense of nature (or at least the one he had outside of work) was what was going to make him a great father. They had finally decided on a Winnie the Pooh themed nursery no matter the gender, so they also found a lot of decorations for the room. They bought a few big-ticket items (the crib, changing table, and dresser) and decided to leave the rest for later (they figured they needed some items left for their friends and family to buy as gifts).

Once they got home later that night, they ordered another pineapple and pepperoni pizza (Lim claimed the baby wanted it; Melendez knew better since they had been ordering that combination
since their residency). They decided to watch a movie and Lim picked the first *Star Wars* movie, which didn’t shock Melendez in the least; she had always been kind of nerdy and he figured she would raise their daughter into a nerdy yet badass woman. Before Lim went to turn off the light, she rolled onto her right side to face Melendez and said, “I’ve been thinking more about what you said.”

“About what?” asked Melendez.

“About the baby’s birth,” Lim answered.

“Oh,” Melendez said. Sure, it had been lurking in the back of his mind, but he was fairly certain that Lim was much more worried about it given the fact that she would be the one actually going through the whole ordeal, “Were you still thinking about trying for a drug-free birth?”

“Yes, but let me explain,” she pleaded, “Dr. Garcia says I’ll probably need supplemental oxygen and I get that, but I’ve been reading stories about how getting an epidural can often lead to a cascade of other interventions, so it might actually be easier on my body not to get one. With the relaxation techniques I’ve learned in counseling, I figure if we take a good childbirth class, I can do it. Laura also had Everly naturally; she might be able to help me some and two people are better than one.”

Damn was Lim always good at defending her point. It was one of the things Melendez really loved about her. And he did see her reasoning. He was confident she could handle it; he just couldn’t imagine anything happening to her or their baby. As much as he wanted to forget it, he still vividly remembered that fateful December day when the quarantine occurred and he didn’t know if he could handle seeing her so helpless again. He grabbed her hand and asked, “So what were you thinking?”

“Well, Lamaze classes take a more neutral approach to pain medication and the Bradley Method… I know myself, I wouldn’t like you telling me what to do and it’s known as the ‘husband-coached birth’. When I’m sick or in pain, I normally do best when I’m left alone somewhat, so I was thinking about looking into Hypnobirthing.”

Melendez quite honestly didn’t have much of a clue what that was, but he trusted Lim’s instincts. He made a mental note to research it. He kissed her and said, “We’ll look into it then.”

“Good,” she rolled over and turned out the light, “We really need to get started on that nursery too.”

“Nesting instinct kicking in for you?” Melendez asked and laughed.

“Yep,” she answered.

Melendez figured just as much. He had gone into her office recently and while it usually looked like a black hole, it was completely organized the other day. And she also must’ve taken the time to clean up his office too because he noticed all of his paperwork neatly stacked and filed. He kissed her temple and said, “Now try to get some sleep. I know you’ve been a little restless and anxious the last few nights. I love you.”

Lim felt the baby kick and smiled to herself, “I’ll try, but I don’t know if our daughter will let me. We both love you too.”
Lim gazed at herself in the bathroom mirror. She smoothed out her royal blue blouse, making sure there were no wrinkles in it, her black blazer complimenting the shade of the blouse. She turned sideways and her baby bump became more visible when she did so, though at twenty-one weeks, she really couldn’t hide the fact that she was expecting anymore. She wasn’t really worried about hiding it though; she loved the little life growing inside of her and every passing day, she became more and more in awe of what her body could do. She cradled her bump in her hands and rubbed it soothingly, “Well, today we face Dr. Han, Little Champion. But no matter the outcome of today, I’ll always try my best for you.”

Melendez knocked on the bathroom door, “Audrey, are you ready to go?”

Lim said, “Yes, let’s get this asshole,” everyone had decided it was best to meet at the hospital first before going to court house, since everyone except Jessica was already there. They both drove over to St. Bonaventure and grabbed coffee and muffins from the cafeteria before they went to the conference room. Andrews, Jessica, and Allegra were already there, “Dr. Lim, Dr. Melendez,” Andrews greeted them.

“Dr. Andrews,” they replied in unison.

“Nice to see you, Ms. Aoki,” Lim also replied. She gave a soft smile at Jessica before sitting down in between Melendez and Andrews. Jessica went over with everyone about the details before they all left for the San Jose Circuit Court, taking their places in the courtroom.

Han arrived shortly thereafter with his lawyer and took a seat on the other side, and soon, Judge Vicki Spain entered the room as everyone stood, “You all may be seated,” she instructed. Everyone took a seat and she looked over the information on the case, “Alright, civil lawsuit between Dr. Audrey Lim and Dr. Jackson Han for a case of pregnancy discrimination,” Judge Spain scowled a little. The one name sounded familiar. She looked up and realized why the name sounded so familiar, “You again?”

Lim smiled a little, “Your Honor.”

Judge Spain took a deep breath, doing her best to hide her obvious dissatisfaction over who the plaintiff was, “Alright, according to the case file prepared by Dr. Audrey Lim, Dr. Neil Melendez, Dr. Marcus Andrews, and Ms. Jessica Preston, Dr. Lim has been removed from all of her scheduled surgeries since Dr. Han was told about her pregnancy. Is that correct, Dr. Lim?” she looked up at Lim.

“Yes, your Honor,” Lim replied.

“And Dr. Han awarded raises to all attending surgeons at San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital except for Dr. Lim, is that correct?” inquired Judge Spain.

“Yes, your Honor,” answered Melendez.

“Alright, well Dr. Lim, I will give you an opportunity to calmly defend your case to me and to explain your side of the lawsuit.”

Lim nodded and pushed herself to her feet, “As long as you do your job properly…”

“I did my job properly the last time you were here, you just didn’t like my solution,” defended
Judge Spain.

“That’s your opinion,” said Lim, “Well, your Honor, this bastard has had it out for me ever since he set foot in St. Bonaventure,” she pointed at Han.

“Dr. Lim…” warned Andrews as Melendez and Jessica buried their faces into their hands. Melendez somehow had the feeling that this judge was the one whom threw Lim in jail.

“From his very first day, he has doubted my abilities as a surgeon because of some mental health issues. I know what you’re thinking…no, I’m not too unstable to be in the operating room just because you threw me in jail,” Andrews and Jessica both raised their eyebrows at Lim’s admission. So far, this testimony wasn’t going to help Lim’s case, “Your Honor, for some reason this man has something against those with mental health differences and now, he has something against women having children. Your Honor, I don’t know if you have children, but surely, you have run into plenty of men trying to undermine your career. Would you really want to be kept out of the courtroom just because you’re pregnant? Because that’s what’s happened to me every damn day for the past eleven weeks. I know you don’t like me, I know you have some sort of bias against me, but at the very least, put aside your dislike for me and do this for women and working mothers everywhere. Thank you.”

Lim sat back down and Jessica leaned closer to her and said, “You went completely off script of what I told you to say.”

“I know, but what you told me to say was bull shit,” said Lim.

Judge Spain looked over at Han and asked, “Dr. Han, do you have any counter arguments?”

Han nodded and stood, “Your Honor, what Dr. Lim did not tell you is that her mental health condition has affected her job performance.”

“Dr. Lim is also our only female trauma surgeon, and trauma surgeries can be very intense,” everyone could tell Han was trying hard to come up with legitimate arguments, “Our hospital is one of the top surgical centers in California. I need all of my employees on top of their game. That’s all I have to say,” Han also sat down again.

“Does anyone else have anything to add?” asked Judge Spain.

Andrews stood, “I do, Your Honor. In defense of Dr. Lim, I will just state that she is one of the best surgeons at St. Bonaventure. She has the focus it takes many other surgeons years to obtain. Yes, she did have one anxiety attack on the job, but it was handled properly and she has been coming out stronger because of her experiences. And if there is any woman in this world who will be able to balance motherhood and a successful career, it’s Dr. Lim,” he returned to his seat.

“Thank you, Dr. Andrews. Well, we will break into different rooms and I will speak with both teams individually. Then we will meet back here and draw up the settlement agreement if both parties come to one.”

It took a few hours for Jessica and Han’s lawyer to finally come to an agreement, mostly because Han wouldn’t budge. Finally, the settlement included St. Bonaventure having to pay $100,000 to Lim and an agreement to let her back into the operating room until she began her maternity leave. Andrews had something else planned in the back of his mind though. He was ashamed to admit
that he was unaccepting of the idea of hiring Shaun, but now he understood he was a great asset to the surgical team. And Dr. Lim? Honestly, Dr. Lim and Dr. Melendez were the two best surgeons at St. Bonaventure, which was why he was so indecisive over who should’ve been the next chief of surgery. He normally didn’t have regrets, but he knew he had made a mistake hiring Han.

Judge Spain closed the case and Han and Andrews left the court house. Melendez glanced at his watch and looked up at Lim, “I have an appointment at 2:00, so I really have to get going. I’ll see you later?” Lim nodded, “Alright, I love you,” he kissed her.

“Love you too,” answered Lim and secretly gained a feeling of smug satisfaction at the look Jessica gave them. Lim turned to Jessica and said, “Well, I’d like to thank you for your help. I’ll admit, I didn’t want to use you, but you’re good at your job. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have some business at work to take care of since I’ll be back in the OR soon.” Lim started towards her car.

“Hey Audrey?” Lim stopped but didn’t face Jessica, “I promise you, Neil will be a great dad. And I know you; you will be a terrific mom,” Jessica started towards her car, “And you’re welcome.”

Once Andrews and Han both arrived back at St. Bonaventure, Andrews gathered the board together for an emergency meeting. They all sat down and Andrews began, “Thank you all for coming on such short notice. I’ve been thinking about some of the decisions I’ve made over the last several months and I’ve discovered I haven’t made the right ones. As you all know, today we settled a lawsuit, and between the quarantine and this event, we don’t need any more any more negative publicity here at St. Bonaventure,” Andrews turned to Dr. Han, “Dr. Han, you are very well educated and very qualified for a chief of surgery position, but there is one quality you are severely lacking: empathy. I know I’m very weak in that quality as well, but ever since you started here, you have done nothing but bring issues to me. You first tried to transfer Dr. Murphy out of surgery, then you made me follow Dr. Lim more closely because of her flashback in the ER, something she wasn’t equipped to handle at the time, and once you found a way to keep her out of the operating room, you jumped at the opportunity. Well, both Dr. Murphy and Dr. Lim along with every other surgeon here are all important assets at St. Bonaventure. But there is one person who is not.”

“Are you seriously firing me and sticking with the surgeon with autism and the one who is pregnant and has PTSD?” asked Han incredulously.

“Dr. Andrews, I don’t know if you’ll have enough votes from the board to fire Dr. Han,” warned Allegra.

“I know, but I don’t need votes. Just like he can control what happens to his employees, I can control what happens to mine. Dr. Han, I’m going to have to let you go.”

The rumor mill circulated quickly about Andrews firing Han. Of course, everyone knew that the hospital would need a new chief of surgery, so all eyes were on Melendez and Lim for the rest of the day. Melendez got off from work first as Lim had to stay behind so Andrews could reacquaint her with everything again and provide any necessary accommodations. Lim decided she was too tired to cook, so she stopped by her favorite taco truck and picked up dinner before heading for home, where Melendez was watching baseball game. He smiled when he saw Lim had brought dinner and she held up the bag, “Got them just the way you like it: lots of beef, salsa, and sour cream, very little vegetables.”

“You know me too well,” he kissed her, “I take it the judge who heard our case was the one
who…”

“Yep,” Lim smiled proudly, almost as if she considered spending nine hours in jail a badge of honor.

Melendez shook his head and kissed her belly, “Don’t be like Mommy and consider going to jail a good thing.”

“She had it coming for her,” said Lim as she sat the food on the dining room table, “Did you hear Andrews fired Han?”

“I think everybody heard. Without the board’s approval yet,” Melendez sat down across from her, “They could offer one of us the job.”

“I know,” Lim affirmed and began to eat.

“You haven’t thought about what might happen if one of us is offered it?” asked Melendez in surprise.

“Yes, obviously,” she smiled and chuckled, “But it’s not like we could easily break up. We kind of have a little someone who will link us together forever,” she rubbed her growing abdomen for emphasis.

“Even if it was, I wouldn’t want to anyways,” he took her hand, “So, what should we do if it’s offered to one of us?”

Lim thought about it, “Tell you what? Let’s cross that bridge when we get there because neither one of us have been offered the job yet. Andrews could offer it to Cooperberg or Farmer for all we know.”

“True,” Melendez acknowledged.

After they finished dinner, Lim and Melendez cleaned up the kitchen before Lim seductively leaned against the kitchen counter, “So, Dr. Melendez, I was wondering if you wanted to go to sleep a little early tonight?”

Melendez slowly turned his head towards Lim, “Is going to sleep early even safe for you and the baby?”

“Dr. Garcia says as long as there’s no bleeding or other complications, then going to sleep early is perfectly fine,” she sauntered over to him and began to suck at the spot on his neck that drove him nuts, “So what do you say, doctor? Do you have time in your schedule to examine one more patient tonight?”

Melendez knew he probably wouldn’t be able to lift her as easily, so he grabbed her hand and pulled her towards the stairs, shutting their bedroom door behind them once they entered it.
Chapter 46

It took a few more days before Lim was scheduled for surgeries, but once her first one in months arrived on Friday, she was elated to begin her day. The baby woke her up kicking, which was no longer an abnormal occurrence for her; while it was often inconvenient in the middle of the night, Lim couldn’t deny that she always felt a sense of comfort when she felt her daughter moving around inside of her. Lim rolled over to find Melendez still fast asleep. He was off that day and Tom and he were going to paint the walls for the nursery while Lim was working. She silently got out of bed and went to shower and brush her teeth. When she arrived back to the bedroom, Melendez was just stirring awake, “Good morning,” she whispered softly.

“Mmm, good morning,” he smiled and kissed her, “How’d you sleep?”

“I slept well. Except for the few times our Little Champion here decided to show off her skills as a future gymnast,” Lim laughed a little.

Melendez chuckled and kissed her abdomen, “Well, today you get to go back into the operating room with Mommy while Daddy and Tom start getting your room ready.”

Lim pulled on a pair of pants and a loose fitting top before grabbing her black MotoChic bag, “I have to get going. I’ll grab breakfast at the hospital cafeteria. Maybe when I get home, we can go out for dinner somewhere.”

“What were you thinking?” asked Melendez, feeling that Lim already had some place in mind.

“The baby was thinking some steamed dumplings and kung pao chicken for dinner tonight,” Lim smirked, “And then maybe a nice relaxing bath and a massage that you’ll inevitably turn into something more.”

“Sound wonderful,” Melendez kissed her again, “Kick ass today.”

“Oh I plan on it,” Lim called out to him as she left the room. She drove to the hospital, changed into her scrubs, and swung by the cafeteria for breakfast before making her way to the OR to repair multiple abdominal injuries for a patient with three stab wounds in his abdomen as a result of a robbery. Lim entered the area to scrub in where Claire and Morgan were already at the sink. One thing was for sure: Lim would never take scrubbing in for surgery for granted again.

“Welcome back, Dr. Lim,” said Claire.

“Thank you, Dr. Browne; it’s good to finally be back. Now I expect that as second year residents, you can handle more responsibility with this procedure. You too, Dr. Reznick. I will be having you perform more aspects since you will soon be going into your third years of residency,” Lim commanded. The two residents dressed and followed their supervisor into the operating room and began the surgery. Lim couldn’t help but feel a deep sense of accomplishment in the back of her mind that Han was gone, not just for her sake, but for other’s as well. Shaun no longer had to worry about saying the wrong thing in front of Han, she could enjoy the rest of her pregnancy in peace (not to mention her PTSD symptoms were under control again since she was no longer worried about Han breathing down her neck). As she watched the two residents in front of her, she also felt relieved to know that if they ever decided to have children in the future, they wouldn’t be kept out of the OR, at least not at St. Bonaventure.

The only thing that was still nagging at Lim was what Melendez had said about the new chief of
surgery. There was a very real possibility that one of them would be offered the position. She
didn’t want to talk about it much; she knew a promotion for either one of them could jeopardize
their relationship since the board wouldn’t like the chief having a romantic relationship with one of
their attending surgeons. It would be quite difficult for them to break up, what with them living
together, not to mention the fact that they would soon be raising a child together. She knew no
matter what happened between them, Melendez would always be there for their daughter. And the
chief of surgery position was very time-consuming, even more so than being a surgeon. It would
take enough adjustment to balance being a surgeon and being a mom, let alone that. Maybe
Andrews and the board would take that into consideration before making their final decision.

After Morgan successfully closed up, Dr. Lim made her final rounds and made sure that Dr.
Cleland had everything under control in the ER before going to the locker room to grab her things
and head home. It was approaching 5:00 by the time Lim walked through the front door; she was
fatigued from being back in the OR, but she wouldn’t have it any other way, “Neil?” she called out
to him.

“Upstairs, Audrey!” he shouted.

Lim set her bag down and hung up her jacket before slowly making her way upstairs. She knew
Tom was gone because his car wasn’t in the driveway. She glanced into the nursery and the walls
were completely painted cream (which was about the only color the couple could agree on for the
walls). Lim couldn’t help but chuckle a little about their conversation in the Home Depot. If she
had had her way, the room would look like the inside of a Harley store; Melendez had totally
rejected that idea. On the contrary, Melendez had wanted to paint the walls based on the Houston
Astros’s team colors; Lim had shot down that idea. They were lucky they had finally settled on the
Winnie the Pooh theme. Lim went down to their room and Melendez smiled when he saw her,
“How was your day?”

“Exhausting, but I loved every second of it,” she climbed onto the bed next to him, “You and Tom
did a good job with the walls.”

“The paint should be dry by Sunday, so we can start on the decorations then,” said Melendez.
Lim sighed and said, “It’s getting pretty real: the fact that we’re going to be parents.”

“I know,” Melendez laid a hand on her abdomen, “But if she’s anything like her mother, she’s
going to turn out just fine. Hopefully.”

Lim smacked his chest, placed a chaste kiss against his lips, and muttered something in Mandarin,
but Melendez didn’t have a clue what she said, “In English, por favor.”

Lim chuckled and kissed him again, “I love you, you jackass.”

“So does the baby still want dumplings and kung pao chicken?” asked Melendez jokingly.

“It might be her mother who’s craving it, to be honest,” said Lim as she got up from the bed, “Now
let’s go, the sooner we eat, the sooner we can come back home for those evening activities we
planned!”

Melendez didn’t waste a single second putting his shoes on and finding his jacket. He didn’t know
what the future held for them, but with Lim by his side, he knew he could handle anything.
The next morning arrived and since it was a Saturday, Lim and Melendez slept in until 9:00 AM. Melendez slowly rolled over and smiled when he saw Lim’s face, “Well if it isn’t the beautiful woman I get to call my girlfriend.”

“It’s too early for you to be all mushy and annoying,” Lim said and laughed, though she couldn’t help but crack a smile.

Melendez kissed her and asked, “So how’d you sleep?”

“Well,” she replied, “Thankfully our little gymnast wasn’t quite as active last night as she has been all this week.”

“Well, all of that activity is a good sign,” Melendez kissed her abdomen, “So do you have any plans for today?”

Lim shook her head, “No immediate plans. You?” Melendez shook his head as well, “Maybe we can go out today, grab some brunch, see a movie, the Tech Museum, the Winchester Mystery House, the Happy Hollow Park and Zoo, a walk in the park; quite frankly, I don’t give a damn if we go grocery shopping as long as I’m with you.”

“Mm, maybe we can start the day with a nice, long shower and then we’ll go from there,” Melendez said.

Lim smirked and threw back the covers before seductively pulling off her pajama top, “Well, there’s nothing wrong with a little morning action, is there?” she headed towards the bathroom attempting to sway her hips, though her sway was starting to turn into a waddle. Melendez didn’t care either way as he followed her.

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It had been awhile since Lim and Melendez had gotten to enjoy a day just the two of them. Between their work schedules, the now settled lawsuit, and preparing for the new baby, they were extremely busy. It was nice to know that they were going to spend a Saturday not having to worry about when their next surgery was scheduled or when Lim’s next prenatal appointment was happening. Lim convinced Melendez to go have a traditional dim sum meal at HK Dim Sum and though she had to explain what was in pretty much every dish to him, they enjoyed the meal before heading to the Winchester Mystery House for the rest of the day. Their final destination of the day was Houge Park where they strolled hand in hand around the premise, watching the children on the playground, “Just think, before you know it, we’ll be watching our little girl swing on those swings and slide down that slide,” Melendez commented.

Lim looked at Melendez skeptically, “Who says she’ll want to play on the swings? Maybe she’ll want to play basketball?”

“Then we’ll play basketball with her,” Melendez wrapped his arm around Lim and kissed her temple, “We’ll teach her to love sports and swing sets.”

Lim couldn’t help but smile at the children, picturing their daughter amongst them. They found a park bench and sat down to take a break. The sun was just beginning to set and the view was gorgeous, “I think we should get away,” Lim said out of the blue.
“What?” Melendez asked, sharply turning his head towards her.

“I said ‘I think we should get away’. Go on a babymoon,” Lim emphasized.

“What’s a babymoon?” asked Melendez in curiosity. He had never heard of the term before now.

“Just like a newlywed couple takes a honeymoon together after their wedding, two people who are about to become parents take a babymoon as a final vacation as a couple before the baby arrives. I think it would be good for us and Dr. Garcia says the second trimester is the best time for me to travel,” explained Lim, “And I agree. The pregnancy is going smoothly, I no longer have first trimester discomforts, my PTSD symptoms are under control for now, this whole Han fiasco has been settled, and it would be great to go somewhere before the stress of the holiday season starts at both work and in our personal lives,” she grabbed his hand, “So what do you say?”

Melendez grinned at the prospect of spending a week alone relaxing with Lim. He kissed her and said, “Well, I guess the first step would be to find a vacation spot and also to talk to Andrews.”

“I thought you might agree with me,” she said. She stood and said, “Well, it’s getting to be late, I’m starving, and this baby wants a double-double cheeseburger, fries, and a strawberry milkshake from In-n-Out.”

Melendez couldn’t help but roll his eyes jokingly. One thing he would not miss about a pregnant Lim was her ever changing food cravings.

After dinner, they spent the rest of the evening putting up decorations in the baby’s nursery, cutouts of all of the Winnie the Pooh characters, and changed into their pajamas before heading back downstairs to relax in the living room. Lim turned on the TV and channel surfed a little bit before she settled on reruns of The Big Bang Theory. Melendez half-heartedly watched the sitcom, though his mind was reeling about bringing up a certain topic. Since Lim was in a decent mood, he decided it was safe, “Hey Audrey?”

“Hmm?” she muttered, muting the TV and turning to him to give him her full attention.

“I was thinking, with the baby on the way and the fact that our relationship is stable and we’re going to be our own little family soon, I was thinking it’s time for me to sell my house.”

It was Lim’s turn to sharply turn her head towards him, “Why?” she asked.

“Audrey, I haven’t been there in months. All of my stuff is here, all of the baby’s stuff will be here, I’m wasting money paying property taxes and bills for it; I think we’d be better off if I put it on the market,” Melendez said.

Lim pulled her feet out of his lap and sat up, “We have enough money to raise this child, Neil; you don’t need to sell your house.”

“I know I don’t need to; I want to,” said Melendez.

Lim was too tired to argue right now, but she was most definitely not thrilled about the idea of Melendez selling his house. She couldn’t put her finger on why, but she just wasn’t comfortable with it. She turned off the TV and announced, “I’m going to bed.”

Melendez was scared by her reaction, “You’re mad,” he stated.

“I’m not mad, I’m just tired, Neil! It’s not easy growing a human, you know?” she shouted from upstairs.
Melendez knew she was pissed but wasn’t saying anything, “Audrey, I’m willing to discuss it if you want?”

“Just drop it, Neil! We’ll talk about it in the morning!” she yelled.

Melendez figured it was best to wait until Lim was asleep before attempting to join her in bed, so he stayed downstairs and read for a half-hour before turning in for the night. Lim was indeed asleep, though Melendez noticed she had strategically placed her body pillow so there would be space in between them. Melendez climbed under the covers and kissed her temple, which prompted Lim to stir and roll over to her other side. Melendez sighed and closed his eyes; something about the idea of selling his house bothered Lim, but he didn’t know if he was ready to find out what.
Chapter 48

Melendez woke up the next morning before Lim, so he decided not to disturb her and just let her sleep. He went downstairs and started a pot of coffee before glancing into the refrigerator to figure out what he wanted for breakfast. He finally decided on eggs, bacon, and sausage, so he got out some pans to cook the meats and scramble the eggs. About twenty minutes later, Lim descended the stairs still clad in her pajamas, “Good morning,” she greeted him.

Melendez turned to face her, “Morning Aud.’

He didn’t know whether or not to bring up the discussion from the night before, but thankfully Lim was the first to speak, “Listen, about last night, I apologize,” she sat down at the island, “I have no issue with you selling your house.”

Melendez furrowed his brow a little. Lim seemed to change her mind on the subject pretty quickly, “What made you change your mind?”

Lim scrubbed her hand over her face and answered, “The fact that I was letting my pregnancy hormones and my past experiences do the talking last night.”

“Oh,” Melendez answered. He set the bacon, eggs, and sausage on the island and Lim helped herself to some food. Melendez poured them both a cup of coffee and set them down on the island as well before he asked, “What, are you afraid things won’t work out between us or something?”

Lim shook her head, “No, not directly, it just seems like whenever something good happens to me, then something bad happens. I graduate from med school and then my father has a stroke that kills him. I get accepted into a residency program and my mother is diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. I get engaged and Josh announces he’s moving to Dallas. I become an attending surgeon and I have a miscarriage and get divorced in the same year. I think about asking you out and you announce that you’ve started seeing Jessica. You break up with her only for Andrews to pit us against each other and then keep the title for himself. We finally sleep together for the first time and I get sick with a killer virus. I survive that only to get PTSD. I recover enough from that only for that jackass, Han, to get hired and openly discriminate against me. Now that we’ve gotten that settled and we’re at a good place, I figure it’s Murphy’s Law that if you sell your house, something will happen where we’ll have a huge fight and break up and you’ll have no place to go. I know it sounds stupid, but now that I finally feel less on edge again, given the patterns throughout my life, I’m afraid it’s too good to last,” she explained matter of factly and sipped her coffee.

Melendez frowned a little when she said the words ‘on edge’. He had noticed that she had been more irritable, wasn’t sleeping well, and had been a little moody and distant for the past several weeks, but he had just assumed it was the pregnancy hormones and the growing baby. He cursed himself for not even bothering to check how Han had been affecting her mental health, “I’m sorry, Audrey; I should have been more observant.”

“No, you don’t need to apologize. I was trying to hide it. I mean our residents have seen enough of me being weak with the virus, the flashback at work, and the pneumonia; they don’t need to see any more. And I was afraid if I showed any amount of emotion or weakness in front of Han, he would have used it as an excuse to fire me, so I buried it.”

Melendez loved Lim to death, but sometimes she was really bad at following other people’s advice of letting herself be vulnerable and talking about her feelings. He squeezed her hand and said, “Well I’m not going to sit here and tell you to get over it, but I can tell you that Han is no longer
there to hurt you. And if you need to talk, you know I’m here.”

“I know,” Lim smiled softly, “But this is something I could struggle with for the rest of my life and I don’t need to come whining to you every time I feel a little hyper vigilant or have a minor nightmare. As long as I’m not having intense flashbacks or nightmares that cause me to wake up screaming in the middle of the night, then I sometimes just need to deal with it myself.”

“Okay,” said Melendez. He took the plates and both Lim and he started to wash the dishes. He turned to her and asked, “So any idea where you might want to go on our babymoon?”

Lim shook her head, “I haven’t really thought about it. Obviously we’re limited on some places. We might want to go somewhere more adult-oriented since it’ll probably be awhile before we can go somewhere that’s not Disneyland or some other family-friendly vacation spot.”

Melendez looked at Lim skeptically, “You love Disneyland and are thrilled that you’ll soon have an excuse to go without looking like an overgrown child,” Lim smacked Melendez with a towel and he laughed, “It’s true and you know I’m right.”

“You got one apology out of me today; don’t push your luck,” said Lim.

Melendez’s cell phone rang and he checked the caller ID before he answered, “Melendez,” he listened to the voice on the other end, “Of course, sir. We’ll see you tomorrow morning at nine, sir. Okay, have nice day,” Melendez hung up the phone.

“Who was that, Neil?” asked Lim.

“It was Andrews. He wants to meet with the both of us tomorrow morning at 9 AM,” answered Melendez.

“Did he say why?” asked Lim.

Melendez shook his head, “He just said it was important.”

“I hope that’s a good sign,” said Lim. She hesitated before she asked, “Should we ask him about time off when we meet with him?”

Melendez sighed and said, “Let’s see what the news is and what kind of mood he’s in before we do. We haven’t even picked a destination yet.”

“Well that’s one item on our checklist today,” Lim smiled, “Along with the fact that that crib isn’t going to build itself and since you forced me to watch the entire series of *House*, I get to choose the next show we binge watch in our spare time.”

Melendez sighed, “Fair enough,” he kissed her and Lim beamed with satisfaction.

They showered and dressed before tackling the crib, which took them way longer than it should have given their field of work. Melendez also wasn’t thrilled by how much Lim insisted on helping but he wasn’t going to argue too much. For dinner that night, Melendez forced Lim to relax, so he surprised her with his family’s secret taco recipe. They settled down to watch some TV and Lim debated between *Stranger Things*, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, and *Lucifer* before choosing the second option so she could use “being scared” as an excuse to cuddle with Melendez (not that she was actually frightened and Melendez knew that fact, but he liked to pretend to feel needed sometimes).

When they went upstairs, Lim took yet another opportunity to look around the nursery. It was
slowly starting to come together, though they still had a lot of work to do. The only tasks that were complete were that the walls were painted and decorated and the crib was built. They still needed to put together and rearrange a lot of furniture and purchase or receive a lot of accessories. Lim also made a mental note to start researching childbirth classes. Jeez, there was still a lot to do before the baby was born, “Audrey?” Melendez interrupted her thoughts.

Lim snapped herself back into reality and went down to their room, “Sorry, I was just thinking about what still needs to be done in the baby’s room.”

“Well, we’ll keep checking off tasks slowly but surely,” Melendez said and kissed her after she crawled under the covers.

Lim turned out the light and was silent for a few moments before she asked, “So what do you think Andrews will tell us?”

Melendez rolled over and laid his hand on Lim’s back, “I don’t know,” he admitted honestly, “He didn’t sound overly upset so I’m guessing it’s not that bad. I guess we’ll find out in the morning,” Melendez kissed her temple, “Now try to get some sleep. I love you.”

“I love you too,” answered Lim and closed her eyes, though she was pretty sure neither one of them were going to get restful sleep tonight.
Chapter 49

Neither Melendez nor Lim slept well that night. In addition to baby girl Limlendez’s game of acrobatics, both of them were worried what Andrews was going to discuss with them at their morning meeting. When they arrived at St. Bonaventure, they decided to stay in their dress clothes for their meeting with Andrews, so they went straight to his office as soon as they arrived. Melendez knocked on the door and they heard Andrews tell them to come into the room. They both stepped into the office and Lim closed the door behind them, “Dr. Melendez, Dr. Lim, please have a seat,” Andrews motioned to the chairs across from him.

Melendez and Lim both glanced at each other and sat down in front of Andrews’s desk. He seemed way too jovial about whatever it was he was going to discuss with them, “You told me last night you had some news to tell us, sir?” asked Melendez for confirmation.

“I did, Dr. Melendez,” Andrews nodded. Lim and Melendez gave Andrews their full attention and Andrews continued, “First of all, I understand your lives will have some major changes coming up in the next several months,” they both nodded in acknowledgment, “Well, as you both are aware, the search for the chief of surgery has been back on ever since Dr. Han was let go from St. Bonaventure,” a panic built up inside both surgeons. They both were betting one of them would be offered the position and they both wondered if Andrews was asking them to break up, “Well, as Ms. Aoki has informed me numerous times, making decisions is not one of my strong points. But as someone who held the chief of surgery for many years, I personally know there is a lot of time and work that must be put into it. The work is enough for two people to split between them. I have gotten approval from the board to offer you both the position.”

Melendez and Lim looked at each other in surprise, “Sir, are you offering us both the job?” asked Lim just to be sure she was hearing things correctly.

“Yes, Dr. Lim, I want to make you and Dr. Melendez Associate Chiefs of Surgery,” said Andrews.

Melendez honestly didn’t know how to respond. For Andrews to go from keeping the title for himself to hiring Han to suddenly offering them both the job was unusual for him, “I don’t quite know what to say, sir,” Melendez admitted.

“Well, the both of you are easily the two best surgeons at St. Bonaventure and I believe your tenures in this position will be long. I also understand that you will soon be parents and that the baby will take up a lot of your time. But I believe that between the two of you working together, you both can do great things for this hospital. Plus, it helps me because I don’t have to choose between the two of you,” Andrews smiled smugly.

Lim and Melendez quelled the urge to roll their eyes. That was the Andrews they knew and somewhat despised, “When would we start in our new positions, sir?” questioned Lim.

“As soon as possible if you accept,” said Andrews, “Ms. Aoki and I can get you both oriented tomorrow and before you both know it, you’ll officially be Associate Chiefs of Surgery of St. Bonaventure.”

“Well, who would take over once Dr. Lim goes on maternity leave in another few months and I have my paternity leave as soon as the baby is born?” inquired Melendez.

“Well, as president of the hospital, I would have to temporarily take over your duties until either one or both of you return to work,” explained Andrews. Lim bit her lip to suppress a chuckle. So
this was Andrews’s way of indirectly keeping the title without actually retaining the title himself like he tried to do once before, “I’m confident you both will do very well in this position. That is, if you both accept.”

Lim and Melendez looked at each other once more, “Well, of course I accept, sir,” said Melendez.

“As do I,” agreed Lim.

“Good. Well, meet Ms. Aoki and me in my office tomorrow and we’ll get you both started. You both are dismissed.”

Melendez and Lim both left the office, too dumbstruck to bring up any other plans at the moment, “Well that was…” Melendez started.

“Extremely unexpected,” Lim finished Melendez’s sentence.

“I was going to say confusing but that works too,” said Melendez, “I’m not sure if he’s trying to be considerate of our relationship or hold as much power for as long as possible?”

Lim chuckled, “Or maybe he wanted to make it so we don’t fight with each other like we were beforehand.”

“He better be careful because we know what happens when we get along too well,” joked Melendez and laid a hand on her abdomen.

Lim smiled and kissed him, “I have to get going. I have a surgery at 10:30. I’ll see you later tonight, Dr. Melendez, Associate Chief of Surgery.”

Lim started to head towards the cafeteria, “Operating rooms are the other way, Lim!”

“But blueberry muffins are in the cafeteria, Melendez!”

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After their shifts, the pair stopped by grocery store to pick up some items for dinner and Melendez put the pot roast on to cook while he listened to Lim argue with Laura over the phone about the baby shower, “Laura, I told you, no games,” Lim said adamantly, “No, not even the chocolate in the diaper game,” she eyed Melendez and shook her head incredulously as if to say ‘what the Hell is Laura thinking?’, “No, not pin the beak on the stork or the blindfolded diaper changing relay either,” said Lim in frustration, “And no to the stupid clothespin game, because there’s always someone at the party who takes it way too seriously. Usually, that someone is me, but still,” said Lim. Melendez couldn’t help but laugh quietly to himself, “Look, Laura, why don’t we go out for lunch this weekend and I’ll lay the ground rules then, okay? Alright, I’ll call you later. Bye,” Lim slammed the phone back into its holder, “She knows I just want a nice lunch and afternoon with my friends and co-workers, not be put on display like some zoo animal,” Lim sat down at the dining room table.

Melendez finally did laugh out loud as he set the pot roast on the table and poured the water, “She’s just excited, Aud; we all are.”

“I know, but I’m not going to change my personality just because I’ll have the name Mommy before I know it,” said Lim lightly.

“And Associate Chief of Surgery,” Melendez said proudly.
“That too,” she couldn’t help but crack a smile, “Daddy and Associate Chief of Surgery,” they began to eat when Lim spoke up again, “Oh, during my lunch break, I was looking at childbirth classes in the area.”

“Are you still planning on doing that hypnotic baby thing?” asked Melendez as he tripped over his words.

“Hypnobirthing,” Lim corrected him, “And yes, or I’m going to at least try to go natural. Unless Little Miss here has other plans,” Lim rubbed her abdomen.

“Well, she is your kid, so who knows what her plans are,” said Melendez amusingly.

“And you’re not stubborn at all?” asked Lim sarcastically.

“Nope, not me,” he mocked jokingly.

Lim shook her head, “You’re lucky I love you, because you really are an asshat.”

Melendez gave her a cunning grin and stood, slowly walking around the table. He began to massage her shoulders. He leaned down to nip at her neck and said, “Then why don’t you show me?”

“Neil…” Lim warned, “We’re eating dinner.”

Melendez stood up straight and frowned playfully. He took his seat again and sighed, “Alright, I’ll behave.”

“Good,” Lim smirked and leaned across the table, “But if you’re a good boy and finish your dinner, I’ll give you a special dessert.”

“Yes ma’am,” Melendez began to quickly devour the contents on his plate.

“Just don’t choke,” Lim reminded him.

Melendez slowed down a little, “Just hard to resist a beautiful woman like you,” Melendez had to admit, all of Lim’s extra hormones benefited him when it came to her suddenly increased libido. Despite Lim’s warning, they both finished their dinner in a flash and hastily washed the dishes before going upstairs for an early evening. Melendez closed the door behind him and slowly turned to face Lim. Sure her figure had certainly changed since the first time they had slept together, but somehow, her pregnant body was even more stunning. He slowly stepped closer to her and laid his hands on her shoulders, “God, you’re beautiful. I’m really the luckiest man in the world.”

“Neil?”

“Yes, Audrey?”

“Shut up and make love to me.”

“Of course, Aud,” Melendez said. She went to say something more, but he immediately stopped her with a kiss.
Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

Sorry this chapter is so short, but just an FYI: this is the calm before the storm.

Since Lim and Melendez had been recently promoted, they decided to stay in California and only go away for a shorter time for their babymoon. Never the less, their trip to Los Angeles provided a much needed break from everyday life. Of course, when they arrived back to San Jose, they were quickly thrown into the deep end with everything that was involved with the chief of surgery position. It was Halloween day, and Lim and Melendez along with all four residents had to work the ER since it was traditionally one of the busiest days of the year. Nurse Farrar was on the phone with one of the EMTs when she hung up and announced, “Listen up everyone. We have two car accident victims coming in, first victim, thirteen year old male, second victim, seventy-two year old male. Both are in critical condition.”

“Park, Browne, you two go work with Melendez on whoever arrives first. Murphy, Reznick, and I will take the second victim,” shouted Lim. The thirteen year old boy, Kyle Webber, arrived first, and Melendez, Claire, and Park went straight to work on examining him. A short time later, the second patient, Kyle’s grandfather, Jerry Webber, arrived. Lim, Morgan, and Shaun went to work examining him, “Hi Jerry, I’m Dr. Lim and this is Dr. Murphy and Dr. Reznick, can you tell me if and where it hurts?”

“My abdomen,” he answered weakly. He was also coughing and short of breath.

“Did the airbag deploy near you abdomen?” asked Morgan.

Jerry nodded and coughed some more, “Yes, how’s Kyle?”

“We need to worry about you right now,” said Shaun.

“I promise you, Jerry, Kyle is in good hands. Dr. Melendez, Dr. Park, and Dr. Browne are excellent surgeons,” assured Lim, “Do you have any medical conditions we need to know about?”

“I have ALS,” informed Jerry.

Lim processed some possible diagnoses in her head, though Jerry’s coughing was distracting her some, “I’m assuming it hasn’t advanced to the point where you are unable to drive?”

Jerry shook his head, “No, I was only diagnosed a year and a half ago.”

Lim listened to his chest and felt around his abdomen, “Murphy, Reznick, get him to radiology for an X-Ray and a CT scan of his chest and abdomen. Call me once you have the results because I’m supposed to stay out of radiology,” Shaun and Morgan nodded and they wheeled him out of the ER. Lim went over to Melendez, “How is he?” she asked.

“He might have a few broken ribs and a concussion, but he seems fine otherwise. He’s young, so that’s definitely an advantage for him in his recovery. How about his grandfather?” inquired Melendez.
“He was complaining of abdominal pain, so I sent him up to radiology for an X-Ray and a CT scan. Reznick and Murphy will call me with the results,” Lim’s phone buzzed at that moment and it was Morgan calling, “Lim. What? Okay, you and Murphy scrub in. I’ll be right up,” Lim disconnected, “Ruptured diaphragm,” she informed.

Lim made her way up to the OR as quickly as she could, which wasn’t that fast anymore, and scrubbed in. They anesthetized Jerry and Lim opened his abdomen, which was filled with blood, “Dammit,” she cursed, “I can’t even see the diaphragm. Murphy, suction please?”

An alarm sounded and Morgan stated, “His O2 stats are crashing!”

“Crap,” Lim cursed again, “With his ALS, his torn diaphragm must be affecting his breathing.”

“We should up his oxygen on the ventilator,” informed Shaun.

Lim nodded towards Morgan who did so, “Okay, I see it. Sutures please?” Lim closed off the tear and smiled, “Looks good.”

Jerry’s vitals began to drop again, “His oxygen is dropping,” announced Shaun. Lim didn’t respond right away, “Dr. Lim?” Shaun looked over at her.

“He needs a tracheotomy done. Dr. Reznick, prep the area. I’ll be right back,” ordered Lim. Before Shaun and Morgan could ask any questions, Lim briefly left the operating room, though the two residents could see her in the scrub-in area taking deep breaths.

Shaun was oblivious to Lim’s behavior, but Morgan had seen it once before, “Shaun, I’ll be right back,” she went into the scrub in area and called out to her supervisor, “Dr. Lim, are you okay?”

Lim nodded, “Yes, just wanted to do some deep breathing in a secluded area. Is the neck prepared?” Morgan nodded in confirmation, “Okay, let’s scrub back in again and get it inserted.”

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Later that night, Lim and Melendez arrived home just in time to be able to distribute candy to the trick-or-treaters in the neighborhood (that is, after Melendez made a run to the grocery store for candy since they had somehow managed to eat the first batch). Once the rush had seemed to die down, Melendez turned off the porch light and Lim was more than happy to eat any leftover peanut butter cups. He sat down next to her on the couch and said, “I got a few offers on my house?”

“Really?” she asked through a mouthful of Reese’s.

Melendez nodded, “I know which offer I’m going to take, so by this weekend, we’ll officially live together,” he smiled.

Lim swallowed and threw her arms around him, “Oh Neil, that’s wonderful! I really needed some good news today.”

“Rough day?” asked Melendez.

Lim sighed and nodded, “My patient isn’t stable even with the surgery. And then in the OR, I almost had a flashback,” she admitted.

“What do you mean almost?” asked Melendez worriedly, holding her more tightly.
“I had to leave the room and go into the scrub in area in order to do some mindfulness breathing. Thankfully, that was another disaster could be avoided,” she said.

Melendez kissed her forehead, “I know it’s hard, but you’re having a lot more good days than bad.”

Lim smiled to herself and stood, “Come on, Neil; let’s put this baby to bed.”

“Bed or…?”

“Sleep,” added Lim.
Chapter 51

Lim didn’t have to go into work until 3 PM the next day, but Melendez had to work the 7 AM-3 PM shift so he was up bright and early, doing his best not to disturb Lim. It didn’t work though since she had become a light sleeper ever since she had gotten pregnant. Melendez was coming out of the bathroom as Lim was stirring awake, “Go back to sleep,” Melendez whispered, “You need it.”

“I’m fine, Neil,” she said, fighting sleep. She sat up in bed and said, “I have a ton of crap to do before work anyways. I’ve got laundry and I might as well wash some of the baby clothes we already have. Plus there’s so much cleaning to do,” she yawned, “Though it’s definitely difficult to balance wanting to sleep and wanting to nest.”

Melendez chuckled and said, “Tell you what? I’ll set your alarm for 9:00 that way you can sleep a little bit longer and have time to nest,” he said.

“You’re so good to me,” she smiled and kissed him.

Melendez finished getting dressed and went to leave the room before he turned back and said, “Now, get some sleep. I mean it.”

“Oh yes, sir,” she mocked before rolling back over and closing her eyes.

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Melendez had been at the hospital barely twenty minutes when he was called to the emergency room. The EMTs were just rolling in the patient as Melendez, Morgan, and Claire all came to her side, but both Morgan and Melendez knew exactly who she was, “Oh my God,” Melendez uttered to himself.

“What?” asked Claire.

“That’s Casey Garrison,” said Melendez. As it turns out, Casey had collapsed on her school playground and had gone into full cardiac arrest. Thankfully, the paramedics were able to revive her, but her cardiac output was still extremely weak, “Send her up for a cardiac MRI and get the cath lab ready. We need to see if her cardiomyopathy has progressed.”

“Right away, Dr. Melendez,” said Nurse Petringa.

The nurses rolled Casey away and her parents followed her to radiology. Melendez, Claire, and Morgan all went into the observation room for the cardiac MRI. Once the MRI was complete, they took Casey to the catheterization lab to do some exploratory procedures but Melendez’s worst fear had come true: Casey needed a heart transplant. He ordered some medication to try to increase Casey’s cardiac output and went to find George and Martha. He found them in the pacing around in the waiting area. They stopped and linked hands when Melendez entered the room, “Dr. Melendez, how is she?” asked George.

Melendez looked at them and said, “I need you both to come to my office,” he said.

George and Martha both gained worried looks. They followed Melendez to his office and he shut the door behind him. He gestured towards the two chairs across from his desk and George and Martha sat down. Melendez sat as well before he took a deep breath and said, “Mr. and Mrs. Garrison, I regret to inform you that Casey’s hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is beyond the point of
The parents looked at each other and Martha asked, “So what does this mean, Dr. Melendez?”

“Casey needs a heart transplant,” stated Melendez. He tried to do it as compassionately as possible, but Martha immediately started sobbing while George was struggling to hold back tears.

“How soon?” asked George.

“Very soon,” said Melendez, “Within a week, two weeks maximum,” he answered.

“What happens now?” asked Martha.

“We get her listed with UNOS, they oversee organ transplants, we wait for a good match while keeping Casey as comfortable as possible,” Melendez explained.

“And what if a new heart doesn’t come in time?” asked Martha, though she knew the answer.

Melendez sighed and said, “If a heart doesn’t come in time, then Casey dies. We have a meeting this afternoon; I can get her listed right away. She’ll be high priority and we’re going to do everything we can for her.”

George and Martha stayed silent while they absorbed the news, “Can we see her?”

“Of course,” Melendez nodded. He led the couple to Casey’s hospital room in the ICU, to which they both hugged her and kissed her before Melendez entered and explained everything in more child-friendly terms.

Once the conversation was over, he checked the time and it was nearing the end of his shift, so he changed out of his scrubs and stopped by Lim’s office, figuring she’d be at work by now. He knocked on the door and she looked up and smiled at him, “I thought you would have left by now?”

“No, I was in the locker room,” he kissed her, “Are all of those baby clothes washed?”

“Mmhm. And the changing table is assembled,” Lim added. Melendez’s eyebrows shot up and Lim said, “What? I was bored.”

Melendez wasn’t in the mood to argue about Lim’s ambition while pregnant. He took a deep breath and said, “Casey Garrison’s back.”

Lim shot up from her paperwork and asked, “When did she come in?”

“This morning, she went into full cardiac arrest at school. She needs a new heart,” said Melendez.

“Oh,” said Lim, “Did you get her listed with UNOS?”

“Yes. I guess now all we can do is hope and pray for a match,” said Melendez.

“Right,” said Lim stoically, “I have to get going. I need to perform a few post op-tests on Jerry Webber,” she pushed herself to her feet, “Don’t wait up for me tonight if you’re tired.”

“I probably will; I can’t sleep if you’re not lying next to me,” he admitted.

“Oh,” she kissed him, “But I mean it! Don’t wait up for me.”
Lim performed some post-op exams on Jerry Webber and the results weren’t good: the results showed that due to the damage done to his diaphragm along with a few other organs, he would never make a full recovery with his ALS and would be ventilator dependent for the rest of his life. The only organ that seemed to be undamaged was his heart. Lim went to deliver the news to Jerry and his daughter, Cathy. Naturally, they were both devastated. Cathy excused herself to go visit Kyle (it had been discovered that he had a bruised spinal cord, so he was under observation) and inform him of his grandfather’s status. Lim’s shift was officially over, but she knew she had to make one final stop. Lim found Casey’s hospital room and knocked quietly on the door in case Casey was asleep. To Lim’s surprise, she wasn’t, “Dr. Lim,” she smiled.

“Hi Casey,” Lim came in and sat next to her, “Where’s your Mommy and Daddy?”

“Mommy went to the cafeteria to get me ice cream and Daddy’s taking a walk,” said Casey. Lim smiled softly, “Dr. Melendez says I need a new heart.”

“I know, he told me,” said Lim.

“I’m scared,” admitted Casey.

“Hey, you have to be brave, just like Belle when she rescued her father from the Beast’s castle, just like when Mulan went into battle in place of her father, just like Moana did when she went out to obtain the pounamu stone…” listed Lim, “And I promise you, you’re in good hands as long as you’re under Dr. Melendez’s care.”

“Really?” asked Casey.

“Really,” confirmed Lim.

“Casey, sweetheart, I found you some ice cream,” said Martha coming into the room, “Oh, Dr. Lim, what a pleasant surprise.”

“I was just about to leave; my shift is over, but Ne…Dr. Melendez informed me that Casey was back,” Lim smiled at her.

“Well, I’m sure Casey appreciates the visit,” Martha smiled, though Lim could see she was barely holding it together.

“Well, I really have to get going,” Lim went to leave the room.

“You’re going to be a great mommy, Dr. Lim,” said Casey.

“Casey!” scolded Martha.

“What? She has the same big belly Aunt Michelle had before Joey was born,” defended Casey.

Lim turned back to the mother and daughter, “Thank you Casey. That means a lot coming from you.”

Lim had barely had time to eat so she stopped by McDonalds and grabbed a Big Mac (funny, she had never liked Big Macs that much until a certain someone started influencing her food choices) before she headed for home. She quietly unlocked the front door and no one was on the first floor,
so she went upstairs and found Melendez fast asleep. She quietly undressed and ran some warm bath water to unwind and also to soothe her new found back pain, but she couldn’t help but think about Casey Garrison. She was eight years old and facing death. Lim couldn’t even begin to imagine how she was feeling; Lim had been 36 and was absolutely terrified of everything that had been happening to her, let alone being a young child. Lim let the water out, pulled on her pajamas, crawled into bed, and kissed Melendez’s temple. He rolled over and laid his hand on her back, lightly rubbing it; though Lim usually found this action very soothing, she had the feeling she wasn’t going to sleep well tonight.

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Lim had been correct in her assumption about not sleeping well, but luckily, Melendez was able to calm her down and she didn’t have any surgeries scheduled for that day. They both arrived at the hospital and changed before parting ways, Lim heading off to make her rounds. Her first stop was Jerry Webber’s room. She knocked on the door and entered his room, “Good morning, Mr. Webber.”

He looked over at her and smiled, “Dr. Lim.”

“How was your night?” she asked as she began to examine him.

“It was good. Cathy brought Kyle by and he was telling me about a girl he met in the child life room,” Jerry chuckled and coughed a little.

“Well, you know teenage boys,” Lim smirked.

“Oh she’s eight; too young for him,” said Jerry. He gained a look of apprehension and said, “He said she told him she needs a heart transplant.”

Lim knew immediately that Jerry was talking about Casey Garrison, but Lim didn’t mention it, “Oh?” she asked, pretending to be oblivious.

“It’s got me thinking, I’m 72 years old, I’ve lived a good life, but now I’ll be ventilator dependent for the rest of my life. I can’t drive, I’ll need a wheelchair now, I’ll just be sitting at home, I want to do something good while I still can. Dr. Lim, is there any way you can get me in contact with Casey’s doctor?”

Lim scowled a little, but nodded, “Yes, my…yes, I know him. Why do you ask?”

“I’d like to see if I can get tested as a match to be Casey’s donor.”
Chapter 52

Lim had called an emergency meeting with Melendez, Andrews, and the board to explain the situation with Jerry Webber. Everyone in the room was shocked to say the least, “How does UNOS feel about that?” asked Allegra.

“UNOS says it’s entirely our decision,” informed Andrews, “I just don’t know how we can do this without risking our medical licenses being suspended or revoked or charges for euthanasia. Is Jerry even a potential match for Casey?”

“He’s O Positive, universal donor, surprisingly, size is good, good antigen match,” explained Lim, “And I looked at the laws: legally, we’re allowed to give him a lethal dose of morphine as long as he ingests it on his own time.”

“He can also ask us for a DNR and then we can roll him into the operating room and he can turn off his own ventilator and there won’t be anything we can do about it,” said Andrews.

“What about Casey’s parents? Have you told them?” asked Allegra.

“No, I wanted to talk to everyone here before even considering telling them. It’s such an ethical dilemma. I don’t even know if Jerry has let his daughter and grandson know about his decision yet,” admitted Lim, “I would definitely have to make sure he’s mentally competent and that this is what he truly wants to do. I would also need another physician to sign off before we even attempted to approach the Garrisons,” she glanced over at Melendez, indicating she was the second physician she was thinking of asking.

Andrews folded his hands and looked between Lim and Melendez, “Well, you’ve made a good case, Dr. Lim. Dr. Melendez, care to add anything else?”

Melendez had been quiet the entire discussion, which was quite unusual for him, “I don’t approve,” he stated.

“What?” asked Lim in astonishment.

“I don’t approve,” Melendez reiterated, “Look, Dr. Lim, of course I want to see Casey Garrison get a new heart; I just don’t think this is the right way to do it.”

“I can’t believe you. I know you; you’d be making the exact same argument if your precious title wasn’t on the line,” quipped Lim.

“It has nothing to do with being an associate chief of surgery; I just don’t think it’s ethical to let one patient commit suicide in order to save another. Look, Dr. Lim, Casey is high on the UNOS list. I’m sure she’ll get a heart soon,” said Melendez.

“And what if she doesn’t?” asked Lim adamantly, “Think about, Dr. Melendez? There is a man who willingly wants to die to save someone else. How many people on this planet would do that?”

“So you admit he has to die?” asked Melendez.

“Yes, of course, I admit he has to die,” Lim did her best not to shout.

“Well, I’m sorry. If you want my approval, you’re not getting it,” said Melendez firmly.
“Alright, let’s settle down,” interrupted Andrews, “Both Casey and Jerry can last several more days, so we can discuss this further when you both are calmer.”

“I have other patients,” Lim eyed Melendez maliciously and exited the conference room.

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Melendez and Lim barely said a word to each other for the rest of the day: no smiles, no quick kisses in the hall, no brief hand holding to satisfy the need to intimacy. Their drive home was deathly silent and they could both feel the tension between them. Melendez pulled into the driveway and Lim went to unlock the door, planning to go straight up the stairs before Melendez stopped her, “Audrey, we really need to talk about this.”

“Oh, NOW you want to talk? You made yourself pretty clear in the conference room. I’m clearly going to have to get another physician to evaluate Jerry,” she said in anger.

“And any doctor with an ounce of intelligence will realize how crazy this idea is!” Melendez shouted.

Lim raised her eyebrows, “Crazy! You really think saving a life is crazy?!?” she stepped closer to him.

“If it involves purposefully killing another man, then yes!” answered Melendez adamantly, “And I’m not going to allow you to let Jerry kill himself because you’ve become too attached to one of our patients!”

Lim was furious now, “You really think the reason I want to allow Jerry to do this is because I’ve become too attached to Casey Garrison?!”

“Yes, I do,” yelled Melendez, “And I feel that you’re not thinking like a surgeon, you’re thinking like a mom!”

Lim was taken aback at his audacity to question her surgical skills, “Well, this has nothing to do with thinking like a mom! It has everything to do with wanting to save an eight year old girl! Eight years old, Neil! Eight!” she screamed loudly, “And even if I WAS thinking like a mom, I guess that’s pretty damn good for you then isn’t it?! Because I’m still scared shitless about raising this baby given the fact that I have no maternal instinct whatsoever and don’t you dare say I do well with Murphy or Gabi or my child patients! It’s one thing dealing with a resident with autism or a young woman with a TBI or a young patient, it’s quite another to deal with your own child! Every time I help Laura look after Everly, I have no idea how to soothe her, so forgive me if I want to learn how to be a mom! ” she tried her best to keep herself calm, but it was beyond hope, “Jerry is 72 years old.”

“What, so that means it’s okay to kill him?” asked Melendez.

“No, and I won’t be killing him; he’s choosing to die,” explained Lim, her tone getting louder with every word.

“The man just went through a car accident and major surgery; I’m sure he’s depressed,” yelled Melendez.

“Or maybe he doesn’t want to die a slow, painful death like my mother did. Once her cancer metastasized, she was so much pain; if a law like this existed ten years ago, I know she would have jumped at the opportunity to take herself out of her misery. But all she could do was deny chemo and take morphine pills. I would’ve missed her, yes, but I still would have supported her decision.”
“So if it was our daughter lying there wanting to die, you’d let her?” asked Melendez, “Or my sister?”

Lim raised her eyebrows at Melendez’s oblivion, “First off, jackass, Gabi wouldn’t be considered of mentally sound mind to make a decision like that. You know that fact as well as I do! And you’re really going to bring our unborn daughter into this discussion?”

“Well, you’ve been so damn sensitive about everything lately; I wanted to prove to you you’re thinking like a mom and thinking irrationally!” Melendez said, intending for it to hurt.

Lim didn’t even know how to react; that line was a cruel blow, even for him, “I can’t believe you just said that. You know everything I’ve been going through these past ten months. You know about how I couldn’t walk two steps without doubling over and gasping for air. You know I couldn’t hear someone coughing without having a panic attack. You know I couldn’t fall asleep without having the three patients that died haunting me in my dreams like clockwork. You went with me to my sessions, I let you see me when I was the most vulnerable in my entire life, I let you hear about the war going on inside my head, the war that still goes on in my head sometimes. I thought with everything we’ve been through together, you would have gained an ounce of empathy, but apparently not. You’re just as arrogant and self-centered as you always were.”

Melendez knew he had crossed a line with his last comment, but he didn’t even know where to begin to apologize, “Audrey.”

Lim stepped back away from him and crossed her arms, “Jessica was right: you’re going to be a great dad, but you’d be a shitty husband.”

Lim turned on her heels and stomped up the stairs and this time, Melendez knew better than to follow her.
Chapter 53

Lim didn’t sleep a wink that night. She tossed and turned and whenever she finally did fall asleep, she would wake up again, either because of a nightmare or because the baby kicked her in God knows what organ. Her alarm finally went off at 6 AM, but considering she hadn’t slept well and she was feeling very irritable, she knew it would probably be best to take the day off for both hers and her patients’ sake. She didn’t have any surgeries scheduled and when she called Andrews, he said that Cooperberg was available to cover the ER, so she went downstairs sincerely hoping Melendez was already gone. To her dismay, he wasn’t.

Melendez was up and fully dressed, but he was only now pouring his coffee in a to-go mug. He looked over at Lim and scowled when he observed her still wearing her pajamas, “Why aren’t you dressed?” he asked.

“Didn’t sleep well, so I took the day off,” she answered bitterly, reaching into the refrigerator and grabbing the bottle of orange juice. She had quickly discovered that high stress and arguing were triggers.

“Alright,” said Melendez, “Did you want to talk about anything before I leave?”

“No,” Lim quipped curtly, “Wouldn’t want you to think I’m being too sensitive.”

“Come on, Audrey, you know I didn’t mean that…” Melendez said as he raised his voice.

“Oh no, I think you made it pretty clear last night that you’re basically just waiting for me to go back to the way I was before the quarantine; back to the time where I showed no emotion and didn’t get triggered by the most innocuous things and you didn’t have to worry about walking on eggshells around me,” she shouted, “Well, I got news for you: I may never be 100% ever again. The damage is done, the pulmonary fibrosis is there, the memories can’t be erased!”

“Dammit Aud, this has nothing to do with your problems! You’re just pissed because I didn’t back you up yesterday. Heaven forbid I have my own opinion on how to treat patients!” yelled Melendez.

“That’s not true!” she defended.

“It is true and you’re just using the PTSD as a crutch!” he shouted back.

“Un-fucking-believable,” she turned to go upstairs so she could shower and get dressed, “This is why I didn’t want you to sell your house because now I’m stuck looking at your sorry ass all the time.”

“Well, we create the schedules now. Do you want me to make the schedules this week so we’re on different shifts where we won’t have to see each other? Will that make you happy?” Melendez shouted up the stairs.

“Preferably!” Lim yelled before slamming the bedroom door shut.

Lim watched Melendez pull out of the driveway and speed off down the street. He was clearly breaking the legal limit but she didn’t care at this point. She went to run herself some bath water and once she was engulfed in the warm safety net, she couldn’t help but start to accuse herself of her life choices. She hated herself for the fact that she had broken her promise to never fall in love again after she divorced Kashal, she blamed herself for letting Melendez into her life in a way
where they were more than friends, she chastised herself for getting knocked up (not that she hadn’t wanted a baby and hadn’t been feeling her biological clock ticking, but she had honestly thought about conceiving via a sperm donor like Laura had and being a single mom until she decided against it), and worst of all, she hated that as much as she wanted to strangle Melendez right now, she also had wanted him to be with her the night beforehand, to hold her as she woke up sweating, screaming, and with a racing heart, to say soothing words in her ear that everything was going to be okay. Shit. Why the fuck did her heart still ache for his comfort when she could barely look him in the eyes after what he had said to her?

A swift kick in her kidney brought Lim back to reality. She groaned a little and rubbed the spot to soothe it before letting out the water and getting dressed. She knew exactly where she wanted to go and didn’t even bother to call her since she knew she worked from home most of the time now. When she arrived at her house, Lim parked on the street and pounded on the front door. Laura answered a few moments later, “Audrey?”

“Why did I let myself fall in love with that obnoxious, arrogant, self-absorbed son of a bitch? And why did I let him father my child instead of having some stranger do it like you did?” Lim stormed into the room without even being invited into the house.

“Hello to you too,” said Laura, “Shouldn’t you be at work, Audrey?”

“I took the day off. I didn’t sleep well last night,” Lim ran her hands through her hair as the tears started to stream down her face. This reaction was new territory for Laura. She had never seen Lim cry before: not when she was dumped by her high school boyfriend, not when either of her parents died, not when she divorced Kashal, not even when she told her she had miscarried. But somehow, Laura knew exactly what to do. She wrapped her arms around Lim tightly and said, “It’s okay, Audrey; deep breath.”

Lim mimicked Laura’s breathing before she pulled out of her embrace, "I’m sorry to bother you. I better go.”

“No, that’s okay. Everly is taking her morning nap, I have time to talk,” said Laura.

Lim nodded and sat down next to Laura on the sofa, “I don’t even know where to begin.”

Laura had the feeling Melendez was part of the issue considering the fact that he was whom Lim was talking about when she barged through the front door, “Well, did you have a fight with Neil?”

“Oh it was beyond that,” Lim stated, “It started out as an argument about a complex case we’re working on and everything just blew up from there. And the bastard told me I’ve been too sensitive lately. Like I wanted to get PTSD! I’m sorry I’m not the woman I used to be, Neil!” she said ironically.

Laura had noticed that herself. Not that Lim had become too sensitive per se, but with the pregnancy and the discrimination lawsuit and her fears about motherhood and the fears about her health, Laura had noticed Lim was struggling some. She just had too much pride to admit it, “Audrey, can I tell you something without you getting mad at me?” Lim took a deep breath and raised an eyebrow, “I’m not defending what Neil said because that was totally asinine of him, but I think he might be worried about you.”

“So what? You’re taking his side?” asked Lim defensively.

“No, well not with what he said. It’s just…” Laura took a moment to find the right words, “Audrey, you have Neil, the baby, the promotion at work, not to mention your health and the PTSD. You’ve
been hiding it well, but you’ve been struggling. Maybe it wouldn’t be a bad idea to go back to your therapist.”

“No,” Lim said firmly, “I don’t need my therapist. My treatment is done. It’s been done. It was done in May.”

“I know, but you know what your OB/GYN said. You know what your therapist said. You don’t have to deal with this alone. You don’t have to push people away,” said Laura.

“You’re wrong. I don’t need any help. I’m over it. It’s been almost a year since the quarantine anyways. Of course I’m over it,” Lim stood, “I have to go I have errands to run.”

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Lim stopped by the grocery store, which wasn’t a pleasant experience. She felt every single individual around her was sick or was coughing or had some sort of physical ailment, but she knew it wasn’t true. She bought some stuff to restock the cabinets and refrigerator (including some of Melendez’s favorite flavor of potato chips, though she had no idea why she still cared about him enough to do anything nice for him right now) and headed for home. She put the groceries away and went upstairs into the only place that calmed her right now, the baby’s room. There was no rocking chair or glider in there yet, so Lim just stood there in the middle of the room to try to ground herself. There was the Winnie the Pooh characters on the walls: Pooh, Eeyore, Tigger, Piglet, Owl, Rabbit, Kanga, Roo, and Christopher Robin. The crib was pushed up against the wall and the changing table was on the opposite wall. The dresser was next to it.

Lim took a shaky breath and pulled the most recent sonogram out of her jacket pocket. She didn’t know whether to love the image or hate it right now. Okay, that was a stupid thought: she loved her baby girl more than anyone else on the planet. Which was why she felt this baby didn’t deserve her as a mother. And it pained her to think that Neil had helped create her with their love. She was going to be the perfect combination of the two of them and now she couldn’t even think about being in the same room as him. But yet, she still loved him. She still wanted to hug him and kiss him and fuck him and laugh with him and joke with him and watch him interact with their daughter and play with her and read to her and rock her to sleep. Lim finally sunk to the ground and let the tears flow profusely. She pulled out her cell phone and attempted to dial the number she needed, though it took her multiple attempts because her hands were shaking so much. Once she finally entered the correct number, the phone rang for a few moments until she heard her pick up, “Hello?”

“Dr. Jacobson, it’s me, Audrey Lim. I need your help.”
Chapter 54

Dr. Jacobson was able to have Lim come in that Monday. Lim hadn’t seen Melendez all weekend other than in passing; he had gone to visit Gabi by himself on Sunday and made sure to leave before Lim was awake on Monday. Lim showered and dressed before she headed out for the day. Considering the fact that she hadn’t been sleeping well the past several nights, she decided to stop by Starbucks, though she got a drink smaller than her usual size given the fact that lots of caffeine wasn’t that great for the baby. Lim arrived at the counseling center and waited a bit before Dr. Jacobson called her back. Lim knew Dr. Jacobson hadn’t failed to notice the baby bump she was now sporting since her last visit. Lim and Dr. Jacobson entered her office and Dr. Jacobson closed the door behind her, “It’s Neil’s,” stated Lim.

“I’m sorry?” questioned Dr. Jacobson.

“The baby; Neil’s the father,” repeated Lim.

“Oh,” Dr. Jacobson chuckled, “Well congratulations, Audrey. How far along are you?”

“Twenty-three weeks as of this past Saturday,” answered Lim.

“Do you know what it is yet?” asked Dr. Jacobson curiously.

“It’s a little girl,” Lim smiled to herself. It was the first genuine smile in several days.

“Well, I’m happy for you,” said Dr. Jacobson, “But about your call to me on Saturday…” Lim sighed and tears formed in her eyes as she thought about it, “What’s wrong, Audrey?”

Lim rubbed her hands together nervously. She was grateful to be able to open up to someone without judgment, but it was still difficult for her, “Neil and I had a terrible fight last week and it has me questioning our relationship. And I think high stress and arguing are triggers for my PTSD.”

“I see,” Dr. Jacobson responded empathetically, “And you hadn’t had any trouble before last week?”

Lim sighed, “Some irritability here and there or an occasional nightmare, but nothing like last week. We have a complex case we’re working on at the hospital and we’re on opposing sides and once we got home, that’s when we blew up in each other’s faces. He told me I’ve been too sensitive lately. I couldn’t believe he threw something I don’t have any control over into the argument.”

“And this case and what he said were the only contributing factor in this fight?” asked Dr. Jacobson for confirmation, though she also wanted Lim to continue to explore her thoughts and feelings.

“Well…” Lim trailed off, “A lot has happened since I last saw you. We got a new chief of surgery that didn’t like the fact that Neil and I were dating and was openly adamant about having surgeons with mental health differences, not just me,” she began, “Then our former supervisor passed away from brain cancer, Neil and I moved in together, of course, this happened,” Lim gestured to the swell in her abdomen, “This same chief of surgery kept me out of the operating room solely because I’m pregnant, we had to file a discrimination lawsuit and Neil’s ex-fiancée was our lawyer. This obnoxious chief of surgery was fired and Neil and I were promoted to associate chiefs of surgery. With this new promotion comes a lot more work and less time for each other, not to
mention preparing for our baby’s arrival. Neil just sold his house recently and then this happens,” Lim finished, “The last few days I’ve been having that nightmare where the three patients are haunting me, sometimes Neil is sick and I can’t save him, and…” Lim forced herself not to cry, “Last night it was our daughter I couldn’t save.”

“I see,” said Dr. Jacobson, “It seems like you’ve gone through a lot recently. Have you been talking to Neil about how you feel about everything?”

Lim hesitated, “Sometimes. Sometimes I keep it to myself. I don’t want to bother anyone and Friday night just confirmed that I am. But as angry as I am with him right now, I still want to be with him and I still want him to understand me. But I’ve never been good at communicating my feelings, even before PTSD. It’s what ended my last relationship and now I’m scared it’s where Neil and I are headed. Only now, we have a baby to throw into the mix and I know him: he won’t abandon her so there would have to be a custody agreement.”

Dr. Jacobson might have had a small feeling of what was going on between Lim and Melendez, but she needed to be able to talk to Melendez to find out for sure, “Audrey, when’s the next time you and Neil are both off?”

Lim looked at Dr. Jacobson in surprise and thought about it, “Um, Thursday I think. I have an ultrasound in the morning to check on the baby and I have my glucose screening test in the morning. We should be done by noon though.”

“Well, I’d like you both to come by my office around 1:30 on Thursday if that’s okay with you?” Dr. Jacobson asked.

“Of course,” said Lim, “I’ll let Neil know tonight.”

The next few days were a little better. Lim had forgiven Melendez enough to allow him back into their bed and their short interactions didn’t contain as much animosity. After Lim’s ultrasound and glucose test (both which came back with good results), Melendez began the drive to the counseling center. He took a deep breath and said, “Hey, Aud…”

“Neil, don’t…” she interrupted him, “We’re at an okay place right now and I don’t want to get into a screaming match.”

Melendez nodded and dropped the subject, at least temporarily. They went back to the office and sat down next to each other on the couch. Neither of them knew what to say, so Dr. Jacobson spoke first, “Audrey came to visit me on Monday.”

“Yeah, she told me,” said Melendez.

“It seems like you both have been through a lot the last several months,” mentioned Dr. Jacobson.

“Understatement of the year,” replied Lim.

“Well, Neil, I appreciate you coming in because I wanted to ask you a few questions based on what Audrey said to me on Monday,” said Dr. Jacobson.

“Fire away,” said Melendez.

“During Audrey’s course of treatment, we focused on coping mechanisms so she could manage her PTSD symptoms. But we also discussed how those caring for someone with PTSD need to care for
themselves as well. By the sounds of how busy you’ve both been lately, it seems like you haven’t had much time to yourself,” mentioned Dr. Jacobson.

“Well, my friend, Tom and I...well, a couple weeks ago…” Melendez finally sighed and shook his head, “No, not really.”

“Neil, with everything that’s been going on lately, do you think you might be experiencing caregiver burnout?” asked Dr. Jacobson gently.

Melendez was silent for the longest time before he finally looked at Lim, “You don’t deserve any of this.”

“Excuse me?” asked Lim, raising an eyebrow.

“You don’t deserve any of this. You’re the most caring, down to Earth girl I’ve ever been with. I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you. I’ve hated watching you suffer this past year. You didn’t deserve to get that virus; not that anybody else in that emergency room did either but you get my point. You didn’t deserve to get that lung damage. You didn’t deserve to get PTSD. You don’t deserve to be fine for ten days in the emergency room only to run into a cashier with a cold and a cough and be plagued by nightmares and fear for three days afterwards. You didn’t deserve to be kicked out of the operating room for no damn good reason other than bringing our child into the world. And I’ve had to watch all of this happen to you for eleven months. I watched you die and I couldn’t do anything about it other than pray that Reznick and Murphy could revive you. I watched you struggle to breathe after five minutes of walking and all I could do was hope the inhaler or the oxygen helped you catch your breath. I heard you wake up screaming night after night and I couldn’t do anything but try to comfort you and hope the therapy sessions helped you. I watched you face discrimination due to your pregnancy and I couldn’t do anything about it other than hope Jessica was a persuasive enough lawyer to win the case and that something would happen to Han. I had to watch all of this happen to you from the sidelines and it was hard for me because you’re the best companion I’ve ever had!”

Lim didn’t quite know what to say before she finally asked, “Neil, why didn’t you tell me any of this?”

Melendez sighed, “I don’t know,” he admitted, “I guess I was afraid I’d say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing and make it worse. Instead I bottled it up inside of me and fucked things up anyways.”

Lim couldn’t believe she had never taken the opportunity to understand how all of this was affecting Melendez. She had been so focused on herself she never even once thought to see how this whole ordeal was affecting him. Instead, he had done his usual behavior of fully committing and not complaining once. Lim sighed and scrubbed her hand over her face, “I’ve been such a selfish, ungrateful bitch.”

“No, you’ve been preoccupied with everything...” Melendez defended.

“No, Neil, I was I selfish, ungrateful bitch. You did everything for me and I took it all for granted. You never once complained when I asked you to stay overnight at the hospital even though you had surgeries the next day. You would make sure I was taking my medicine when I was so sidetracked by the thoughts in my head I couldn’t remember anything. You stayed up all night with me when I couldn’t fall asleep because I was afraid I was going to have a nightmare. You never pressured me to have sex when I wasn’t in the mood. You waited patiently until I was ready to go public with our relationship. You held my hair back when I was puking my entire first trimester and you’ll run to Walgreens at two in the morning if I’m really craving something. You stepped in
and helped me recognize the fact that I was being discriminated against by Han and willingly reconnected with the woman who dumped you because you love me so much and you knew she could help me. And what did I do for you? Nothing. How did I thank you? I yelled at you the first time you took a stand against me and didn’t placate me. I’ve been an awful girlfriend.”

Melendez grabbed her hand and she looked up into his chocolate orbs, “You haven’t been a terrible girlfriend. You’re going to give me the thing I’ve wanted most in life,” the baby kicked, almost as if she knew Daddy was talking about her, “I’ll admit, it hasn’t been easy these past eleven months. What I meant to say when I called you too sensitive was more along the lines about how I felt it was hard to communicate with you because I don’t want to cause you any more suffering,” he tucked some of her brown locks behind her ear, “You are the love of my life, Audrey. I would do anything for you.”

Lim grabbed the hand that was rubbing her cheek and squeezed it, “I love you too.”

Melendez and Lim arrived home from the counseling center and sat down together on the couch. They really needed to discuss their case now that they were calm, “I’m sorry I called you too sensitive,” he apologized, “That was totally idiotic of me to bring your condition into the argument like that.”

“Thank you, because that really hurt my feelings,” she answered gratefully, “And I’m sorry I told you you’d be a shitty husband when you’re going to be anything but. But what you said about thinking like a mom and not a doctor is somewhat true. I can’t help but look at Casey and not think about if it was our daughter.”

“It’s why you’ll be a good mom,” said Melendez, “And I can’t help but think about my sister whenever the concept of end of life decisions comes up. I know she wouldn’t legally be able to make that decision, but still, she deserves her life, even with a disability. I guess it’s also the whole pro-life Catholic upbringing.”

Lim chuckled a little. She knew Melendez only went to church on Christmas and Easter, but she wasn’t surprised about his views given the fact that his family was fairly conservative. She grabbed his hand, “I think we should have a serious conversation with Jerry and his family. If you’re still against it, I respect that, but then I’d need to get someone else to sign off on a psychological evaluation that way you wouldn’t have to compromise your beliefs.”

“Thank you,” Melendez acknowledged, “Speaking of our daughter, she still needs a name.”

“I know, and I’ve been thinking about it,” admitted Lim. They were silent when Lim randomly said, “Mei-Li.”

“I’m sorry?” asked Melendez in confusion.

“Our daughter’s name: Mei-Li. It’s Mandarin for beautiful,” explained Lim.

“Mei-Li,” Melendez repeated to himself, “And for a middle name, I’ve always liked the name Esmeralda.”

“Esmeralda?” questioned Lim.

“It’s Spanish for emerald, but it’s also the name of the heroine of one of my favorite books,” Melendez shrugged.
“The Hunchback of Notre Dame?” Lim asked out of curiosity. Melendez nodded, “I didn’t know you had an interest in French literature?”

“I’ve read all sorts of things. It’s how I kept myself sane while reading textbooks in med school,” Melendez laughed and Lim nodded understandingly, “You’re telling me you don’t have a favorite book?”

“Oh course I do,” she looked down, “I know this might be a little stereotypical but *The Joy Luck Club*. It was one of the first ‘grown-up’ books my mom read to me as a little girl and it helped me adjust when we moved to the United States from Taiwan. We went to see the movie together when it came out and it’s one of the last movies we watched together before she died.”

“I’ve never read it or seen it. I’ll find a way to do so,” Melendez said, “But I think when the time comes, you should be the one to read it to our little girl.”

“She has a name, Neil,” Lim teased.

Melendez smiled and kissed her abdomen, “My apologies, Mei-Li.”

Lim smiled and began to kiss him, “I’ve missed you, you know?”

“Did you now?” asked Melendez.

“Mnhm. And I’m going to show you how much,” Lim said.

“Gladly.”
Lim and Melendez awoke entwined in each other’s arms, Lim feeling the most well rested in months. The only thing she would have really appreciated is if the little hands and feet inside her belly would settle down at night so she could sleep comfortably. Lim had the 7 AM-3 PM shift and Melendez had the 3 PM-11 PM shift but then they were both off through Tuesday morning. Lim went to shower when Melendez came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her abdomen and nipping at her neck, “Neil,” she chuckled, “We didn’t wake up early enough for that and I’ll be late if we do that this morning.”

Melendez pulled away in disappointment, “Alright,” he sighed sadly.

Lim turned around and kissed him, “I appreciate that you’re still interested though.”

“That works for me,” he stroked her cheek.

Lim threw on a pair of pants and a blue maternity top, cursing to herself at the fact that they were now getting tighter and she’d need yet another round of maternity wear. And she didn’t know which was worse: having Laura constantly saying how beautiful she was or having Neil constantly saying how beautiful she was. After she arrived at St. Bonaventure, she grabbed a coffee from the hospital cafeteria and made her rounds before going to scrub into a long and complex surgery. Morgan had called in sick, so Shaun would be the only resident assisting her. She entered the scrub-in area and began washing her hands, “Well, it looks like it’s just you and me today, Murphy,” Lim said.

“Yes,” Shaun nodded and stared into the operating room, “Because Dr. Reznick called in sick.”

Since it was just the two of them, Lim decided to let Shaun assist more with some of the more complex stuff, guiding him if he started to struggle. The two surgeons were silent for the longest time when Shaun suddenly asked out of the blue, “Dr. Lim?”

“What Murphy?” asked Lim.

“Are you and Dr. Melendez still fighting?” asked Shaun.

Lim shot her head up, unaware that her residents even knew about her argument with Melendez, “No, we’re fine, Murphy.”

Shaun didn’t speak any longer until he said, “You both seem very happy together.”

“Yes, we are,” Lim responded. Where was Shaun going with this conversation?

More silence on Shaun’s part, “Dr. Browne thinks I’ll be a good father someday. But I don’t know how to love.”

“Clamp here,” Lim instructed Shaun. Shaun did as ordered, “Let me tell you a little secret, Murphy. None of us really know how to love. We learn over time. For some people it’s easier than others. But it’s all something we have to learn. Having the right partner makes all the difference.”

“Mm. Okay,” said Shaun, “The baby is lucky to have you as her mother, Dr. Lim.”

“Thank you, Dr. Murphy. Suction here,” she said.
As her shift wore on, Lim began to really look forward to the concept of three whole days to herself. Not that she or Melendez could rest: their first hypnobirthing class was the next day, she would probably have to do some more clothes shopping, they had promised themselves that they would pick out a rocker or glider for the baby’s nursery, not to mention there was a basket of laundry to wash and a pile of paperwork that they needed to complete by Wednesday afternoon. Melendez was arriving just as Lim was packing her bag, though she had agreed to stay a bit longer so they could both talk to Jerry Webber face to face. Melendez smiled when he saw Lim and gave her a quick kiss, “Hi.”

“Hi,” she smiled back.

Melendez could tell she looked exhausted, “Rough day?”

“Not rough as much as it was long. Working these long shifts and growing another human isn’t easy,” she admitted. They both walked to Jerry’s hospital room and Lim knocked on the door, “Mr. Webber?” Jerry looked over at the two physicians, “I’d like to introduce you to Dr. Neil Melendez; he’s Casey Garrison’s doctor.”

“Nice to meet you, Dr. Melendez,” said Jerry.

“You too,” said Melendez politely.

“So I guess Dr. Lim told you about what I’d like to do?” asked Jerry.

“She did,” Melendez confirmed.

“Well, I’ll leave you both alone. I’ll see you later,” Lim said to Melendez and left the room.

Melendez watched Lim leave the room and turned back to face Jerry, “This is a big decision you’re making.”

“I know,” agreed Jerry.

“Have you talked to your family about this decision?” asked Melendez.

“I wanted to get all of the details before I talked to them,” he admitted.

Melendez sat down in the chair in the room, “You really need to talk to them. It’s not something we can reverse obviously; you really need to be confident in this decision.”

“I know,” said Jerry, “I will have a serious discussion with Cathy about it. I can’t tell you what to think and what to believe, Dr. Melendez, but once my wife passed away, it took a long time for me to move on. Cathy and Kyle kept me going, but Kyle was only two when Jean died. She had pancreatic cancer and I had to watch her suffer. She was always in a lot of pain and I did everything I could to take her out of her misery, but I always felt so helpless. I just don’t want for Cathy and Kyle to feel that helpless as I slowly deteriorate and have to watch me suffer the way we all watched Jean suffer. And if I can save someone, I’d like to do so.”

“Well, I’ll consult with Dr. Lim on your confession, but I’d also like to tell you this: your family might not see you as a burden even if you think so. And I would recommend seriously considering their thoughts and feelings before you make a final decision,” said Melendez. He stood and said, “I’ll check in on you later.”
After a successful valve replacement surgery assisted by Claire and Park, Melendez changed into his casual clothes and headed for home, grateful for the fact that he was no longer fighting with Lim. He reheated some leftover lasagna from dinner a few nights ago and went upstairs, though he could hear Lim’s voice reading...Goodnight Moon? He brushed his teeth before entering the bedroom, “You’re a little old for that book, aren’t you?” he teased.

She looked up at him and glared jokingly, “I’m not reading it to myself. I’m reading it to the baby.”

Melendez changed into his pajamas and crawled under the comforter. He kissed her abdomen and said, “Well I’m sure little Mei-Li enjoys hearing Mommy read to her,” Lim smiled nervously and Melendez asked, “What?”

Lim put the book on her nightstand and rolled over to face Melendez, “Just thinking about everything we’re doing this weekend and the fact that we’re starting the childbirth classes tomorrow.”

“And?” asked Melendez.

Lim sighed and rubbed a hand over her abdomen, smiling to herself as she received not-so-gentle kicking in response, “Guess I’m just nervous about the birth. It’s not going to be easy, especially with the fact that my lungs are now weaker.”

“Hey,” Melendez took her hand, “You’ve been eating well, most of the time anyways,” he laughed and Lim laughed as well, knowing he was referring to her sometimes unusual cravings, “You’ve been exercising and Dr. Garcia says everything is going well. And no matter what happens, I’ll be right there by your side in the delivery room.”

“And you’ll willingly take my insults and vulgarity like the strong man you are?” she agitated.

Melendez sighed in amusement, “Of course, Audrey. But honestly, that won’t be much different than how you are now,” she smacked his chest and he laughed, “I’m kidding. Now give me that book.”

Lim handed him the book and he wrapped his arm around her. She snuggled against his chest as Melendez began, “In the great green room..."
Chapter 56

The weekend went smoothly for Lim and Melendez. They spent more time on the nursery, which was almost near completion as well as spending some time making up from their fight. When Tuesday morning arrived, neither one of them really wanted to go back into work, but today was the day they were going to find out from Jerry’s family whether or not they supported his decision. When they both arrived at the hospital, Lim stopped by Andrews’s office to drop off some paperwork and checked on a few of her other patients before meeting up with Melendez in Jerry’s room. Cathy and Kyle, who had been released on Saturday, were shocked about Jerry’s decision to say the least, “So how would this work, Dr. Lim?” asked Cathy.

“Well, two physicians would evaluate your father to make sure he is of sound mind to make the decision. If it’s determined he is so, then he would sign a DNR form, we’d take him to the operating room, prep him for surgery, and he’d pull the plug on his ventilator,” Lim explained, “Then the transplant would be performed on Dr. Melendez’s patient as well his other organs would be procured.”

Cathy absorbed the information and stood, “Excuse me,” she quickly left the room.

Everyone watched her exit and Lim told Melendez, “Check to make sure Jerry’s vitals are stable,” Lim followed Cathy out the door and called, “Ms. Webber?”

Cathy sharply turned around to face Lim, “He’s not mentally stable,” she said affirmatively.

“With all due respect Ms. Webber, it’s up for the doctors to determine…”

“I don’t give a damn what you doctors say! He’s been upset since my mother died eleven years ago. He put all of his determination in helping me raise Kyle and now that he has ALS, he hasn’t been able to do as much. He doesn’t really want to do this; he’s just looking for an easy way out. There’s no way you can’t see that!” shouted Cathy.

Lim sighed, “Or maybe he doesn’t want to torture you and Kyle making you watch him suffer.”

“It wouldn’t be torture though. Kyle’s father bailed on me as soon as he found out I was pregnant. Dad’s been there since day one helping me raise him. And when Mom was going through her battle with pancreatic cancer, I cherished every moment with her. I didn’t help her invite death into her life. She fought until her last breath. And I’ll make sure Dad does the same thing, no matter what you all say,” Cathy stormed away towards Jerry’s hospital room.

Lim sighed, not quite sure what Cathy meant by making sure Jerry would fight until his last dying breath. She was already going to sign off on the evaluation and if Melendez didn’t want to compromise his morals, then Dr. Cooperberg had agreed to do a psych evaluation. Lim checked her phone and Cleland had called all trauma surgeons to the ER for a three car accident. Lim and Cleland were involved with a husband and wife couple, the husband with a cerebral hemorrhage and the wife with a pulmonary contusion and broken ribs. Lim had to perform an emergency surgery since her patient also had an aortic aneurysm, but thankfully, she was able to repair the aorta. Unfortunately, the husband was pronounced brain dead before the day was out. When Lim stopped by Melendez’s office, he was finishing up some paperwork for Andrews. Lim knocked on his door and smiled softly, “Ready to go?”

“Yeah, I can finish this tomorrow. I have no surgeries scheduled until noon,” said Melendez. He grabbed his briefcase and they headed towards his tesla. Neither one of them was in the mood to
cook, so they stopped by their favorite taco truck before they headed for home. They ate in silence for a little bit before Melendez asked, “So how was the rest of your day?”

“Oh, said Melendez. The phone rang and Melendez got up from the table. He checked the caller ID before he answered, “Hi Mom. Yes, I got your message about Thanksgiving. No, I haven’t discussed it with Audrey yet. We were busy all weekend,” Melendez rolled his eyes a little and Lim chuckled in amusement. She knew Neil loved his family to death but they were all a little overbearing at times, “Yes, she’s right here; we’re eating dinner,” Melendez looked over at Lim, put the receiver on his shoulder, and said, “Mom says hi,” he put the phone back up to his ear and said, “I promise I’ll ask her as soon as we finish this conversation. Okay, I love you too. Buenas noches. Okay, goodbye Mom,” Melendez hung up the phone.

Lim smiled and laughed as Melendez sat back down, “What did she want to know?”

“All of my relatives are coming in from San Antonio for Thanksgiving and she wants me to be there, of course,” Melendez began, “She also wants you to come for dinner.”

“Oh yes. My Abuela and Abuelo, the tios, the tias, my cousins, and they’ll probably be family members there I’ve never met before,” he admitted amusingly.

Lim nodded in understanding. She had always seemed to be introduced to new family members at Lim family gatherings, “So, when would we go to your parents’ house?”

“Well, dinner isn’t until late, like really late. Like 9:00 late. We’d have time to watch the Macy’s parade in the morning, then I’d have to pick up Gabi from her group home, and we’d all go over to Mom and Dad’s house. They’ll be a lot of dancing, a lot of talking, a lot of eating, and my relatives will probably keep barking at you to stay off your feet because you’re pregnant. Then they’ll realize you’re just as stubborn as the rest of us Melendezes,” he said proudly, as if it were a badge of honor, “And also a lot of Latino side dishes with the turkey,” he chuckled.

“Hey no Lim family holiday dinner was complete without rice, dumplings, and soy sauce. I get it,” she smiled amusingly. They finished their food and washed the dishes together before settling down and beginning the latest season of Stranger Things on Netflix. Before they turned in for the night, they glanced into Mei-Li’s nursery. It wasn’t fully complete: they still needed to fill the dresser drawers with more clothes, fill the small basket with toys, and well, of course add the little one. Lim rubbed her abdomen gently as the baby kicked and she smiled to herself, “Just think? At next year’s Melendez family Thanksgiving dinner, they’ll be a new family member joining us.”


“Lim-Melendez,” Lim emphasized.

“But won’t it make more sense for her to be a Melendez when we’re all Melenendezes?” he asked as he went to their room.
“Who said I’m becoming a Melendez? And you’re just assuming I’m going to marry your sorry ass without even asking?” she joked, following Melendez to their room.
Cathy Webber made sure Kyle was on the school bus the next morning before driving over to visit her father. She arrived at his hospital room and knocked on the door to make sure he was awake, “Hi Pumpkin,” he smiled when he saw her.

“Oh Dad,” she came into the room and kissed his cheek, “How are you feeling?”

Jerry knew what she was really asking. She was asking ‘are you still planning to pull the plug?’ He sighed and said, “I know you’re upset, Cathy.”

“Upset? Dad, you want to kill yourself!”

“I want to save a life while I still can,” Jerry emphasized. Cathy sighed in frustration as she obviously wasn’t getting through to him, “Pumpkin, I know you think I’m doing this because I’m not thinking clearly. But it’s quite the opposite. I saw what you went through when your mother died. I don’t want to put you through that again by watching me deteriorate.”

“But I want to take care of you, Dad,” pleaded Cathy.

“I know,” he rubbed her cheek and wiped away the tears, “But I raised you and I know how strong you are. You and Kyle will be okay. Someone else needs me more right now.”

“But I need you too, Dad. And Kyle needs his grandfather. Please live, for us,” Cathy begged as more tears poured down her cheeks.

Jerry was silent for a few moments before he changed the subject, “Pumpkin, I’m thirsty; do you think you could go get me some water?” asked Jerry.

“Of course, Dad,” said Cathy.

Cathy got Jerry the water and decided to go get some food for herself so she stepped onto the elevator with another woman. Cathy smiled softly, but didn’t say anything. She was a bit surprised when the other woman said, “It’s tough having to be around a hospital all the time,” Cathy glanced over at the other woman in confusion, “I’ve seen you walking around the building.”

“Oh,” said Cathy, “Yeah, my father and my son were both in a car accident. My son is fine, but my father, not so much.”

“At least your son is fine. My little girl…if they don’t find her a new heart soon…” the other woman began to cry.

It took a few moments for Cathy to realize that this woman was the mother of the girl to whom Jerry wanted to donate his heart. She knew better than to say anything though, “I’m sure they’ll find a donor.”

Lim had just gotten out of a surgery when Melendez hastened his stride to catch up with her, “Dr. Lim!”
Lim slowed down a little so Melendez could walk beside her, “What?”

“You need to go do Jerry Webber’s psych evaluation and get all the paperwork completed. Dr. Cooperberg has already filled out his forms. As soon as you do, I’ll let Casey’s family know and get her prepped for surgery,” said Melendez.

“But,” Lim stuttered, “Cathy was so against it. She claimed she was going to do everything in her power to stop us all.”

“Something must’ve changed her mind,” said Melendez.

“Okay. I’ll sign off and get him to sign the paperwork,” said Lim.

Lim performed the evaluation and signed the form stating Jerry was mentally sound. She handed him the DNR and the donation form, “You know, this is the first time I’ve ever had the actual donor sign the form when it wasn’t a living donation.”

Jerry took the forms and looked over at Cathy and Kyle. Cathy had tears in her eyes but she nodded encouragingly. Once the forms were signed, a few nurses helped prep Jerry for surgery while Lim went to check on Casey. Melendez was in the room with George, Martha, and Casey. They all smiled when they saw Lim, “Well Casey, Dr. Melendez and I are going to get you ready for surgery.”

“Am I really getting a new heart?” asked Casey.

Lim nodded, but didn’t quite know what to say, so Melendez said, “A very brave and kind man is giving you a new heart. Now let’s get you ready.”

They prepped Casey for the transplant and George and Martha kissed her before she was wheeled into the operating room where Melendez, Park, and Shaun were scrubbing in for surgery. As for the women, Jerry was wheeled into the hallway where many doctors and nurses were lined up along the pathway into the operating room. George and Martha Garrison along with Claire and Morgan were standing at the end. Lim looked over at the Webbers and said, “We call it the Walk of Honor to thank Jerry for his sacrifice.”

At this point, Cathy and Kyle were both crying. Kyle hugged Jerry and Jerry rubbed his back, “It’s okay, Buddy.”

“I love you, Grandpa,” he cried.

“I love you too, Kyle,” said Jerry. He looked up at Cathy and Cathy leaned over to kiss him, “It’s okay, Pumpkin.”

“At least there’s going to be a part of you out there living,” she admitted, though she was still sobbing.

Lim struggled to hold back tears as she followed Jerry down the hall. They stopped again in front of the Garrisons and George said, “God bless you, Mr. Webber.”

“Thank you for saving our daughter,” said Martha.

Jerry grabbed her hand and said, “You’re very welcome.”

Morgan and Claire took the gurney and wheeled Jerry into the operating room. It was an emotional transplant for everyone involved but thankfully, everything went smoothly. Melendez and Lim
were on their way home later that night, but they were both very quiet, not knowing what to say. Finally, Lim said, “That was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be.”

Melendez reached over and grabbed her hand. Lim promptly squeezed it, “It’s what he wanted though,” Lim could see Melendez was holding back tears of his own. They arrived home and Melendez unlocked the front door. They set their bags down on the floor and Melendez could tell by the look in Lim’s eyes that she needed affection and comfort, “Come here, mi amor,” Melendez wrapped Lim in a comforting embrace and kissed her temple.

Normally, Lim would smack Melendez upside the head for calling her a cutesy nickname, even if it was in Spanish, but she honestly didn’t care at the moment. They both stayed that way for several moments before Lim pulled back and said, “We should get started on dinner. I’m starving because I didn’t get the chance to eat today.”

“Neither did I,” admitted Melendez, “Maybe after dinner, we can unwind with a nice long bath and a movie.”

Lim hugged him again and kissed his cheek, “Mm. I’d like that.”

Chapter End Notes

Next up: Thanksgiving with the Melendez family!
Chapter 58

Thanksgiving Day…

Casey’s heart transplant was a success and she was able to go home in time for Thanksgiving. Melendez spent the next week making sure everything was set in regards to their visit to his parents’ house and Lim made sure everything was running smoothly at the hospital. Thanksgiving morning arrived and Lim woke up to the feeling of the baby kicking. She stretched and rolled over to find Melendez still snoring. She got up and went to the bathroom before crawling back into bed next to him. She kissed his shoulders and neck, waking Melendez in the process. He groaned in satisfaction and asked, “You have no shame, do you woman?”

“Happy Turkey Day, sleepy head,” she said jokingly.

Melendez rolled onto his back and sat up in bed next to her, “Happy Thanksgiving.”

“Well, today I get to meet every member of your entire family,” she said.

“Believe me, it won’t even be half of my relatives,” Melendez admitted getting up out of bed, “We should probably go shower and dress before the parade so we can leave right at noon.”

Lim followed him to the bathroom and continued to kiss his neck and shoulders, “Well, maybe we should enjoy our morning together before we have to behave in front of everyone.”

“Audrey,” Melendez warned teasingly.

“You’re really going to say no?” she asked in surprise.

“Of course I’m not,” answered Melendez. After their shower, they both dressed and went downstairs where Lim scrambled some eggs so they wouldn’t be eating a large breakfast and Melendez turned on NBC for the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. After the parade was over and Santa had arrived in Herald Square, Lim and Melendez left to go pick up Gabi from the group home. Melendez couldn’t help but notice how quiet Lim was, so he asked, “Is something wrong, Audrey?”

“No, I’m just a little nervous about meeting your family members. I mean, I’ve met your parents and Gabi, but everyone else? That’s a whole different ballpark,” she chuckled nervously.

Melendez grabbed her hand and kissed it, “Just be yourself and they’ll love you as much as I do.”

They arrived at the group home and the receptionist greeted them, “Happy Thanksgiving! How may I help you both?”

“I’m here to pick up Gabrielle Melendez,” informed Melendez, “I’m her brother, Neil Melendez,” he handed her his ID.

“Of course, sir. Ms. Melendez is in the living room waiting for you,” the receptionist gestured towards the mentioned area.

“Thank you,” Melendez answered and went over to greet Gabi, “Hey Kid, Happy Thanksgiving!” Gabi looked up and smiled at them, “Happy Thanksgiving!” she hugged Melendez and then Lim. “Let’s get you over to Mom and Dad’s house so we can have a nice big dinner,” Melendez helped
her to stand. Lim smiled at her boyfriend at how gentle and caring he was with Gabi. It made her more and more excited to see him as a father.

It wasn’t long before the group of three arrived at the Melendez residence where Maria Melendez answered the door almost immediately, “Neil, mijo,” she kissed his cheek.

“Hi Mom,” Melendez hugged her.

“Mi ángel,” she kissed Gabi’s cheek and Melendez helped Gabi inside, “Audrey,” Maria kissed her cheek as well.

“Hi Maria,” Lim greeted politely.

“And look at you, you look muy Hermosa, very beautiful,” Maria smiled, “Pregnancy looks good on you.”

“Tell that to my entire first trimester of morning sickness, my swollen ankles, my heartburn, my aching back, and my growing need to pee every ten minutes,” said Lim.

“Oh, but it will be worth it in the end. Trust me,” comforted Maria.

“Oh, I know you said not to bring anything, but I made steamed dumplings from my Ama’s recipe. It doesn’t feel like a holiday meal without it for me,” Lim admitted.

“Audrey, you didn’t have to do that,” Maria took the container.

“I know I didn’t have to; I wanted to,” said Lim.

“Trust me, Mom, she’s already as stubborn as the rest of the Melendez, Garcia, and Lopez women,” said Melendez.

“Well, then you’ll fit right in. Mateo, Neil, Gabi, and Audrey are here!” Maria called.

Mateo Melendez came out of the family room with another few family members and smiled, “Happy Thanksgiving, Neil and mi amorcita,” he kissed Gabi’s cheek and shook Melendez’s hand, “It’s nice to see you again, Audrey.”

“You too,” said Lim.

“Audrey, this is my Tío Miguel Garcia and my cousins, Isabella, Manny, and baby Eddie. My Tía Elena is in the kitchen, I’m sure.”

“Oh she is,” confirmed Maria.

“Are Abuela and Abuelo here yet?” asked Gabi.

“No, mi ángel, they’re on their way,” said Maria.

Another woman who appeared to be around Melendez’s age came out of the kitchen, “Neil, Feliz Día de Acción de Gracias.”

“Hi Tía Elena,” Melendez kissed her cheek, “Elena, I’d like you to meet Audrey Lim.”

“So nice to finally meet you. Neil has told me so much about you,” Elena shook Lim’s hand.

“You as well,” said Lim, “Well, should I help where I’m needed?”
“Oh no dear, you have enough on your plate with the baby. You should just relax with the men and the kids in the family room and watch…whatever sports game they’re watching,” said Maria.

“Oh alright,” said Lim and Maria went back into the kitchen, “That’s what I would prefer anyways,” she whispered to Melendez and he chuckled.

Two of the kids, neither one of them looked older than five, came running out of the family room and into Melendez’s arms, “Neil!”

“Isabella, Manny,” Melendez kissed their cheeks, “Where’s your baby brother?”

“Tío Mateo has him,” said the girl, Isabella.

“Well let’s go see him,” said Melendez and Isabella and Manny ran back into the family room.

Lim pulled Melendez a little closer to her and asked, “First off, doesn’t your mother have four siblings? And second off, are you and Elena the same age?”

Melendez chuckled and shook his head, “No, Elena is two years older than me. She’s the only one of Mom’s siblings born in the United States. And some of Mom’s relatives have gone back to Mexico.”

“Ah,” said Lim. Melendez and she went into the family room. Isabella and Manny were playing Candyland on the floor and Mateo was holding an infant, Eddie.

“Eduardo, meet your cousin, Neil,” said Mateo, handing the baby to Melendez.

“Hey there, hombrecito,” Melendez cooed at the baby. Lim knew that Melendez had gained a baby cousin back in May, but with work and Dr. Glassman’s death and helping her with her PTSD treatment, he hadn’t gotten the chance to fly down to San Antonio. But seeing him with little Eddie now made Lim all the more excited to watch Neil with their baby. After a few more moments of interaction, he passed Eddie to Lim and said, “Go meet Auntie Audrey.”

“Hey there, little guy,” Lim smiled.

“Mateo, Neil! Dinner is almost ready and Manny and Isabella need help setting the table!” Maria called from the dining room.

“Yes dear,” answered Mateo.

“I’ve got to go. Are you okay with him?” asked Melendez.

“Well, if I’m not, then our baby’s in trouble,” joked Lim.

“Alright,” he kissed her cheek, “I love you.”

Elena stood in the doorway and watched Melendez go into the dining room before she sat down on the sofa next to Lim, “He loves you so much you know?” Lim glanced up at Elena confused, “Neil. He loves you so much. I can tell by the way he looks at you and talks about you.”

“Well, I love him too,” Lim smiled as she rocked Eddie back and forth.

“I understand the whole late in life love thing. Miguel and I didn’t get married until we were 34. Hence, why the kids are still so young,” said Elena.

“Well, Neil and I aren’t married yet. We’ve talked about it, but then the baby happened and work
happened and we got a little sidetracked. Not to mention we both were in relationships that we thought were going to last and didn’t so we were a little hesitant to start dating at first,” admitted Lim.

“Understandable,” admitted Elena, “But I knew Neil and…blonde what’s her face…”

“Jessica?” Lim supplied helpfully.

“Yes, Jessica,” said Elena, “I knew they were never going to work out. She came to Thanksgiving with him a few years ago, when Isabella was only a couple months old, and she was not comfortable around her. And Neil always went on and on when we were kids about how much he wanted to be a dad someday. So I knew the kid issue would eventually come between them. But that doesn’t seem to be a problem for you,” she smiled at Lim and the baby.

“Even if it did, it’s a little late now,” Lim chuckled just as Eddie started crying.

“It’s probably time for me to feed him,” said Elena, grabbing a bottle and going to warm it. When Elena came back, she reached out for Eddie and offered him the bottle. He promptly began to eat and Elena asked, “So how far along are you?”

“I’ll be twenty-seven weeks on Saturday,” answered Lim.

“Did you find out the gender yet?” asked Elena curiously.

“We did. It’s a little girl,” Lim smiled.

“Oh that’s wonderful,” said Elena excitedly, “You can do all sorts of Mommy and Me activities together.”

Lim scowled at Elena, “I ride a Ducati and despise everything pink and traditionally girly.”

Elena laughed, “It will still be a wonderful experience. Like nothing you’ve ever experienced before in your life,” she smiled at Eddie.

“Honey,” Miguel came into the room, “Roberto and Rosalinda are here.”

“Of course,” Elena stood and followed her husband.

Melendez came into the room and Lim took his hand, “So you ready to meet my grandparents?”

“Add them to all of your other relatives I’ve met today,” she followed him to the dining room.

“Abuelo, Abuela, I’d like you both to meet my girlfriend, Audrey,” Melendez said proudly. He was damn proud that Audrey was his, “Audrey, these are my grandparents, Roberto and Rosalinda Lopez.”

“So you’re the infamous Audrey Lim. Neil has told us so much about you,” said Roberto taking her hands and kissing her cheek, “Rosie.”

Rosalinda was a little surprised to see Lim in her current condition, but never the less, she smiled politely and shook Lim’s hand, “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Audrey.”

“Mamá, Papá, dinner is ready,” said Maria.

“Of course, mija,” said Roberto.
Everyone gathered around the dinner table and Isabella said grace before they all began to eat, “So, Neil, you never mentioned to me and Abuelo that Audrey is pregnant,” said Rosalinda.

“I know, Abuela,” said Melendez. Lim was a little confused as to why he had kept that information from her.

“How is that going to work? Will Audrey quit her job?” asked Rosalinda.

Lim shook her head, “No, I don’t plan to. I’ll have a long maternity leave, but we’ve also been looking into other childcare options.”

“Oh,” said Rosalinda.

“It’s not easy juggling a career and kids, but you’ll get the hang of it,” said Elena.

“It would be a lot easier if women stayed in the home and waited until marriage to have children like it was intended,” said Rosalinda.

“Mamá,” scolded Maria.

“No need to start drama at the dinner table, Rosie,” said Mateo.

“Well, I’m sure they’ll have to juggle between two houses yet,” said Rosalinda.

“No, we live together,” said Lim, “We’ve been turning the spare room in our house into the nursery. Neil sold his house a few months ago.”

“Oh, I see,” said Rosalinda.

“Listen, Abuela, I know I haven’t exactly followed the traditional conservative lifestyle, but I love Audrey and I love our little girl. Sure, she wasn’t planned, but I refuse to call her an accident. You believe that God does everything for a reason and I believe there’s a reason God gave us this baby. I promise you, even though we’re not married, this baby is going to receive all of the love in the world. She has two parents who love her already, she has lots of pseudo aunts and uncles and all of you, plus Audrey’s brother. Alright?”

Rosalinda didn’t say any more and the conversation veered to other members of the family and their life events. After dinner, everyone went to the family room where Lim watched Melendez play Simon Says with Gabi, Isabella, and Manny, “You’ll have to forgive Mamá, she’s a little on the traditional side,” said Elena.

“It’s okay,” chuckled Lim, “As a tomboy who grew up in the same house as traditional Taiwanese grandparents, I’m used to it,” Lim looked back over at Melendez and smiled, “He’s so good with the kids and Gabi.”

“He is. He was always the nurturing one when we were growing up. I think it’s one of the reasons he became a doctor,” said Elena.

“Alright now that dinner is over, it’s fiesta time!” announced Mateo, putting on some music.

“If you’ll excuse me, dancing has always been my specialty,” Elena went over to Miguel and her kids and started dancing with them.

Melendez came back over to Lim, sat down next to her, and Lim shuffled closer to him. She leaned her head on his shoulder and he wrapped his arm around her, rubbing her back, “Feel like a
Melendez yet?”

Lim smiled and nodded, “Maybe one day after the baby is born and we’re not quite as focused on preparing for her, we can make it official.”

“You’d actually become a Melendez?” asked Melendez surprisingly.

“No, of course not. I’ll hyphenate my last name at best,” she smirked.

A slow song came on and Melendez held out his hand for Lim. She smiled as they joined the other couples in the middle of the family room floor. Melendez pulled her closer and kissed her temple before whispering in her ear, “Audrey Lim-Melendez does have a nice ring to it.”
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

Warning: this chapter contains a PTSD episode.

It was December 3, 2019. The day started out like any other day. Well, mostly. The alarm went off at 5:30 AM and Melendez slapped the snooze button before trying to gain a few more minutes of sleep. The alarm went off ten minutes later, at 5:40 AM, so he finally surrendered to the blaring sound and got out of bed to go shower. When he came out to get dressed, Lim still hadn’t moved. He gently tapped her on the shoulder and she jumped awake, bolting upright in bed and glancing over at him, “What the hell, Neil?!”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. The alarm went off fifteen minutes ago,” mentioned Melendez.

“Shit,” Lim whispered to herself and threw off the covers, “Have you showered already?”

Melendez nodded, “I can go start breakfast if you want?”

Lim nodded and ran her hands through her hair, “Okay,” she sighed and went towards the shower.

Melendez went downstairs and started on a few omelets. Lim seemed rather tense all of a sudden the last few days. She jumped every time someone snuck up behind her not to mention she had been tossing and turning a lot the last few nights. Lim came down the stairs and the couple ate their breakfast in dead silence before Melendez asked, “So do you have any surgeries scheduled for today?”

Lim shook her head, “No, I’ll be working on paperwork all day.”

“Oh, that sucks,” said Melendez.

“No, I wanted it to be that way today,” said Lim.

Melendez was confused, but just nodded. They cleaned the dishes and got into Melendez’s car for the drive to the hospital. Melendez turned on the radio and various stations were already playing Christmas music, so Melendez turned up the volume. After *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* and *The Little Drummer Boy* played through, the next song broadcasted was the start of *Jingle Bells*. After the first lines were sung, Lim quickly switched off the music, leaving for a silent car, “What are you doing?”

“I turned off the radio, what does it look like I did?” she snapped at him.

“Why?” asked Melendez.

“Because I don’t like the song, okay?” she quipped.

“Okay,” said Melendez. He couldn’t help but notice how alert Lim was the entire ride over, but he didn’t quite know how to approach the subject. The couple arrived at the hospital and went their separate ways. Lim went to her office and looked at the pile of paperwork on her desk. She hated doing paperwork, but she didn’t want to go anywhere near there. Not today.
About an hour into her shift, Lim hadn’t even finished ten pages of the various forms as her concentration levels were seriously low today. She received an alert on her phone calling all surgeons, trauma or otherwise, to the ER. There was a mass casualty event involving a ten car accident with about twenty victims. Lim looked down and realized she hadn’t even bothered to change into scrubs, so she stopped by the locker room on the way to the ER. When she arrived, several other surgeons were already working on patients. Melendez was with Shaun and Morgan and Cooperberg was with Park and Claire. Even Andrews was wearing scrubs and helping where he was needed. Lim couldn’t help but just stand there observing all of the organized chaos.

“Dr. Lim, Cleland needs help in Bay 3,” Andrews ordered but Lim didn’t respond, “Dr. Lim.”

“What?” asked Lim, trying hard to keep focus.

“Dr. Cleland needs help in Bay 3,” Andrews repeated before disappearing.

Lim put on a gown and mask before reporting to Bay 3, “What do we have?” she approached a patient who was coughing forcefully.

“Forty year old female, was in the front passenger’s seat in one of the cars that sustained the most impact, complaining of chest pain, shortness of breath, tightness in her chest, and fatigue. She has abnormal breath sounds and a rapid heart rate; I’m thinking she might have a punctured lung, so we’ll need to put in a chest tube,” said Cleland, “Could you get the supplies for me out of the supply closet?”

The supply closet? Past the negative pressure room? Lim supposed she could just push that fact from her mind, “Sure.”

It was loud and chaotic in the ER, with doctors and nurses running around gathering supplies and performing various medical tests, “Next two patients are coming in by ambulance!” called Cooperberg. And then, Lim heard it again. The radio station playing had Jingle Bells blasting loud and clear. Lim could feel her heart rate increasing and she felt the heat from her fever rising up inside her body. She was struggling to breathe and felt weak in the knees, like she was ready to pass out. She checked her arm and there was no rash: not yet anyways. But she knew it was happening. She had to make sure everyone was protected and she had to get herself locked away before she infected everyone else in the ER, “Everyone needs to get their masks!” shouted Lim.

People looked over at Lim in confusion and Shaun stated, “Dr. Lim, we all have our masks.”

“No, no, I mean the masks that protect you from airborne viruses. The two patients coming from the airport…”

“Dr. Lim, they’re car accident victims,” said Claire.

“No, they’re coming from the airport. They have a mutation of SARS and if we don’t protect ourselves, everyone else will too!” shouted Lim, “Now I have to go lock myself away because I’m infected.”

Melendez couldn’t help but wonder what on Earth was going on with Lim as he watched her try to lock herself in the isolation room until it hit him, “Oh no. This is what a flashback looks like,” Melendez stepped a little closer to her to try to stop her and asked, “Audrey, what day is it?”

“December 3…2018,” she answered.

It was 2019. Melendez tried to step a little closer to her, “Audrey, take a few deep breaths for me,” he attempted to lay his hands on her shoulders.
Lim turned sharply and pushed him away, “Get off me, Neil!” she shoved him to the point where Park had to keep Melendez from losing his balance and falling.

“What’s going on?” asked one of the patients who was able to walk.

“It’s alright everyone, just stay back. Crowding around her will only make it worse,” said Andrews.

Melendez joined him and this time, he knew not to touch Lim, who had sat down on the floor next to the nurse’s station. She had tears in her eyes, she was breathing rapidly, and she was sweating. He didn’t say anything at first, but finally, he gently took Lim’s hand and said, “Audrey, if you can hear me, squeeze my hand,” Lim didn’t respond at first, but soon, she squeezed Melendez’s hand, “There you go.”

Andrews didn’t sit down on the floor, but he lowered his voice and asked, “Dr. Lim, what day is it today?”

“D…December 3, 2019,” responded Lim correctly this time. She felt a sensation inside her abdomen similar to the feeling of dread she had felt alone in that isolation room, like there were butterflies or worse in her stomach, “What’s that I’m feeling in my abdomen?”

Morgan crouched down and said, “Dr. Lim, that’s your baby moving around.”

Lim looked down and was only now becoming aware of the fact that she had a basketball-sized abdomen. Lim could feel the tightness in her chest and she was struggling to breathe, “Having… trouble…breathing.”

“Here let’s get you on some oxygen,” Melendez and Andrews helped her to stand and led her to one of the vacant triage rooms.

Melendez put an oxygen mask on her and Morgan checked the baby’s heart rate, which was thankfully strong and steady. It brought Lim back to reality some after hearing it, “Well, it sounds like baby Limlendez is as tough as her mother,” commented Morgan.

“That’s good to know” said Lim softly, though her voice was still quivering.

Andrews came into the area and Melendez stood, “It’s okay Dr. Melendez, we have every patient covered. I need Dr. Reznick.”

Morgan nodded and she followed Andrews out of the room. Lim turned to face Melendez and Melendez could tell she was trying hard to hold it together, “Hey, it’s okay.”

“Oh Neil, I don’t know what happened. I’ve been jumpy all day, but I never expected that to happen. I was just planning on staying out of here and doing paperwork in my office,” said Lim.

“Audrey, it’s not your fault. I just don’t know what triggered it,” admitted Melendez.

“It’s December 3,” Shaun stated casually.

Lim and Melendez over at Shaun and Lim asked, “Pardon me, Murphy?”

“It’s December 3, which means it’s the one year anniversary of the quarantine. Anniversaries of the traumatic event can trigger flashbacks in people with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. It could have also been the ER or the fact that you had to go past the isolation room,” stated Shaun.

Melendez and Lim looked at each, Melendez not even thinking about the fact that the quarantine
had occurred one year ago. Obviously, Lim was aware. He could tell by the pained look on her face, “It could have also been *Jingle Bells*. Certain songs can also trigger flashbacks and *Jingle Bells* was playing on the day of the quarantine. I remember asking about what the noise of the buzzing light was and Dr. Lim answered *Jingle Bells* because that was the song playing.”

Melendez sighed to himself as Shaun left the room, Lim’s look of anguish still plastered on her face, “Audrey…I never even thought…”

“It’s okay, Neil. I thought I would be okay if I just pretended like it didn’t happen,” Lim said quietly, “I didn’t want anyone making a big deal out of it and feeling sorry for me.”

“Audrey,” Melendez kissed the top of her head, “Dr. Jacobson mentioned it wouldn’t be an uncommon reaction for memories to resurface.”

They stayed silent until Lim said, “You have patients, Neil.”

“Audrey…”

“Neil, I just need to be alone right now,” Lim said firmly.

“Okay,” Melendez squeezed her hand and left the room.

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Once Lim regained her breath and her sense of surrounding, things were stable enough in the ER to allow for Lim to go back to her office, though she was still having trouble concentrating. Melendez came by later that evening to pick her up and they began the journey home, Melendez respecting Lim’s privacy and not asking any questions. They were both exhausted from the day’s events and Lim wasn’t very hungry, so she went straight to bed while Melendez reheated some leftovers. When he went upstairs, he thought he faintly heard the sound of the baby’s heartbeat through their fetal doppler and sure enough, Lim was listening to their daughter’s strong and steady heartbeat. Melendez changed into his pajamas and crawled in bed next to her, “It’s such a comforting sound isn’t it?” asked Lim.

Melendez nodded and said, “Very much so,” Lim put the doppler on the nightstand and Melendez grabbed her hand, “Are you alright?”

Lim took a deep breath but shook her head, “No. That was kind of embarrassing what happened today. One of the chiefs of surgery having a flashback in front of everyone like that.”

“Audrey,” Melendez kissed her temple and she snuggled closer to him.

“I know, I know…it’s not my fault, healing takes time, blah blah blah,” said Lim.

“No, that’s not what I was going to say,” said Melendez, “I was going to ask if you needed me to do anything?”

Lim buried her face in his chest and said, “Just hold me,” Melendez did so and didn’t say anything for a while until he heard Lim say, “Thank you.”

“For what?” he asked.

“This past year, you’ve been so supportive of me. You stayed with me in the hospital and helped me when I didn’t have the motivation to carry on in my recovery. You stuck by my side even when I pushed you away. You willingly dated me and didn’t leave me after I was diagnosed with PTSD.
You’ve been so patient and understanding with me. You still love me and accept me even though I’m not always the same person I once was. And you make me feel loved,” she admitted, “And… there’s no one else in the world I feel like I can be vulnerable around other than you.”

Melendez continued to rub her back and said, “You know, we should really start decorating the house for Christmas.”

“He really?” asked Lim raising an eyebrow.

“You never have?” asked Melendez.

Lim shook her head, “Honestly, no. I’ve always worked so much around the holidays I felt no one would be here to enjoy it. But I guess starting next Christmas, it’ll be a bigger deal in the Lim-Melendez household, won’t it Little One?”

“Well, part of the way to heal traumatic memories is to create new memories. I know you’ll probably never get over it and this time of year will always be hard for you, but maybe we should start creating some new memories together since this will be our first Christmas as a couple. Maybe we can get some decorations and Gabi’s group home does a cookie decorating and ornament decorating contest. We can go together if you want?” said Melendez.

Lim nodded and said, “Okay. But for tonight, can we just stay like this while you continue to hold me tightly?”

“I’m not going anywhere.”
Chapter 60

Lim spent the next few days hiding in her office, partially because of the fact that she had a mountain of paperwork to complete, but also because she was too embarrassed to face everyone at the hospital. In fact, the only time she really came out was if she was checking up on a patient or performing a surgery. She couldn’t help but feel like the rest of the hospital staff was gossiping about her incident. It seemed the only people who weren’t were Melendez, the residents under her command, and surprisingly Andrews. He had even checked on her a few times to make sure she was doing well after what had happened that Tuesday.

Melendez couldn’t help but notice his girlfriend’s behavior. She had taken to recoiling from a lot of interaction: she had been eating lunch in her office instead of in the cafeteria, occasionally she would stop by his office if she needed to talk to someone about anything, but other than that, he didn’t really know how to help her.

It was the Friday after her flashback in the ER, and Lim had put her lunch in the refrigerator of the break room that was usually empty, though when she arrived, Shaun was in that particular room. It was unusual for him; he would always consume his turkey sandwich and milk at the same table in the cafeteria at 2:00 PM on the dot. If it was the night shift, it would be at 2:00 AM. Lim grabbed her lunch and headed towards the door when she decided to ask Shaun, “Why aren’t you at your usual table?”

“Because someone was sitting in my spot at the cafeteria,” Shaun answered, “And I need to eat at 2:00, so I had to eat in here because my spot was taken.”

“Oh,” said Lim.

She turned to leave when Shaun asked, “Are you going back to your office, Dr. Lim?”

“Yes Murphy,” said Lim, “I’m sure nobody wants to eat with the crazy chief of surgery.”

“You’re not crazy,” said Shaun.

“I appreciate you trying to make me feel better, Dr. Murphy, but you don’t have to lie to me,” said Lim.

“I have trouble lying, so what I’m saying is the truth,” said Shaun. He sipped his milk. Lim decided to sit down next to him on the sofa and she opened her lunch: a peanut butter and strawberry jelly sandwich, a bag of salt and vinegar chips, and a Sprite, the exact same lunch she ate every day as a resident. Both Shaun and Lim ate in comfortable silence before Shaun asked, “Dr. Lim, why have you been hiding from everyone all week?”

Lim didn’t quite know how to answer Shaun because she wasn’t sure why she was. She finally settled on her answer, “Come on, Murphy. After everything that happened on Tuesday, you haven’t noticed people staring at me?”

Shaun didn’t answer right away, “I have,” he admitted, “But hiding makes it seem like it was something to be embarrassed about and be ashamed of.”

“Dr. Murphy…”

“You have PTSD; people with PTSD sometimes have flashbacks if they’re triggered by something that reminds them of their traumatic event,” stated Shaun as if Lim hadn’t been dealing with that
personally for over a year now, “Just like I have autism. Sometimes people with autism have meltdowns,” Lim didn’t know whether to speak, but Shaun continued, “I’ve had three meltdowns since I’ve started working here at St. Bonaventure. But I have autism. It’s part of who I am.”

Shaun stayed quiet long enough for Lim to ask, “Are you trying to tell me something, Murphy?”

Shaun took another bite of his turkey sandwich and said, “I have autism and sometimes I have meltdowns; it’s a part of who I am, but I’m still a surgeon. You have PTSD. It’s a part of who you are. But you’re also a good surgeon and a good mentor. You are obviously a good girlfriend since you had enough sexual intercourse to conceive a baby…”

“Shaun…”

“You will also be a good mother. You’re very gentle with me and your patients. You’ll be good with your daughter,” Shaun finished. Shaun stood and threw away his sandwich wrapper and milk carton. He stood in the door before turning back around to face Lim, “You were the only person besides Dr. Browne who didn’t judge me because I have autism. I’m not good with empathy and I’ve never been through a traumatic event, but you survived something to give you PTSD and you should be proud that you survived. But I can’t tell you not to have flashbacks just like you can’t tell me not to have meltdowns. It’s a part of who we are. I try not to let it bother me anymore, because I like who I am. You should try not to let it bother you either and you should like who you are. You’re a great person, Dr. Lim, and I’m lucky to have you as my mentor and Dr. Melendez is lucky to have you as his girlfriend and your baby is lucky to have you as her mother,” Shaun left the room.

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Lim went back to her office after she finished her lunch, not out of embarrassment, but because she still had a ton of paperwork to complete. Shaun’s words had hit her hard, but the young resident had been right as per usual. She had been ashamed and embarrassed by her flashback but she couldn’t help what happened on Tuesday. It was a part of who she was now and there was no guarantee it would never happen again. But she had survived that virus and she should be proud. She was not weak because of PTSD. When she had first met Shaun during his first graveyard shift in the OR, she had never thought about the fact that he had autism. It was just a part of who he was. She had gone round and round with Melendez early on about Shaun and had chastised him multiple times for how he had treated Shaun in the ER, especially given the fact that he had been aiding Gabi for years. Shaun had been the only resident who never started to walk on eggshells around her after she had gained the courage to reveal her diagnosis to them (they had adjusted since then, but they weren’t sure how to react at first). She had gotten so lost in her thoughts and her administrative work that she didn’t even hear Melendez enter the room, thus startling her, “What?”

“I asked if you’re ready to go?” asked Melendez.

Lim glanced at the time and didn’t even realize it was approaching the end of her shift, “Yes, but I might have to finish these forms at home this weekend. Just let me go change and then we can leave.”

“Alright, I’ll wait here,” said Melendez.

Lim put the papers in her bag, went to the locker room, and changed into her casual clothes. She was just about to leave when Shaun entered the locker room since it was also the end of his shift. He didn’t say anything, but Lim stopped him before he started undressing, “Dr. Murphy?” he glanced over at her, “Our conversation earlier today in the break room, thank you.”
“Why?” asked Shaun.

Lim sighed, not knowing where to begin. “No one else in this hospital knows how it feels to be judged because they perceive things differently than you. I mean, I talk to Dr. Melendez and he’s supportive, but that was nice for you to be able to empathize with me and I’m proud of you.”

“Dr. Lim, I don’t know how to empathize,” Shaun said.

“No Shaun, you do. To be able to try to put yourself in my shoes, to try to relate to how I feel, that’s empathy,” explained Lim. Shaun didn’t say anything, but instead, pulled his toy scalpel out of his scrubs pocket. He stared at it for a few moments before he snapped it in half. He offered one half to Lim, “Dr. Murphy…”

“Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I hold the toy scalpel my brother, Steve, gave to me. You should carry half of it with you and hold it if you feel like you’re going to have a flashback,” said Shaun.

“Shaun, are you sure?” asked Lim.

Shaun nodded, “Yes,” Lim took half of Shaun’s beloved toy scalpel and put it in her bag before Shaun asked, “Dr. Lim, can I hug you?”

“Um, sure,” answered Lim and Shaun slowly wrapped his arms around her.

She embraced him back before he pulled out of her arms, “You’re a good surgeon even with PTSD.”

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When Melendez and Lim arrived home, Lim started preparing dinner while Melendez did some of their laundry. She hadn’t told Melendez about her conversations with Shaun that day; she wanted to keep it as a special moment between them. Lim put dinner on the table and they began to discuss everything they wanted to get to decorate the house: an artificial tree (since Lim really couldn’t handle the aroma of a real one), a star for the top, three stockings to hang somewhere, and Lim insisted on some light up reindeer and an inflatable Santa for outside. They also talked about everything they’d be doing in December: a few activities at Gabi’s group home, Andrews’s annual party for the employees of St. Bonaventure, and they would shop for each other’s gifts on their own time and some more for the baby together (they knew she wouldn’t physically be there, but the expectant parents just couldn’t help themselves).

It had been a long week for both of them, so they decided to unwind in the tub after dinner, just enjoying each other’s company. Melendez absentmindedly massaged Lim’s shoulders and back, though he noticed she wasn’t saying much, “Is something wrong, Aud?”

“Hmm?” she mumbled for clarification.

“I asked if you were okay,” Melendez repeated.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just thinking about a conversation I had with Murphy earlier today,” admitted Lim. She grabbed his hand, stopping his motion in the process, “I’m so lucky to have you.”

Melendez kissed the top of her head as his hand drifted down to her abdomen, “I’m so lucky to have you too. Both of you,” he rubbed her stomach gently. Those lines were all of the assurance Lim needed.
Chapter 61

Over the next few weeks, Lim and Melendez were busy with holiday preparations. They had spent the first weekend of December facing crowds to buy Christmas decorations and then Lim had enjoyed bossing Melendez around as he put up most of them, minus Lim helping put ornaments on the tree. They placed the three stockings with their names, Neil, Audrey, and Mei-Li, on the mantel and wrapped some garland around the banister of the stairs. They did some of the activities at Gabi’s group home and they also had an ultrasound a couple weeks before Christmas, so they were able to show the sonograms to Gabi. She was mesmerized at being able to see the images of her niece. They spent their evenings watching cheesy Hallmark Christmas movies or one of the classics, fully enjoying their first Christmas season as a couple. Lim was also grateful that this holiday season was turning out much better than the year before, for obvious reasons.

The only aspect that was bothering Lim was finding the perfect present for Melendez. In the past, she had normally given him a six pack of his favorite beer or some gag gift, but this year was different. They were no longer best friends who went out for drinks and agitated each other (well, maybe they were still that too). They were two fully committed individuals who had deep feelings for each other, who cared about each other, who wanted each other to succeed, and who would put the other instead of himself or herself first. She browsed the stores and stayed on Amazon for hours, but she still hadn’t found the perfect gift yet. Mei-Li had been easy. She had gotten her daughter a few more toys, pacifiers, and adorable outfits to add to the plethora of infant accessories they already had. Gabi had been easy. Lim had bought some coloring books with zoo and farm animals. Josh had been easy. All he ever asked for were Amazon gift cards and the latest graphic novels she could find. But Melendez, he would be the most difficult.

Finally, one sleepless night (no thanks to heartburn, pain in places she didn’t know could hurt, her baby’s movements, and frequent bathroom visits), Lim found the perfect gift for Melendez. Well, it was one big one and a couple small ones, but still, he would love them.

Finally, Christmas Eve arrived, but Melendez had to work the day shift and Lim knew he wouldn’t be home until after Christmas Eve mass. She decided to use the day to wrap his presents and she suddenly gained the urge to vacuum and dust every room in the house after that. When Melendez arrived home around 6:00, Lim was nowhere to be found, “Audrey?”

“In the laundry room, Neil!” she called.

Melendez followed the sound of her voice and found her surrounded by baby clothes, “What are you doing?”

“Washing all the baby clothes,” she answered.

“Again?” Melendez laughed and raised his eyebrows.

“We work in a hospital and it’s cold and flu season. Who knows what germs got on them,” said Lim, “I also vacuumed and dusted for that reason.”

Melendez wasn’t going to complain too much about Lim’s nesting because it made for a spotless house, at least temporarily, “Did you at least start dinner?” asked Melendez.

“Oh shit, I knew I was forgetting something,” said Lim, “Damn pregnancy brain.”

“That’s okay, I can order pizza,” said Melendez.
“Oh instead of pineapple and pepperoni, can we get it with spinach and olives instead?” asked Lim, folding a few onesies.

“Audrey, you don’t like olives and you know I hate spinach on my pizza,” pleaded Melendez. Lim stood and gave him puppy dog eyes, “I’ll have them put it on half.”

“Thank you,” she smiled triumphantly and kissed him.

After dinner, they retreated to their bedroom to watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* and Lim read *The Night Before Christmas* to the baby afterwards. The kicks and wiggles assured them that she enjoyed the story. Lim turned out the light and said, “Alright, we have to go to sleep so Santa will come to our house tonight,” she whispered. Melendez looked at her skeptically and Lim said, “It’s not for you, it’s for her.”

“Oh,” Melendez chuckled. Melendez rubbed Lim’s abdomen, “Mommy’s right. The Big Man himself comes tonight.”

“Just imagine next Christmas when she’s actually in our arms,” smiled Lim.

“It’s going to be wonderful. I get more and more excited every day,” admitted Melendez.

Melendez and Lim woke up the next morning and went downstairs to open presents and they opened Mei-Li’s presents first, which was basically an excuse to laugh at how much they were spoiling their daughter, “Wait, I have one more present for her,” Melendez handed Lim a box.

When Lim opened the box and removed the tissue paper, she couldn’t help but laugh at what she found. She held up the infant sized black leather jacket and said, “You just couldn’t help yourself when you saw it, could you?”

“Hey, I saw it shopping for some of your presents and I just couldn’t resist,” admitted Melendez. Lim opened her presents, a few new tops, some DVDs, a new helmet to go with her Ducati, and a mini season plan for the San Francisco Giants.

When she was done opening her presents and Melendez opened some of the smaller gifts, Lim handed Melendez her presents for him and said, “Open them in the order I hand them to you.”

Melendez nodded and opened the first present, a framed autographed Justin Verlander jersey, “Audrey…”

“I figure since it’s now our house, I should allow you to hang up some Astros stuff next to my Giants stuff,” she smiled.

Melendez chuckled and kissed her, “Thank you, but you might have opened a can of worms on that one,” Lim handed Melendez the other present and Melendez unwrapped it. It was a book filled with pictures of the two of them. Melendez looked up at Lim and asked, “Audrey, when did you do all of this? You hate scrapbooking.”

“Blame the fact that I started my maternity leave and I’m already bored,” admitted Lim and she laughed, “But seriously, I found a shoebox full of pictures when I was organizing our closet and I wanted to do something with all of them. Most of them were the two of us throughout the years anyways.”

“And the ones that weren’t?” asked Melendez, raising an eyebrow.
“If they were family, I put them back in the box so I can start another album and if they were me and Kashal, I chopped them into a million little pieces,” she admitted, “I figure maybe we could add some pictures us with our little one after she’s born.”

“Sounds like a wonderful idea,” said Melendez. He couldn’t help but notice there was one picture that had an awkward edge to it, “What happened to this picture?”

Lim sighed, “Jessica was on the other side of you, so I cut that part off too.”

Melendez rolled his eyes jokingly, but kissed Lim anyways, “Well, thank you for my presents. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

They spent the rest of the afternoon at Gabi’s group home eating dinner, doing crafts, watching movies, and smiling as Gabi interacted with Santa. Lim joked with Melendez, blaming him that it was the first Christmas she didn’t work the ER since she started her career, but she didn’t regret a minute of it. It was late when they arrived home again, so they went directly to bed. Lim kissed Melendez’s temple and said, “Merry Christmas, Neil.”

Melendez kissed her back and said, “Merry Christmas, Audrey.”

Lim leaned her head on his shoulder, “Thank you for making today the best Christmas I’ve had in a really long time.”

Melendez couldn’t help but kiss her again, “You’re welcome,” he laid a hand on her growing stomach, “But I can guarantee you that next Christmas will be even better.”
It was a semi-warm Saturday afternoon in January when Lim had her baby shower at Laura’s house. As promised, Laura kept it low-key, with no games, nothing too frilly, and the guest list was small. Those in attendance besides Lim included Maria, Elena, and Isabella, Laura and Everly, who had just turned a year old a week earlier, a few of Lim’s friends from med school, and Morgan and Claire. There was a diaper cake in the shape of a motorcycle with an adorable pink bear riding it and the sheet cake read, ‘Welcome Mei-Li Esmeralda Lim-Melendez.’ The only aspect of the shower Lim would have probably changed was the amount of pink adorning the living room (curse the blue for boy and pink for girl color coded baby shower decorations). Oh, and the nursery rhyme background music that Laura and Claire absolutely adored.

Morgan approached Lim to give her some updates on everything going on at the hospital, but Lim’s keen sense of smell detected something in Morgan’s drink. When Morgan was finished talking, Lim took the drink out of Morgan’s hand and took a whiff, “Is there a reason why you’re spiking your punch, Dr. Reznick?”

“I can solve that problem,” said Lim, walking over to the iPod speaker and yanking it off the doc. There was plenty of food but Elena’s homemade churros and Laura’s sticky rice cakes were the biggest hits. They all sat down in the living room to open presents where Lim received even more clothes for the baby (Claire had even found a T-Shirt that read Riding Mom: Some Riders Wait their Entire Life to Meet their Riding Buddy. I’m Raising Mine and a matching onesie that read Mommy’s Future Riding Buddy). Morgan had found a little pink motorcycle for when the baby was a little older. Lim also received plenty of the necessities like even more outfits, diapers, wipes, bibs, burp cloths, bottles, pacifiers, a baby monitor, supplies for breastfeeding, a baby bathtub, toiletries, hooded towels that looked like animals (there was a panda bear, a monkey, a tiger, and a pig), and Maria and Elena had pitched in for a stroller. Isabella had also picked out a few of her dolls she no longer played with to give to her new baby cousin.

Maria picked up one more package and handed it to Lim, “I’m sure Neil will be embarrassed that I gave this to you, but, I thought it would be appropriate for my first grandchild to have it,” Lim opened the box and found a blue blanket, “I hand knitted it when I was expecting Neil and it was the blanket I brought him home from the hospital in. And he used to take it with him everywhere,” Maria chuckled.

“Really?” Lim laughed.

“We thought he was going to pack it in his suitcase and bring it to college with him,” smiled Elena.

“Well, thank you Maria. I’ll make sure Mei-Li treasures it as much as Neil did,” Lim hugged her.

Laura had Everly hand Lim another present and Lim opened it to find an outfit that consisted of a pair of pink pants, a matching bow and hat, and a shirt that read Hello, I’m New Here, “It’s the outfit I brought Everly home from the hospital in. Now you have your coming home outfit for the baby,” smiled Laura.
“I didn’t know that was a thing, to be honest, but thank you,” admitted Lim.

Elena was next and Lim opened the package to find a Winnie the Pooh mobile, “Neil told me that the theme of the nursery was Winnie the Pooh. I found it at Target when I was looking for stuff for Eddie,” said Elena.

Morgan and Claire glanced at each other and Morgan said, “Well, Dr. Lim, considering neither one of us have children, we don’t have any sentimental items to give to you. However, we were shopping on Etsy during one of our breaks and we found these and couldn’t resist.”

Lim found a few more onesies, one that said *Future Doctor (Like Mommy)*, another one that read *Future Surgeon*, and the last two read *Relax…My Mommy is a Surgeon* and *Relax My Dad is a Doctor;* “Well, these are adorable. Thank you Dr. Reznick, Dr. Browne.”

“Well, she is the daughter of two of St. Bonaventure’s best surgeons,” smiled Claire.

“Kiss ass,” muttered Morgan under her breath, to which Claire promptly gave her a ‘look who’s talking’ stare.

The final activity of the afternoon was having cake and Laura made sure to get plenty of pictures of Lim cutting the cake while showing off her baby bump. They were serving the strawberry cake as Melendez arrived and he was overwhelmed by the amount of love and generosity they had received, “Wow, that’s a lot of stuff,” he whispered to Lim.

“If we didn’t have it beforehand, we do now,” she smiled back and offered him a slice of cake.

“Only five more weeks to go before your due date. You think we’re ready?” asked Melendez nervously.

Lim cradled her swell and rubbed it gently, “Well, ready or not, here she comes.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter was short, but I promise you the next one will be very very special.:)
Chapter 63

The month of February flew by for Lim and Melendez as they made the final preparations for the arrival of their baby. They put the finishing touches on the nursery (and Lim made sure Melendez knew where everything was), Lim had her hospital bag packed and ready to go for weeks, their maternity and paternity leaves were in place, they knew everyone they would need to send their birth announcements to, and Lim’s birth plan was meticulously written (Melendez couldn’t believe it was six and a half pages long). They were ready.

As Lim’s due date approached, she couldn’t help but wonder if every pain or every twitch was the real thing, but she wasn’t one of those women rushing to the hospital every time she felt something. Her due date passed and she was getting more and more irritated each passing day she wasn’t in labor. She felt like she was ready to pop or that she needed a crane to simply get up off the couch. At this point, she was honestly ready to reach up and pull the baby out herself.

The morning of Friday, March 13, 2020, Melendez awoke and glanced at the time. It was a little before seven and he had to be at work by 8:30. He rolled over and found Lim stirring next to him, “Good morning,” he smiled.

“How are you?” asked Melendez.

“I’m still pregnant. How do you think I am?” she answered sarcastically.

Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle, though he did have to admit, he was getting anxious as well. Dr. Garcia had mentioned that if Lim didn’t go into labor on her own soon, then she would need to be induced. He kissed her forehead and said, “She’ll be here before you know it. Any plans for today?”

“I figure since I suck at moving around and you’ll be in board meetings all day, I’ll just binge watch the latest season of The Walking Dead since you aren’t into zombie shows,” she said.

Melendez got out of bed and went to shower, though when he came back, he noticed Lim holding her back and taking a few deep breaths, “Are you alright, Audrey?”

“Mmhmm,” she nodded, “Back pain. It’s just been par for the course the entire third trimester.”

Melendez finished getting dressed and kissed her, “Well, take it easy. You don’t want to exert yourself too much.”

“Speaking like a doctor. I wonder why?” she smirked.

Melendez smirked back and left the room, “Love you.”

“Love you too,” she called.

As the morning progressed, Lim couldn’t help but notice the fact that her back pain was increasing. Actually, now that she thought about it, it had been bothering her all night too. She had even told Melendez to apply counter pressure a couple times because it was bothering her so much. By around mid-morning, Lim’s back pain was accompanied by cramping in her abdomen that came
every so often along with pressure in her pelvis. The pains began to come consistently and were
getting closer together but it was only when she went to the bathroom and noticed a blood stained
mucus in her underwear did it finally hit her, “Fuck.”

She was in the early stages of labor. How could she be so dumb? The pains in her back that were
now radiating around to the front of her abdomen had been slowly getting closer together since
about 2:00 AM. The back pain, the abdominal cramps, the pelvic pressure, the bloody show…
about the only thing that hadn’t happened yet was her water hadn’t broken, “Okay Audrey, don’t
panic,” she whispered to herself. But she was panicking on the inside. Melendez would be in board
meetings all day and since he wasn’t on call, he probably had his phone turned off. Laura would
have to take Everly to daycare before even getting her to the hospital. There was no one to take her
to the hospital. Well, that’s what Uber was for, wasn’t it? Another pain hit her and she breathed
through the contraction before she called Dr. Garcia, “Dr. Garcia. Yes, it’s me, Audrey Lim. I
think I’m in labor; can you meet me at the hospital? Okay, thank you,” she hung up the phone and
went to get an Uber when another contraction started, “Ow, fuck,” she cursed to herself. She timed
a few contractions and noticed her contractions were eight minutes apart. Well, she probably
wasn’t in early labor anymore. She tried to call Melendez, but she had been correct in her
assumption that his phone was off, so she figured she could try to get someone at the hospital to
contact him when she arrived. She managed to get upstairs to grab her hospital bag and thankfully,
the Uber driver had just arrived, “Where to?” she asked.

“San Jose St. Bonaventure Hospital,” Lim managed to squeak out, as another contraction had
begun. Thankfully, it wasn’t a far drive and Lim requested to be dropped off near the emergency
department since the labor and delivery unit wasn’t far from there.

When she arrived, Shaun was the resident covering the ER and he noticed the fact that she was in
distress right away, “Dr. Lim, do you need assistance?”

“Yes, I need assistance! I’m in labor,” quipped Lim.

“Then why isn’t Dr. Melendez with you?” asked Shaun.

“He’s stuck in board meetings,” said Lim, leaning against the nurses’ station, panting through the
pain.

Shaun didn’t quite know what to do but he said, “Breathe, Dr. Lim.”

“I know, I’m trying,” whimpered Lim.

Though Shaun struggled with empathy, he could visibly see that Lim was in a lot of pain. He
grabbed her hand and said, “We need to get you to obstetrics.”

“Murphy, what are you doing?” asked Lim, “Dr. Garcia is on her way.”

“No she’s not,” said Shaun.

“Why not?” asked Lim.

“Because I heard Dr. Cooperberg say she’s stuck in traffic and the other OB/GYN is in an
emergency c-section,” said Shaun.

“Dammit,” said Lim.

“I’ve delivered a baby before,” said Shaun.
“When?” asked Lim. She paused to breathe through another contraction.

“During the quarantine,” announced Shaun proudly.

The contraction finished and Lim stood up straighter, “You willing to deliver a second baby?” she asked.

“I can’t. I don’t have a supervising doctor,” stated Shaun.

More contractions and more pain, “Technically, I’m a doctor and I’m your supervisor. If something really goes wrong, I can tell you what to do.”

“Mm. Okay,” said Shaun.

Lim checked herself in and was led to a room where Nurse Villaneuva got her situated while Shaun thoroughly read (and subsequently memorized) Lim’s birth plan. Shaun came in, dimmed the lights, and closed the curtains, “Are you alright, Dr. Lim?”

“Other than the fact that I’m about to squeeze a six to eight pound bowling ball out of me, yeah,” she said.

Shaun put on some gloves and said, “I need to check your dilation,” Lim shouted a few curse words and Shaun said, “But I can wait until your contraction is over,” he checked her dilation and announced, “You are three centimeters dilated.”

“Only three? I’ve been in labor since the middle of the night!” shouted Lim. She handed Shaun her cell phone, “Murphy, do me a favor and call Dr. Melendez and tell him to come to labor and delivery as soon as his meetings are over and then call my friend Laura Wang and tell her to get her ass to St. Bonaventure ASAP.”

Shaun took Lim’s phone and dialed Melendez’s number, though it went straight to voicemail, “You have reached Dr. Neil Melendez. I can’t answer the phone right now, but please leave a message and I will return your call at my earliest convenience.”

Shaun heard the beep and said, “Dr. Melendez, this is Dr. Shaun Murphy. When you get out of your meetings, come to the labor and delivery unit. Dr. Lim is in labor.”

He scrolled through Lim’s contacts and found the name Laura Wang, so he dialed the number. It rang a few times before someone picked up, “Audrey?”

“This is not Audrey. I am Dr. Shaun Murphy. I am one of Dr. Lim’s residents,” he introduced himself, “Dr. Lim is in labor and she told me to call her friend Laura and tell her to get her ass to St. Bonaventure ASAP.”

“Well, why didn’t she have Neil call me?” asked Laura.

“Dr. Melendez is in meetings,” said Shaun.

“Okay, wow, tell Audrey I’ll be there as soon as I drop off Everly at daycare,” said Laura.

Shaun hung up the phone and went back into Lim’s hospital room, “Your friend, Laura, is on her way.”

“Thank you, Murphy,” said Lim.
At around 6 PM, Melendez’s meetings were finally over. He checked his phone and noticed he had a voicemail from Lim, though when he listened to it, it wasn’t Lim speaking, “Dr. Melendez, this is Dr. Shaun Murphy. When you get out of your meetings, come to the labor and delivery unit. Dr. Lim is in labor.”

Melendez’s fight or flight instinct kicked in as he ran as fast as he could to the locker room, ripping off his dress clothes and putting on scrubs and tennis shoes so he could be a little more comfortable. He made his way to the labor and delivery unit as fast as his legs could carry him, hoping that he wasn’t too late and that Lim hadn’t had the baby yet. He went to the main desk and asked, “Audrey Lim. Where is she?”

“Room 205, Dr. Melendez,” informed the receptionist.

“Thank you,” he answered and found his way to her room, only to find Shaun sitting out front reading, “Dr. Murphy, what are you doing here?”

Shaun looked up at Melendez, “Dr. Garcia is stuck in traffic and the OB/GYN on call was performing a complicated c-section. I’ve delivered a baby before, so Dr. Lim asked me to help her.”

“Oh,” said Melendez, “How’s she feeling?”

“She feels like she is going to have a baby,” answered Shaun, “I’ve been checking her cervix every hour, she is five centimeters dilated, her water broke a half hour ago, her friend, Laura, arrived two hours ago. I have made sure to dim the lights and close the curtains. I found a birthing ball and made sure she has access to the shower. And I’ve provided supplemental oxygen if she needs it. Dr. Lim has also been very considerate of my autism and has been laboring very quietly.”

Melendez was almost certain Lim’s quietness was more because of the fact that she wasn’t much to make noise while in pain than from being considerate of Shaun’s autism, but he let it go. He knocked on the door and quietly entered the room, “Deep breath, Audrey,” he heard Laura coach.

Melendez walked to the other side of the bed so he could see Lim face to face, “Hey, Audrey,” he whispered.

Lim opened her eyes and the relief was evident on her face, “Neil, thank God you’re here. I really need you,” she squeezed his hand.

He rubbed her head and asked, “How are you feeling?”

“It hurts, Neil,” she uttered softly.

“But she’s been doing great,” said Laura.

They both heard Lim start breathing and moaning through another contraction, so Melendez rubbed her back and said, “Deep breath, sweetheart.”

“Don’t call me that!” she shouted.

“What? Sweetheart?”

“Yes, it sounds weird.”
A few more hours passed and Melendez and Laura continued to coach Lim through contractions with Shaun checking her progress every hour. Melendez couldn’t stand to watch his girlfriend in pain: the hypnobirthing lingo could call it pressure or discomfort all it wanted to, but deep down, he knew Lim was in a lot of pain and the only way to ultimately relieve it was for her to have the baby.

Finally, out of the blue, Lim announced, “Someone get Murphy because I need to push.”

Laura went to get up to find Shaun, but as luck would have it, Shaun burst into the room at that moment, “Dr. Lim, good news. Dr. Garcia is no longer stuck in traffic,” Dr. Garcia came in behind Shaun.

“Well, that’s good, because she says she has the urge to push,” said Melendez.

Dr. Garcia examined Lim and said, “Well, I can see why. You’re fully dilated so you can start pushing with you next contraction.”

Laura put the oxygen mask on Lim and Melendez grabbed her hand. Shaun went to leave the room and Lim called out to him, “Murphy!” Shaun turned around. She looked up at Melendez and he nodded, “We want you to stay.”

Shaun didn’t say anything, but instead, came back into the room and sat down next to Dr. Garcia, “I’ve delivered a baby before,” he reminded Dr. Garcia.

“Yes, I remember,” she said.

“Can I? Can I deliver this baby?” asked Shaun hesitantly.

“Dr. Murphy…”

“Please?” asked Shaun.

“Just decide who’s delivering my baby and let me push her out!” shouted Lim.

Dr. Garcia slid her chair over and said, “I’ll guide you through the delivery, Dr. Murphy. Audrey, when you have your contractions, I want you to push down when you get a strong urge to push and as long as you need to until the contraction ends. Okay?”

“Mmhmm,” mumbled Lim.

Lim pushed with each contraction, though she was no longer as quiet as she had been, “That’s very loud, Dr. Lim.”

“You want to take over, Murphy?” asked Lim sarcastically.

“I can’t, I’m not a woman, I can’t have a baby,” said Shaun.

“I was being sarcastic, Murphy,” scolded Lim.

“Murphy, try not to take things too seriously if you want to get out in one piece…” started Melendez.

“Oh, he gets off the hook; you’re the one that knocked me up!” Lim turned to him. Another contraction started and Lim yelled, “Cào nǐ mā!”
No one in the room other than Laura understood the Mandarin, so Shaun asked, “Dr. Melendez, what did that mean?”

“I don’t know and I don’t think I want to,” admitted Melendez.

“You don’t,” said Laura.

Lim finished pushing and Melendez wiped her sweaty brow, “You’re doing great, Audrey.”

“Oh you wángbādàn, this is your fault! You’re the one who got me into this situation!” said Lim.

“Do I want to know the meaning of that one?” he asked Laura. She shook her head in amusement.

Soon, the baby started to crown, so Shaun announced, “She’s crowning.”

“You’ll probably feel some burning and stinging, Audrey,” said Dr. Garcia.

“Some?” quipped Lim, “It feels like my entire lower body is being ripped in half with a knife!”

Lim delivered the head and Shaun suctioned out her nose and mouth, “One more contraction and you’ll have a baby,” comforted Dr. Garcia.

Lim pushed once more and yelled out, “Cào,” as her baby was delivered.

The baby immediately started crying, “Great job, Audrey,” Dr. Garcia said proudly as Shaun placed the baby onto Lim’s chest and into her mother’s welcoming arms.

“10:03 PM,” Shaun announced the time of birth.

“Mei-Li,” Lim laughed and cried, tears streaming down her face, “Oh Neil, she’s beautiful.”

Melendez gazed at his baby girl. With her dark brown hair, her chocolate brown eyes, and her olive skin, Mei-Li Lim-Melendez was the spitting image of her mother, though she had Melendez’s eyes. Melendez kissed Lim and said, “I am so proud of you, Audrey.”

“You did a really good job,” commended Laura.

Lim gazed down at her baby girl and couldn’t believe the amount of love she was feeling towards this tiny human. It amazed her that she had grown this little one inside of her and that she was the product of her love with Neil. Melendez observed Lim with their little girl and he had never seen her look at anyone in this manner before now, not even him. The look of love and adoration on Lim’s face made everything they both had just gone through today and the past year worth it. Mei-Li finally opened her eyes and Lim smiled, “Hi, my little Ài.”

“Dr. Lim, Dr. Melendez, what’s your baby’s name?” asked Shaun.

Lim smiled again and turned the baby towards Shaun, “Shaun, meet Mei-Li Esmeralda Lim-Melendez.”
“Hi, Mei-Li. I’m Dr. Shaun Murphy. Your Mommy and Daddy are helping me become a good surgeon,” said Shaun.

Dr. Garcia clamped the cord and handed the scissors to Melendez, “Do you want to do the honors, Daddy?”

“Of course,” Melendez nodded and took the scissors. He cut the cord and handed the scissors back to Dr. Garcia. He sat down on the bed next to Lim and rubbed his daughter’s head, tears welling in his eyes. He couldn’t believe it. He was a father. He had a daughter. His greatest wish in life had come true. And he couldn’t have asked for anyone better to be the mother of his child.

After the placenta was delivered, Lim passed the baby to Dr. Garcia to weigh and measure her, “6 lbs., 7 oz., 23 inches long,” announced Dr. Garcia. She placed the baby back on Lim’s chest and laid a blanket over her.

“Definitely don’t take after your Daddy then. I was over nine pounds when I was born,” Melendez chuckled.

At the moment, Andrews came into the room and said, “Dr. Murphy, there you are! Dr. Cooperberg has been looking everywhere for you. What in the world is going on?”

“Tell Dr. Cooperberg I was helping Dr. Lim deliver her baby,” Shaun pointed to the new family of three.

Andrews turned towards them and his stern expression softened as he laid eyes on the tiny bundle in Lim’s arms, “Congratulations to the both of you,” he smiled.

“Thank you, sir,” said Melendez.

Andrews couldn’t help but feel a slight pain about how he and Isabel would probably never have children together, but if it wasn’t meant to be, it wasn’t meant to be. The baby started crying and hunting for nourishment, so Andrews said, “Well, I’ll leave you two alone. Murphy, ER, now!” he ordered Shaun.

Shaun quickly ran out of the room while Dr. Garcia showed Lim how to properly latch the baby, “I need to go check up on a few of my patients. I’ll come back later to see if you need anything.”

“Okay, thank you, Dr. Garcia,” said Lim. Dr. Garcia left the room and Lim gazed down at her baby girl, “Hi sweetheart,” she cooed and smiled at the suckling sound Mei-Li was making, “Oh Neil, look at what we brought into this world together.”

Melendez couldn’t help but let the tears fall. He kissed Lim’s temple and buried his nose in her long brown hair, “You did a great job, Audrey. Really great job.”

“Told you my stubborn…butt could do it without an epidural,” she smiled proudly.

Melendez chuckled and shook his head, “Yeah, you were right.”

Mei-Li finished nursing and Lim handed her to Melendez, “Want to go say ‘hi’ to Daddy?” she asked softly. Melendez took Mei-Li, placed her on his shoulder, and began to burp her, “You don’t need a rag?” asked Lim.
“I’m wearing scrubs. I’ve gotten much worse than baby spit-up on them,” Melendez laughed. They both heard Mei-Li’s tiny burp and Melendez swaddled her in her special blanket before handing her back to Lim. They didn’t say much more other than babbling to their daughter, but right now, that was all they wanted to do.

The next day, all of their residents stopped by Lim’s hospital room to see the baby, since Shaun had told everyone about her arrival the day before. Park couldn’t help but think back to the day Kellan was born and Claire was more than happy to love all over the baby, “Dr. Lim, Dr. Melendez, your daughter is just beautiful,” Claire said, rocking Mei-Li in her arms.

“She better be, because that’s her name,” said Lim.

“Really?” asked Morgan.

“Mmhm. Mei-Li is Mandarin for beautiful,” explained Lim.

“She has your eyes, Dr. Melendez,” said Claire.

“But you have your Mommy’s nose,” said Morgan.

Claire handed the baby to Morgan and then Morgan handed Mei-Li to Park, “It seems like just yesterday, Kellan was this small,” he commented, “Now he’ll be eighteen in June. Enjoy her now; she’ll grow up fast.”

“Don’t remind us, Dr. Park,” scolded Lim jokingly.

Park handed Mei-Li back to Lim and Shaun hesitantly asked, “Dr. Lim, may I hold Mei-Li?”

Lim smiled, “Of course, Dr. Murphy,” she carefully passed the baby and cooed, “Go to Dr. Shaun, Mei-Li.”

Shaun carefully cradled Mei-Li in his arms and everyone in the room swore they saw Shaun smile a little. Soon after, Mei-Li started crying, so Shaun asked, “Dr. Lim, how do I make her stop crying?”

“You hand her back to me and I feed her,” said Lim.

Shaun did so and all of the residents left the room to begin their shifts and give the new parents some privacy. After Mei-Li finished nursing, Melendez burped her and changed her diaper, “I’ll take her down to the nursery so you can get a few hours of uninterrupted sleep.”

“Mmhm,” Lim mumbled, “Have one of the nurses come get me if she needs fed,” Melendez nodded and he found Petringa to help him get Mei-Li down to the nursery. When Lim woke up again a few hours later, Melendez wasn’t in the room, so she figured he was either down in the nursery or getting something to eat. She could tell that it would be time to feed Mei-Li soon, so she grabbed her grey robe and those disposable hospital slippers to make her way down to the nursery. When she arrived, Melendez wasn’t there, but Shaun was standing at the window, gazing at all the babies, “Dr. Murphy, didn’t your shift end at 3:00?”

Shaun didn’t answer right away, but when he finally spoke, he said, “Your daughter is the second baby I’ve delivered.”

“Well, you did a good job,” commended Lim.
“Mei-Li is very pretty,” said Shaun.

Lim smiled, “Thank you, Shaun.”

“You and Dr. Melendez must have compatible genes, because you make cute babies together,” Shaun stated matter of factly.

“Um, thanks?” Lim didn’t quite know how to acknowledge that statement.

“You were the only attending surgeon who didn’t judge me because I have autism. You’ve taught me a lot about how to be a good surgeon. You get me. It meant a lot to me to be able to deliver your baby,” said Shaun.

They both could see Mei-Li was crying, so Lim laid a hand on Shaun’s shoulder, “I have to go feed her,” Shaun watched Lim go into the nursery and start babbling at Mei-Li, but by the time Lim looked up at the window, Shaun was gone. Lim sat down in one of the rocking chairs and thankfully, Mei-Li was taking to breastfeeding well. Lim rocked back and forth, gazing into her daughter’s eyes, “You have no idea how big of a surprise you were. But you were the best surprise I’ve ever received in my life. And your Daddy, he might have a unique way of showing it, but he loves you very much. He spent hours helping me decorate your room, he read to you while you were growing inside me, and he supported me when I was struggling this past year. I don’t know how I got so lucky to have you both in my life, but somehow, the universe knew what I needed before I did,” Lim choked back a few tears and continued, “You also have a big brother or sister. He or she might not be here physically, but I know he or she is somewhere out there watching over you.”

Melendez had just arrived and had heard everything Lim had said to Mei-Li. Lim looked up when she heard him approach, but neither surgeon said anything to each other. Right now, they were just enjoying one of their first of many special moments together.
On Monday morning, both Lim and Mei-Li were cleared to go home, so Lim changed into a pair of sweat pants and a button down shirt before dressing Mei-Li in her special going home outfit. Melendez had gone to find a wheelchair while Lim swaddled Mei-Li in her blue blanket, “Today’s your first big adventure xiǎo shūnǚ. Today you get to come home with Mommy and Daddy. We spent a lot of time getting our home ready for you and we have a very special room just for you.”

Melendez came into the room with a wheelchair and asked, “Are my two favorite girls ready to go?”

Lim finished swaddling Mei-Li and cradled her in her arms, “Yes, we’re ready, aren’t we my Ài?” Mei-Li yawned and squirmed a little in response, “See, she’s ready.”

Melendez wheeled Lim down to the front entrance while Lim held Mei-Li in her arms. Melendez got his Tesla and Lim had made sure to remind Melendez about twenty times to make sure the car seat was properly installed. Before they knew it, they were making their journey home to begin their lives as a family of three. Lim couldn’t help but keep looking into the backseat to make sure Mei-Li was content, but the three day old infant had fallen fast asleep, so Lim made sure to make a mental note that car rides soothed her daughter. Melendez glanced over at Lim, grabbed her hand, and asked, “So how have you been feeling?”

Lim sighed, “Pretty good. A little sore in certain areas, but it’s getting better. But she makes everything worth it, don’t you sweetheart?” Lim glanced into the back seat again.

Melendez pulled into the driveway and grabbed Lim’s hospital bag while Lim got Mei-Li out of her car seat. Melendez unlocked the front door and opened it. They all stepped inside and Melendez said, “Welcome home, mija.”

Mei-Li had opened her eyes again and was looking around the room, “So what do you think, Ài? It might not be the biggest house in California, but it’s home,” smiled Lim, “Over here is the living room and the dining room and kitchen are this way,” Melendez couldn’t help but smile as he watched Lim give Mei-Li a tour of the house. He followed his girls up the stairs as Lim spoke to Mei-Li in Mandarin. They had agreed to try to teach her basic Mandarin and Spanish, even if she never became fluent in either language, “Right here’s the bathroom,” continued Lim, “This room right here is Mommy and Daddy’s room.”

“That’s where you came to be,” joked Melendez.

“Neil!” Lim scolded in mock amusement.

“What? It’s the highlight of the tour,” he smirked.

Lim shook her head at her boyfriend and then looked back down at her daughter, “I told you Daddy has a unique way of expressing love,” Lim turned on the light of the nursery and stepped inside the room, “And here is your room, Ài. You have a crib to sleep in, some toys for when you’re a little older; here, we have a glider and a changing table. You and I will be spending a lot of time together in those two places. And here on the dresser, is a picture of Mommy and Daddy when we went to San Francisco for the day. Dr. Garcia thinks that’s right around the time you were created for us. And then we have another picture from when I was carrying you inside of me,” Lim couldn’t help but laugh at the picture, as she had insisted on incorporating the Ducati and her black leather jacket into the maternity photo shoot. Mei-Li’s eyes began to get heavier and heavier at the
sound of Lim’s voice, so Lim gently laid her in her crib and laid a hand on Mei-Li’s chest, “I’ll be back soon to feed you, baby girl. Wǒ ài nǐ, I love you.”

Lim turned off the light and shut the door behind her. She went down the hall and when she arrived, Melendez had just gotten out of the shower, “That’ll probably be the last long shower I have in eighteen years,” he joked.

Lim couldn’t help but laugh, but she knew how true that statement was, “I might go try to shower quickly too,” they both heard Mei-Li start crying over the baby monitor, “Right after I go feed her.”

As the week wore on and Melendez and Lim slowly but surely settled into their routine as parents, they couldn’t help but realize they had been thrown into the deep end when it came to raising a newborn. Oh sure, they were both loving every minute of it, but Lim was about ready to smack Laura upside the head for telling her parenthood was joyful and not at all exhausting. There were the feedings every two hours followed by a diaper change, but Mei-Li was a laid back baby. That is, when she was happy. Granted that was most of the time, but she also loved attention and loved to be cuddled and loved to lie against Mommy or Daddy’s bare chest. Then, there was her irregular sleep schedule. Of course, they both knew she was an infant with her own schedule, but Melendez and Lim weren’t quite sure who her early morning activity pattern came from (Melendez was the light sleeper but Lim was the early riser, especially now). Then there were the extra chores. Their house looked as if a tornado had gone through it because it seemed like they were always doing laundry; every sort of bodily fluid ended up on either Mei-Li’s clothes or their clothes (they both were considering wearing scrubs 24/7).

But parenting wasn’t all bad though. There was that sweet newborn baby smell and all of those cuddles and hugs and kisses. There were the times when they would read her bedtime stories or sing her Spanish and Mandarin lullabies they remembered their mothers singing to them as toddlers. Or there were those times where she just gazed into her parents’ eyes. No matter how hard and stressful it was, both Lim and Melendez loved every second of it.

Of course, the aspect of parenting they loved the least was the late night feedings. Mei-Li began crying and Lim and Melendez both groaned as they woke themselves up, “Neil, it’s your turn to feed the baby,” ordered Lim.

“I thought you said this morning you didn’t have any bottles pumped,” said Melendez.

“Oh no, mister. I took time out of my day to pump just for that reason,” she teased, “Now go, I promise to cover the next one.”

“I’m going to hold you to that promise,” Melendez climbed out of bed and stumbled downstairs to warm a bottle. Mei-Li was still whimpering when he arrived, so he did his best to soothe her, “It’s okay pequeña, Daddy’s here,” he said. He settled her into his arms and offered her the bottle, to which she began to eat right away, “Good job, mija,” he rocked back and forth a few moments before he spoke again, “You know mija, the day Mommy told me about you was one of the best days of my life. And then the day you came into the world was the absolute best day of my life. Nothing will ever top that experience,” he held back a few tears and said, “You’re just what Mommy and I needed after the year we’ve had. Last year, Mommy got really sick and it was touch and go with her for a while. And she had a really rough recovery,” Mei-Li finished her bottle, so Melendez grabbed a burp cloth and gently patted her back, “It’s not all bad though. If all of that hadn’t happened to Mommy, then we probably wouldn’t have gotten together. And if we hadn’t gotten together, we wouldn’t have you, mija,” Mei-Li burped and laid her head on Melendez’s
shoulder. Melendez put her on the changing table and changed her diaper, “Mommy’s a strong woman though, and if you’re anything like her, you’re going to be one tough little lady too. I love you both so much.”
Mei-Li received a lot of visitors over the next few weeks including most of Melendez’s relatives, Josh, and Laura and Everly. While Josh was visiting from Dallas, Melendez had taken the time to ask him about something that had been floating around in his mind. Josh had been a little surprised at Melendez’s question (not the subject matter, but the fact that he had even asked him permission), but nevertheless, he was excited about the prospect. He also told Maria, Elena, and Laura his plans and they were all more than willing to help plan the surprise. Melendez sure hoped that Lim would be too busy with the baby to notice his new found secret trips out to stores and internet browsing, but he wanted this event to be the biggest surprise of her life. In the meantime, he also had to return to work while Lim stayed home with Mei-Li, which wasn’t easy for him, but it was necessary. Lim usually tried to make up for it by giving him time in evenings with Mei-Li while she either prepared dinner, showered, or napped.

Though Melendez believed she was oblivious to his behavior, Lim couldn’t help but notice how secretive he was being. He would always clear his internet browser history, he spent an awful lot of time talking to Josh, Laura, or his relatives, and he had even wanted to go out shopping with Laura (he wouldn’t tell Lim what he had been shopping for).

One day, when Melendez came home from work, he opened the front door and quickly saw Lim asleep on the couch and Mei-Li asleep on Lim’s chest with the Giants game on the TV. He set his briefcase, turned off the TV, walked over to Lim, and gently tapped her on the shoulder, “Audrey,” he whispered.

She startled awake but smiled at him, “Hi,” she whispered back and sat up, being careful not to jostle Mei-Li, “She fell asleep on my chest while I was watching the baseball game and I just couldn’t bear to put her down.”

Melendez smiled, “Well here, let me take her while you go shower or bathe. I have a big surprise I want to give you.”

Lim looked at Melendez in confusion, but smiled, “Thanks,” she kissed his cheek and disappeared upstairs.

After Lim was out of earshot (he hoped), Melendez looked down at his daughter, who had just opened her eyes, “Well mija. Tonight is the first step in a very secret mission that Auntie Laura, Uncle Josh, and all of my relatives are in on to surprise Mommy. We have to keep very quiet so Mommy doesn’t find out until we go on our special trip. Do you think you can do that for me?” Mei-Li yawned and licked her lips in response, “I thought you could. Now let’s go get you dinner so we can relax a little tonight.”

Later that night, after Lim had gotten Mei-Li to sleep, she changed into pajamas and found Melendez sitting on the bed. He was also clad in his pajamas, but he had a present on the bed, “Neil, what’s all this? It’s not my birthday or an anniversary.”

“I know,” he smiled, “It’s just a little something my family, Josh, and Laura have been planning for you. A nice little ‘welcome to motherhood’ present.”

Lim eyed him skeptically, but opened the package anyways. Inside, she found a Ravenclaw t-shirt in her size and a Gryffindor t-shirt in Melendez’s size, “Neil, I love the t-shirts, but are they supposed to represent something?”
Melendez pulled something out of his nightstand drawer and asked, “What’s the one place in California you’ve wanted to go to since it opened several years ago, but have never gotten the chance to go because of our busy schedules?” Lim furrowed her brow, because she had no clue about the place Melendez was talking about, “Hint: the shirts can be worn at this place.”

Lim glanced down at the *Harry Potter* themed apparel and the thought suddenly hit her, “No way?”

Melendez pulled out the paperwork with the hotel reservations, the tickets, and other assorted reservations to Universal Studios Hollywood, “One last big hoorah before you go back to work,” said Melendez.

Lim sighed a little. She wasn’t looking forward to returning to work and leaving Mei-Li, but she loved both being a trauma surgeon and being a mother, “Will it be just the three of us?”

“Oh no. Laura and Everly are coming down with us, my relatives are coming, and so is your brother.”

“Hmm. It’ll be a nice big family reunion,” Lim smiled.

“Yes it will,” Melendez agreed, “And it’ll be right before the colleges let out, so the crowds should be down.”

“Oh, plus Mei-Li will turn two months old while we’re there,” said Lim happily, “We should get her a little costume for the trip!”

“Audrey…” Melendez whined jokingly.

“Come on, wouldn’t she look adorable dressed as Dobby? Or a little Hogwarts student?” beamed Lim.

Melendez gathered everything together, put it away, and put it back in his nightstand drawer, “Well, we have two weeks before we leave. Maybe we can find a little outfit her,” he kissed Lim’s temple. They heard Mei-Li fussing over the baby monitor, so Lim went to go attend to her before Melendez stopped her, “I’ve got her. You can get the next feeding.”

“You’re so good to me,” she smiled and kissed him.

Melendez obtained and warmed a bottle before going to the nursery and settling Mei-Li into his arms to feed her, “Well mija, step one of Operation Surprise Mommy was successful. Now, I’ll give her my other special present for her when we’re in Universal Studios.”

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Two weeks later, the family was on their way to Los Angeles. Laura and Everly and Maria, Mateo, and Gabi were following behind them while Josh and the Garcias would meet them in Los Angeles since they were all flying in from Texas, “Just think Neil, this is our first trip as a family of three,” said Lim.

“Mmhm,” said Melendez.

Lim looked over at him and noticed he was being awfully quiet, “Are you okay, Neil?”

“Yeah, why do you ask?” he asked her.
“You just seem quiet,” she mentioned casually.

Melendez took Lim’s hand and kissed it, “Don’t worry about me,” he soothed. Though deep in the back of his mind, he was hoping this wasn’t going to end up a wasted trip. He couldn’t help but think about the object burning a hole in his suitcase, the one Laura had helped him pick out a few weeks prior. But at the same time, he couldn’t wait to give it to Audrey. He could only imagine her reaction. Laura and Josh had kept trying to soothe Melendez’s fears, that they had no doubt that he would get the answer he was hoping for and expecting. Lim’s voice interrupted his thoughts, “What?”

“I think we need to pull over and change Mei-Li’s diaper,” Lim wrinkled her nose.

They were soon checking into the hotel in Los Angeles and many of their relatives weren’t far behind them, “Audrey!” Elena exclaimed excitedly, hugging her and kissing her cheek, “And how is my little Chiquita?” she kissed Mei-Li’s cheek, to which the infant grinned her toothless smile.

“She’s been doing well,” Lim said happily.

“Well, I promise you that this will be a wonderful trip for you,” said Maria with a twinkle in her eye.

Lim glanced at Maria and asked, “Do you know all something that I don’t?”

Elena pretended to zipper her lips, “Our lips are sealed.”

Melendez couldn’t help but overhear their conversation, “Oh it’ll be a special trip indeed for you, Audrey,” he thought to himself.
Chapter 67

Everyone woke up bright and early the next morning so they could get to Universal Studios early. As Lim got Mei-Li ready for a day outside, she couldn’t help but notice how nervous Melendez seemed to be. After he had finished applying his sunscreen, he had taken to pacing the hotel room while Lim fed Mei-Li, dressed her, and got the diaper bag ready, “Neil, is something wrong?”

“No, just going over something in my head,” he admitted.

Lim couldn’t help but scowl a little, but turned her attention back to her daughter, “Well, are you ready for a fun day at Universal today? We get to spend the day with Abuela and Abuelo, Uncle Josh, Auntie Laura and Everly, and some of your cousins,” she cooed at her. Though Lim had decided against an actual costume, she had found a onesie on Amazon that read *Snuggle this Muggle* with lightning bolts and Harry Potter’s glasses.

The family met up with everyone in the continental breakfast room where Lim joined Maria, Elena, Laura, Isabella, Manny, Eddie, and Everly while Melendez hung back with Josh, Mateo, and Miguel. Mateo laid his hand on his son’s shoulder and asked, “So are you ready mijo?”

Melendez glanced at his father and said, “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Neil, I know my sister; you don’t have to be as nervous as you are. I mean, we’re about to experience the Wizarding World of Harry Potter! Relax a little!” Josh said and went over towards the breakfast meats.

“Hey, give him a break,” said Miguel, “Don’t worry, Neil. I was just as nervous when I was asking your tía the same question.”

“Thank you, that’s good to know,” said Melendez.

After breakfast, the group headed to the park and was thankfully some of the first in line. They went straight to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter and Lim was overwhelmed by how immersive this section of the park truly was, “Neil, this is amazing; I can’t believe you planned all of this for me,” she kissed his cheek.

“Well, believe it Aud,” said Melendez.

“What do you think, Ài? Someday when you’re older, Mommy will read all of the *Harry Potter* books to you and we’ll watch the movies together. And I can show you my comic book collection and all of my other special collectable items,” she cooed at Mei-Li, though the infant was looking around at her surroundings.

“Well, believe it Aud,” said Melendez.

“Just as a head’s up, Audrey and I want to ride *The Walking Dead* attraction before the day is out,” said Josh.

“Alright done,” agreed Melendez, “But first, we should go to Forbidden Journey because it’s inside the Hogwarts castle.”

Everly started crying and Laura tried to comfort her before she looked up at the group, “I think she might need a snack.”
“Oh I have some snacks in my backpack,” said Elena.

“Good, because all I have are bottles,” chuckled Lim. Mei-Li started fussing a little and Lim said, “While you feed Everly, I think I’ll feed Mei-Li because it seems like needs to eat again too.”

Once both of them were done, Melendez took a deep breath and said, “Okay, now for the Forbidden Journey.”

Mei-Li started fussing again and Lim said, “I should probably change her diaper first.”

“Mommy, I have to go potty too!” said Isabella.

“Alright mija, let’s go,” said Elena. She passed Eddie to Miguel and said, “You should make sure Manny and Eddie are okay too.”

After everyone had gotten out of the restroom, Melendez quickly stepped forward and said, “Okay, before we ride anything or someone else needs something, I really think we should go take pictures in front of Hogwarts.”

Everyone started smiling so Lim was totally confused at this point. They all went over by Hogwarts castle and took pictures. Lim and Melendez took a few pictures with Mei-Li before Maria took the baby from Lim. Miguel and Laura pulled out their phones, but they weren’t taking pictures, they were recording video footage. Melendez turned to Lim and took her hands, “Neil?” asked Lim worriedly.

Melendez took a deep breath and began his speech, “Audrey, when I first laid eyes on you, you were wearing blue jeans, an Avengers t-shirt, and big thick glasses. You had your hair pulled back into a ponytail. You would eat a peanut butter and strawberry jelly sandwich, a bag of salt and vinegar potato chips, and a Sprite every day at lunch. On our first day of residency, you revealed to me that you rode a Ducati you had named Black Lightning. We used to compete with each other until I realized I was the only competitive one. But as the years wore on, we became friends and you became my best friend in the world. I knew I could count on you for anything no matter how much of an asshole I was to you. We’ve been through a lot these past seventeen months, some good things, some bad. You made my biggest dream come true and you gave me a beautiful baby girl. If these past seventeen months have taught me anything, it’s that we’re better together and stronger together. Together, we can move mountains and we can get through anything. When I picture my future, I can’t picture it without you in it. I see myself waking up next to you, celebrating holidays with you, raising our daughter with you, doing mundane things like washing dishes and shopping for groceries with you, even doing nothing with you,” Melendez cupped Lim’s face in his hands, “I love you, Audrey and I have a question to ask you.”

Lim had grabbed his hands in hers and she asked to herself, “Is this really happening?”

Melendez pulled a small box out of his pocket and got down on one knee. Tears started to form in Lim’s eyes as Melendez opened the box, revealing a small silver-cut diamond ring, “Audrey Mikayla Lim, will you marry me?”

Lim covered her mouth, trying to form the words she wanted to say. She didn’t know why she was crying because she wasn’t a sappy person. She hadn’t even cried when Kashal had asked her to marry him. Then again, he had never really asked; they had just decided to get married and went down to the courthouse the next week. But this time, it was different. He was the man of her dreams, the father of her child, and most importantly, her best friend, so she knew exactly what she was going to say, “Yes, of course, you asshat!”
Lim could hear everyone else laughing at her response, but as Melendez stood and slipped the ring onto her finger, it felt like it was just the two of them, “I love you,” he whispered.

“I love you too,” she smiled and kissed him, “Now let’s go ride the hell out of all these rides. We have the rest of our lives to annoy each other.”

“After you, fiancée,” said Melendez. He loved the sound of that: fiancée. He couldn’t wait until the day where he would get to call Audrey Lim his wife.
Chapter 68

Everyone was thrilled for Lim and Melendez in regards to their engagement. Naturally, Shaun had been the first to notice that Lim was now sporting an engagement ring that she hadn’t been wearing when she went on maternity leave. As much as Lim loved her job, going back to work and leaving Mei-Li with Mateo and Maria during the day had been the hardest thing she had ever done (it had taken Maria all she could to get Lim out of her house and for the first few weeks, she had had to deal with Lim calling ten times a day). In between work and caring for Mei-Li, Melendez and Lim were also busy planning their wedding, which involved a lot of discussion and compromises. Lim had agreed to a church wedding even though she didn’t believe in anything the Church said because she knew how important that was to Melendez and his family, though she sometimes regretted it whenever she was dealing with all of the Pre-Cana classes and getting her previous marriage annulled. In return, Lim had made it abundantly clear she was not planning on wearing a poofy white dress (her exact rationale had been white is the color virgins wear and then she promptly held up Mei-Li to prove her point). Melendez figured it was easiest not to argue with her on that one. In addition, the couple wanted a small wedding, yet both of their families wanted every living relative in the United States, Mexico, and Taiwan to be invited (what did they not understand about fifty people or less?). There was also one aspect of the wedding where they both wanted to surprise each other; Lim had received help from Maria and Elena while Melendez had received help from Josh.

Finally, the day of the wedding arrived: November 7, 2020. Everyone was busy preparing for the ceremony. Melendez had the help of Mateo, Miguel, and Tom, his Best Man, while Lim was being aided by Maria, Gabi, Elena, and Laura, her Maid of Honor. They were both nervous and excited all at the same time. Mateo looked at Melendez with pride and said, “Well mijo, today’s the big day.”

“I never thought it would come,” Melendez chuckled nervously.

Mateo laid a hand on his son’s shoulder and said, “But you picked a good one, Neil. I have no doubt that your marriage will be beautiful.”

“Thanks Dad,” said Melendez. He looked at the time, “Well I guess I should be driving over now.”

“Alright, we’ll see you at the church,” Mateo hugged Melendez and Miguel shook his hand and hugged him. Melendez had stayed the night at his parents’ house in order to avoid seeing Lim on the day of the wedding, but he planned on breaking tradition.

When he arrived at their house, Maria, Elena, Gabi, and the kids were just getting ready to leave, “Neil, you look so handsome!” Elena smiled.

“Thank you,” he smiled.

“My little boy is all grown up,” said Maria with tears in her eyes.

“Mom, I haven’t been your little boy in years,” Melendez teased.

“I know, but you’ll always be my little boy. You know how it is now,” Maria gestured to her granddaughter snuggled in her arms.

Melendez smiled at Mei-Li, rubbed her head, and kissed her cheek, “I suppose I do,” he looked up at Laura, who he knew was ready to give him a little hassle like in Chinese tradition and smiled,
“I’ll see you all later.”

“Bye mijo,” Maria kissed his cheek along with Elena and Gabi.

Melendez approached Laura who smiled and asked, “Are you worthy of my best friend?”

“Well, we have a child together at the very least, so I hope so,” he laughed.

“What are Audrey’s favorite colors?” asked Laura jokingly.

“Red and blue,” answered Melendez.

“How about her favorite meal?” Laura smirked.

“Beef noodle soup and steamed dumplings,” Melendez answered proudly.

“What about her favorite super hero?”

“Tie between Black Lightning, Wonder Woman, and Spiderman.”

“And who’s the love of her life?” asked Laura.

“Is this a trick question?” Melendez asked back, raising an eyebrow.

Laura grinned and stepped aside, “Your bride awaits you. I’ll see you soon.”

Melendez used his key to enter the house and stepped into the living room when his eyes landed on Lim. He knew she had decided against a traditional white wedding dress and had decided to go with a traditional qipao dress. It was red, floor length, and had gold woven through it, her hair was in a bun with a gold tassel woven through it, and her make-up was perfectly done. It was obviously a much different look for Lim than Melendez was used to, but seeing his beautiful bride standing in front of him made the realization of the fact that he was marrying Audrey Lim even more genuine. He walked up to her, took her hands in his, and choked back a few tears before he asked, “How did I get so lucky to be able to marry you?”

“Because you’re a stubborn ass who never gives up once he has his heart set on something,” she joked and squeezed his hands, “Can you believe we’re actually getting married?”

Melendez sighed, “It probably won’t hit me until I see you walking down that aisle,” he leaned his forehead against hers, “And even then, I may still think I’m dreaming.”

A knock at the door interrupted their special moment, “That’s probably Josh,” said Lim.

“I should get going then,” said Melendez.

He opened the door and let Josh in before exiting. Josh’s eyes landed on Lim and he smiled, “Well, this is it Sis. You’re getting married.”

“Yeah,” she chuckled nervously, “I just wish Māmā and Bà Bà were here.”

Josh kissed her forehead and said, “They are, Audrey. They’re here somehow. So are you ready?”

Lim nodded, “Yes.”

The brother and sister drove over to the church and nearly everyone was already seated. Melendez, Tom, and the priest took their places at the altar, Maria was seated, Laura, Manny, who was the
ring bearer, and Isabella, who was the flower girl, all walked down the aisle before the doors closed. Josh turned to Lim and smiled, “Neil is a very lucky man to be marrying a woman like you.”

The opening notes of the Bridal March began to play and the church doors opened. Though Lim and Melendez knew there were other people in the room with them, it seemed as if time was standing still and it was just the two of them. Melendez was holding back tears and Lim was as well. Once Lim and Josh were at the front, Melendez stepped off the altar and the priest began, “Who gives this woman to this man?”

“I do, Father,” answered Josh.

He kissed Lim’s cheek and took his place in the congregation and Melendez took Lim’s hand and led her onto the altar, “Friends, we are gathered here today to witness the marriage of Audrey Lim and Neil Melendez. Let us call upon God to be with us today as we celebrate this union of two into one. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The peace of the Lord be with you always.”

“And with your Spirit,” everyone said back.

After the opening prayers were said and the readings were read, the priest had Lim and Melendez stand in front of him, “Neil and Audrey, you have come together here today so that the Lord may seal and strengthen you in the presence of this community of family and friends and your love be enriched with His blessing you, so that you may have strength to be faithful to each other for ever and assume all the responsibilities of married life. And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions. Neil and Audrey, have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely, and wholeheartedly?”

“I have,” answered Melendez.

“I have,” answered Lim.

“Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?”

“I am,” answered Melendez.

“I am,” repeated Lim.

“Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”

“I am,” said Melendez.

“I am,” said Lim, both of them thinking of Mei-Li.

“Since it is your intention to enter the covenant of Holy Matrimony, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and his Church. Neil, you may say your vows.”

Melendez took Lim’s hand and looked over at Josh. Josh smiled and nodded before Melendez took a deep breath and began his vows, “I, Neil, take you, Audrey, to be my wife. I promise to be faithful to you, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love you and honor you all the days of my life or until death do us part.”

Lim smiled and held back tears, because Melendez had surprised her by reciting his vows in
Mandarin. They were too much alike for their own good. Lim glanced over at Maria and Elena, who smiled and nodded before she began her vows, “Yo, Audrey, te tomo a ti, Neil, a ser mi esposo. Prometo serte fiel, en los buenos y malos momentos, en la enfermedad y en la salud, en amarte y honrarte todos los días de mi vida o hasta que la muerte nos separe.” Melendez smiled and squeezed her hand.

“May the Lord in His kindness strengthen the consent you have declared before the Church and graciously bring to fulfillment His blessings within you. What God has joined, let no one put asunder. May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God who joined together our first parents in paradise, strengthen and bless in Christ the consent you have declared before the Church, so that what God joins together, no one may put asunder,” the priest took the rings from Laura and Tom, “May the Lord bless these rings, which you will give to each other as the sign of your love and fidelity. Neil, place this ring on Audrey’s finger as a sign of your love and fidelity.”

“Audrey, receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” Melendez slid Lim’s wedding band onto her finger.

“Audrey, place this ring on Neil’s finger as a sign of your love and fidelity.”

“Neil, receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” she slid his wedding band onto his finger.

The priest took thirteen gold coins and a two red envelopes into his hands and said, “In Mexican tradition, it is customary for the newly married couple to give thirteen gold coins called arras to each other to symbolize their support for each other. And in Chinese tradition, the giving and receiving of money in red envelopes called hóngbāo symbolizes wealth and good fortune. So Neil and Audrey have decided to combine both of their cultures by giving each other arras and money in red envelopes.

Bless, O Lord, these arras and hóngbāo that Neil and Audrey will give to each other and pour over them the abundance of your good gifts.”

Melendez took some arras and an envelope and said, “Audrey, receive these arras and hóngbāo as a pledge of God’s blessing and a sign of the good gifts we will share.”

Lim did the same and said, “Neil, receive these arras and hóngbāo as a pledge of God’s blessing and a sign of the good gifts we will share.”

Everyone recited the Our Father and the priest gave the Nuptial Blessing. He gave the concluding prayer, “May the Lord Jesus, who graced the marriage at Cana by His presence, bless you and your loved ones.”

“Amen.”

“May He, who loved the Church to the end, unceasingly pour His love into your hearts.”

“Amen.”

"May the Lord grant that, bearing witness to faith in His Resurrection, you may await with joy the blessed hope to come.”

“Amen.”

“And may Almighty God bless all of you, who are gathered here, the Father, and the Son, and the
Holy Spirit.”

“Amen.”

The priest smiled and said, “By the power vested in me and by the state of California, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Neil, you may kiss your bride,” Melendez and Lim smiled at each other and stepped closer to each other. Melendez cupped her face in his hands and they leaned in for a kiss, the couple thoroughly enjoying their first passionate kiss as husband and wife. They pulled apart and Melendez took Lim’s hand, “Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor to present to you for the very first time, Dr. Neil Melendez and Dr. Audrey Lim-Melendez.”

At the reception, which was in a hall decorated in red and gold along with yellow, aqua, orange, and green papel picado and red and orange lanterns strung everywhere, everyone was having a good time, but impatiently waiting for the couple of honor. There were traditional Chinese and Mexican dishes along with some classic American dishes and a pancake bar for Shaun. Everyone had gathered and the families and bridal party were introduced before the DJ said, “Alright and now the couple of the hour, it is my honor to present to you the newlyweds, Dr. Neil Melendez and Dr. Audrey Lim-Melendez.”

Melendez and Lim came into the room to cheers and applause. Normally their egos would thrive on the attention at work, but right now, it was a little awkward. Their chosen song for their first dance as husband and wife, *Can’t Help Falling in Love*, blasted through the speakers, so they wrapped their arms loosely around each other. Lim laid her head on Melendez’s shoulder and he kissed her temple, “I love you, Audrey.”

“I love you too,” she answered.

After their first dance as husband and wife, everyone went to get their food and Tom clinked his glass for the Best Man’s toast, “If I could have everyone’s attention,” he announced, “Neil, you’ve been my best friend since 2007. When you asked me to be your Best Man, I knew I couldn’t say no. Audrey, you’ve been in my life almost as long as Neil has been. I could always see there was a spark between you two and it was only a matter of time before you would finally pounce on each other,” he joked and everyone laughed, “But as I stand up here and give you this toast, I can only wish you both and your beautiful family a healthy and happy life,” he held up his champagne glass, “To Neil and Audrey!”

“To Neil and Audrey!” everyone chorused.

Melendez stood and took the microphone from Tom, much to everyone’s surprise, “Um, I know the groom doesn’t normally talk at the reception, but since the vows we said in church were pretty set, I wanted to say a few words to my wife,” Melendez smiled at Lim, “Audrey, I’d be lying if I didn’t tell you that I’m afraid I’m going to wake up and realize this is all a dream, but as the day goes on, I realize it’s not. I really do get to spend the rest of my life with you. Audrey, we may have a unique way of showing our love to each other, but I have no doubt that my abundant love for you is mutual and I can’t wait to see where our life together takes us. Wǒ ài nǐ, Audrey Lim-Melendez.” He loved the sound of that: Audrey Lim-Melendez.

She smiled and said, “Yo también te quiero.”

“Can we have cake now?” asked Isabella.

Melendez and Lim cute the cake and posed for pictures. The cake was three tiers: the first tier was chocolate flavored and had a color palette in yellow, orange, aqua, and green (for Melendez), the second tier was red and gold with a few lions on it and was vanilla flavored (for Lim), the last tier was marble cake and a combination of all of the colors (to represent the both of them). Of course, the cake wasn’t complete without a motorcycle wedding topper. They cut the cake and distributed slices and since Mei-Li was now nearly eight months old and had been started on solid foods, Lim tried to feed her some vanilla cake, though Mei-Li got most of it on her face, “Look at you, little lady; most of Mommy and Daddy’s wedding cake is ending up on you and not in you,” Lim laughed.

Melendez chuckled and patted her head, “We’ll note that for Thanksgiving this year, mija.”

As the end of the party approached, Lim tossed out her bouquet and she went to change into her getaway outfit. Melendez knew he would have to change as well; he couldn’t ride their getaway vehicle in a tux. He passed Mei-Li to Elena and said, “Here, I have to go change so I can properly ride our getaway vehicle.”

Shaun had overheard him and asked, “Dr. Melendez, what is your getaway vehicle?”

Melendez sighed, “You don’t want to know, Murphy.”

Melendez changed and as soon as Melendez got out of the bathroom, Lim was waiting for him. She was now dressed in jeans, a *Just Married* shirt with the bride and the groom on a motorcycle, and her black leather jacket. Melendez was wearing the same outfit as she had bought him a matching black leather jacket, “Thank God I’m out of that dress! You’re looking good, Melendez.”

“I’ll never wear or do this again,” he joked.

She smirked, “Never say never,” all of their guests were waiting outside to greet them with rice, though the couple wasn’t leaving for their honeymoon for another week. But tonight, Mei-Li would be staying with Melendez’s parents so they could enjoy their first night as husband and wife baby free, “Have a good night with Abuelo and Abuela, sweetheart. I love you,” Lim kissed Mei-Li.

Melendez kissed the top of her head, “Wish Daddy luck, mija,” Lim glared at Melendez and handed him his helmet. They went through the shower of rice and Lim jumped onto the front of her Ducati that had a *Just Married* sign attached to it, turned on the ignition, and revved the engine. Melendez put on his helmet, hesitantly mounted the back seat, and wrapped his arms around Lim’s waist, “This is officially the craziest idea you’ve ever had.”

She glanced back him and smirked, though he couldn’t see it under her helmet, “Do you trust me with your life, husband?”

Melendez’s nerves weren’t exactly calm, but he nodded and said, “I trust you wife.”
Chapter 69

“Are you sure we packed everything?” asked Lim.

Melendez looked over at her and said, “Audrey, the reason we took a week between our wedding and our honeymoon was so we would have time to recuperate and make sure we packed everything for ourselves and Mei-Li.”

Lim sighed, “I know. And I’m looking forward to our honeymoon, but it will be our first significant amount of time away from the baby.”

“She’s in good hands with Mom and Dad,” said Melendez. He came up behind Lim and started massaging her shoulders, distracting Lim from the suitcase she was packing.

“Neil,” Lim lulled her head back against his chest, “We’ll have all week to rub our hands all over each other. We really need to make sure we’re set to go and Mei-Li has enough supplies for the next week.”

“Well, if they run out of diapers or any other supplies, there is always the local Walgreens,” Melendez laughed.

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The next morning, Lim and Melendez had an early flight so they woke at 5:30 AM so they could get Mei-Li ready and dropped off with Melendez’s parents before they had to be at the airport. Melendez made a quick breakfast while Lim was upstairs dressing Mei-Li, “Alright, Ái. You get to spend this week with Abuelo and Abuela while Mommy and Daddy go on a special trip together. But I’m going to miss you so much,” she tickled her belly and blew a few raspberries on it, eliciting a fit of giggles from Mei-Li, “But you’ll be fine. Abuelo and Abuela plan on taking you to the park and the zoo and Gymboree and a few other places.”

Melendez knocked on the door to the nursery and Lim glanced up at him, “I have our food and hers all ready to go.”

Lim sighed and looked back at the infant on the changing table, “Alright.”

After they all ate, Melendez and Lim put their bags in the trunk of Melendez’s Tesla and drove over to Mateo and Maria’s house. Both of them were up and waiting for them, Maria grinning from ear to ear as she saw her son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter pull into the driveway, “There’s my beautiful familia.”

“Hi Mom,” Melendez hugged her.

“How’s married life treating you both?” asked Mateo.

“Truthfully, we were already living together and raising a baby, so it doesn’t feel much different other than the fact that it’s official now,” admitted Lim.

Mateo chuckled at her truthfulness, “And how’s the little amorcita?” he took Mei-Li from Lim and kissed her cheek, causing Mei-Li to giggle.

“She’s great. Eating like a champ, babbling and giggling at everything and everyone, and it probably won’t be much longer before she’s crawling,” said Melendez.
“Which you better not start doing until Mommy and Daddy get back from their honeymoon,” Lim scolded jokingly. She handed the bag to Maria, “All of her stuff is in there, but if I forgot anything, here’s a key to our house. Our cell phones should work in England, so give us a call if something serious happens to her.”

“Audrey…” said Melendez.

“She gets solid food in the morning and evening and milk around mid-morning and right before bed.”

“Audrey…” Melendez tried to get her attention again.

“She’ll try to go to bed with her blanket and her stuffed panda bear, but she shouldn’t sleep with them because she’s not a year old yet.”

“AUDREY!” Melendez finally got her attention. She turned to him and he smiled, “They’ve raised two kids of their own plus they babysit my cousins sometimes.”

“We have a crib in the spare room for when Miguel and Elena stay with us, so she’s set to go sleep wise. Maria has been looking forward to this all week,” said Mateo.

“Now you both should get going so you don’t miss your flight,” said Maria.

Lim sighed, “Alright,” she kissed Mei-Li’s cheek and said, “Now don’t do anything super cute while I’m gone, Âi. I love you.”

Melendez kissed Mei-Li as well, “I love you, mijia.”

“Adios mio,” Maria kissed Melendez’s cheek and then Lim’s as well.

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Lim and Melendez drove to the airport and once they arrived, Melendez parked in long term parking, looked over at Lim, and squeezed her hand, “Are you alright or do you need to wait a few minutes?” Lim had been having some nightmares about getting sick at the airport, so she had spoken to Dr. Jacobson about them since they would be flying to London for their honeymoon.

Lim sighed, but shook her head, “No, I’m okay. I took a dose of the Xanax that Dr. Jacobson prescribed for me,” she leaned closer to Melendez and began to kiss him, “Plus knowing I get to spend a relaxing week with you calms me.”

Melendez made no hesitation to kiss her back, “We’re gonna be late,” he said.

“So stop,” Lim mentioned, though she didn’t really want him to do so. It was only when Melendez accidentally laid on the horn (again) were they brought back to reality.

“So are you ready, Dr. Lim-Melendez?” asked Melendez.

“With you by my side, I’m ready for anything that comes our way.”

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It was 7 AM London time when they arrived at Heathrow Airport. They took a taxi to the President’s Hotel in Russell Square. Since it was 11 PM California time, Maria and Mateo were surprisingly still up, “Yes Maria, we just arrived at the hotel. Neil is checking us in,” said Lim, “Has Mei-Li been okay? Is she sleeping alright? Is she eating for you?”
Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle at his wife’s conversation, though he was naturally worried about Mei-Li too, “We’re on our honeymoon, but this is the first time we’ve left our daughter for a significant amount of time. Can you tell?” he joked with the concierge.

“Well congratulations to the both of you,” he said.

Lim came over to Melendez and said, “Maria says she’s been sleeping and eating for them.”

They went up to their room on the third floor and though the room was small by American standards, it was nice and cozy for a romantic experience. They set their suitcases down and cuddled on the bed before Melendez asked, “Can you believe we’re finally husband and wife?”

“Well, you did a damn good job of making it official last week,” she smirked and opened one eye at him.

Melendez smiled back and kissed her. They deepened the kiss and he said, “You know we made sure we had no plans for today?”

“Mm. I know because we figured we’d probably both be jet lagged,” she groaned and gave him a wicked grin, “Why don’t we unwind with a nice long bath and then maybe have a little fun?”

“Sounds perfect wife.”

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They weren’t quite sure how, but the newlyweds were perfectly content with spending most of the first day in their hotel room before they finally ventured out for dinner. There was a quaint pub across the street from the hotel that they decided to try. It was like their favorite bar back in California with the main difference being that soccer games were broadcasted on the TV screens. They both had traditional golden ale and ordered dinner: Shepherd’s Pie for Melendez and fish and chips for Lim and they split a sticky toffee pudding for dessert. They strolled hand in hand around the area for a bit before going back to their hotel. Melendez started getting ready for bed while Lim called Maria and checked in on Mei-Li. He could hear Lim singing to Mei-Li over the phone and as he was exiting the bathroom, he heard her say, “Mommy loves you sweetheart.” She held the phone out for him.

He smiled and took the phone, “Daddy loves you too, mija. Have a good rest of the day,” they crawled into bed and Lim snuggled next to Melendez when he asked, “So, during our unstructured time, what were some of the things you wanted to do? I know the Sherlock Holmes house and a side trip to Bath were on your list along with Madame Tussauds so you can take a picture with a wax Spiderman, plus we have theater tickets on Thursday. If you count going to see *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* London theater.”

Lim snickered and said, “I figured we could do some of the museums and palaces too. But to be honest, I do plan on spending a lot of time here at the hotel,” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

Melendez knew that was a hint that she was ready to go again, so he planted a passionate kiss to her lips, “As do I.”

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Over the next week, the couple enjoyed their honeymoon. They went to visit some of the more famous museums like the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the National Gallery. They toured the Tower of London and took a side trip to Bath one of the mornings. They took romantic strolls through Hyde Park and stopped by to see the Changing of the Guard outside
of Buckingham Palace. They visited London’s China Town and did some shopping at some of the other major department stores like Selfridges, Harrods, and Hamleys (Lim had used the opportunity to buy a few souvenirs and Christmas presents for Mei-Li). Some of the sightseeing also took place via walking tours (Melendez had told Lim it didn’t matter what kind but semi-regretted letting her choose when she chose the Harry Potter tour and the Jack the Ripper tour). They even did some of the corny tourist attractions like the Warner Brothers’ Studio Tour, Madame Tussauds, and the Sherlock House. That was, when they finally decided to leave their hotel room.

On their final night in London, Melendez had booked a special experience to surprise Lim that she didn’t know about yet. Right now, she was on Face Time with Maria and Mei-Li who was laughing and clapping with excitement at seeing her Mommy face to face. “Are you having a good time with Abuela this week?”

“Oh yes. She loved the zoo and she was mesmerized by all of the animals. You might have a future vet or zoologist on your hands here. How’s London?” asked Maria.

“It’s great,” answered Lim, “Full of history and excitement. We haven’t been bored yet. Right Neil?”

Melendez came over and smiled, “No we haven’t.”

“I’m sure you haven’t,” Maria teased them.

“Well, we really should get going. It’s dinner time here. I’ll see you tomorrow, Ài. Mommy and Daddy miss you,” cooed Lim.

“We love you, mija,” said Melendez. Lim disconnected the phone and Melendez smiled, “We should get going. I have a special surprise for you before dinner.”

“Mm. What kind of surprise?” she smirked and rubbed her hands over his chest.

Melendez smiled and kissed her, “Not that kind of surprise. At least not yet,” he winked. He grabbed her hand and said, “Come on; it’ll probably be easiest to take the tube over.”

Lim nodded and followed her husband. They took the Underground into the heart of London. They got off the train and Melendez took her over to the check-in for the London Eye, “I booked a Cupid Capsule under Melendez.”

The attendant checked the list and smiled, “Neil Melendez?” she asked for confirmation. Melendez nodded, “Head over to priority boarding and your host will be right with you.”

“Neil, what did you do?” asked Lim in curiosity.

“I booked us a Cupid Capsule. It’s a thirty minute ride over London just the two of us and our own personal host with champagne and chocolate truffles. I know you’re not really into gushy stuff, but it is our honeymoon.”

They boarded the capsule and their host introduced himself and poured them two glasses of champagne. As their capsule got higher and the streets of London became smaller, Lim kissed Melendez’s cheek, laid her head on his shoulder, and said, “I don’t care if this is sappily romantic. Right now, this is perfect.”

“Good,” he clinked his glass with hers, “To our future.”
She smiled and laughed, “To us and our married life.”

The next morning was their flight back to San Jose. While they were disappointed to be leaving London and not having as much time to themselves, they were also looking forward to being home, seeing and snuggling with Mei-Li, and beginning their married life together. When they were in the air, Lim looked over at Melendez and smirked, “You know, I don’t think I’ve ever been that frisky with you.”

Melendez looked up from the book he was reading and smiled, “Then our mission was accomplished,” the couple fist bumped each other before Lim fell asleep, as the Xanax made her drowsy. After ten long hours, the plane landed in San Jose. The couple went through customs and obtained their luggage before heading to Mateo and Maria’s house to pick up Mei-Li.

Melendez knocked on the door when they arrived and Maria answered the door almost immediately, “Neil, Audrey,” she hugged them both and kissed their cheeks. She had Mei-Li in her arms and Mei-Li was smiling and reaching out for Lim.

“There’s my baby girl!” Lim cooed and took Mei-Li into her arms, giving her lots of kisses, “I missed you so, so much.”

Mateo came over and handed Melendez Mei-Li’s bag, “Did you both have a good time?”

“Oh it was wonderful,” said Lim, “I hope we get to go back someday. Maybe it can be a family vacation next time. Does that sound like fun?” she asked her daughter. Mei-Li giggled in response.

“Well, maybe we can come over some other time and talk about everything we did, but we should probably get home since we’re both a little jetlagged,” admitted Melendez.

“Well, we’ll let you go,” Maria kissed Melendez’s cheek, “Te amo, mijo.”

The family arrived home and it was getting late, so Lim bathed Mei-Li and gave her some of the bath toys they had bought her in London. They had mutually decided to give her the bath toys and soft blocks immediately and to save the Ring Stacker, the Baby Einstein Discover & Play piano, the tea set, and the cars for Christmas (Melendez could only laugh at how Lim was just going to let Mei-Li play with whatever toys she wanted). Lim fed her and dressed her in her sleeper that had Winnie the Pooh and Tigger on it before singing her Hush Little Baby and placing her in her crib, “I love you, Ài.”

Lim turned out the light and went down to their room. Melendez had already changed into his pajamas, so Lim did so as well, “Man, I thought she was never going to let me take our out of the water. Our little dumpling loves bath time,” Melendez smiled and laughed. Lim crawled into bed and kissed him before she said, “So, this is it.”

Melendez looked over, “Yep, wedding is done, honeymoon’s over, actual married life begins.”

Lim couldn’t help but smile, “Yeah, but to be honest, I think we’ve been a married couple for quite some time now. We’ve always argued like one.”

“True,” Melendez laughed, “But I think we both know who really runs the house.”

Lim smiled, knowing he was referring to Mei-Li. Her Winnie the Pooh activity mat was in the
living room, her play pen was in the dining room, and there were baby toys everywhere. Mei-Li was exactly like her Daddy in that she could easily charm every person in her life. But Lim and Melendez loved their life together and now that they were officially husband and wife, it was going to be even more special.
Chapter 70

Chapter Notes

Final chapter. Thanks for the support!

Seven Years Later…

Melendez crouched down behind his three year old son, helping the young boy properly hold the baseball bat in his hands, “Carlos Lim-Melendez steps up to the plate as Mei-Li Lim-Melendez gets ready to throw out the first pitch,” Mei-Li did all sorts of crazy things that Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle at before she gently threw the ball to her brother, allowing him to hit it easily, “And Carlos gets a grand slam!” Carlos just stood there, “Run around the bases, Buddy,” Carlos took off as Mei-Li chased after him. Soon, all three of them heard a roar in the distance, so the kids took off towards the driveway, “Stay on the grass!” Melendez warned.

Mei-Li and Carlos impatiently waited on the very edge of the yard as Lim pulled into the driveway, dismounted her bike, and took off her helmet, “MOMMY!” they both shouted, running towards her.

“Hi guys,” she bent down and kissed both of them multiple times, “How was your day with Daddy?”

“We played baseball and Daddy took us to McDonalds and I got a Wonder Woman toy in my Happy Meal!” said Mei-Li happily.

Lim eyed Melendez and said, “I thought we agreed that you wouldn’t take them to McDonalds every time you watched them?”

“No, you agreed to that. I didn’t say anything about that,” Melendez said and cockily smirked at her.

Lim rolled her eyes jokingly, “Alright,” she came over to him and kissed him.

“Ew!” both kids shouted and covered their eyes.

The couple pulled apart and laughed, “You know you both will like getting kissed one day.”

“I don’t think so!” Mei-Li wrinkled her nose.

“Girls have cooties!” said Carlos.

“Well, let’s go inside and I’ll start dinner,” said Lim.

“Can we have mac and cheese for dinner tonight?” asked Mei-Li.

“If that’s what you want, Ài,” said Lim.

“And can we watch a movie too?” asked Carlos.

“As long as there’s time after dinner. Remember, we’re leaving early for Disneyland tomorrow,”
said Lim.

The family of four entered their suburban house and was immediately greeted by Mulan, the family’s Golden Retriever named after Mei-Li’s favorite Disney princess (Mei-Li’s exact reasoning was because she’s Asian like me and Mommy and tough like Mommy). Lim and Melendez had moved further out into the suburbs of San Jose when they had found out that they had a second baby on the way. They were content with Mei-Li and not planning on any more children, so Lim’s second pregnancy had been a beautiful surprise. Carlos Samuel Lim-Melendez was born on August 15, 2024 at St. Bonaventure Hospital (Shaun had also helped deliver him) weighing 8 lbs., 3 oz. and measuring 21 inches long. Mei-Li loved being a big sister, though she did go through a jealousy phase right after they brought Carlos home from the hospital (once Carlos was able to play more, then she liked being a big sister).

After dinner, the kids changed into their Mulan and Toy Story pajamas before sitting in front of the DVD cabinet with Melendez to pick out the movie while Lim popped some popcorn, “How about Mulan?” asked Mei-Li.

“How about Toy Story?” asked Melendez.

“We always watch Toy Story!” shouted Mei-Li.

“Mei-Li Esmeralda,” Lim called from the kitchen.

“Sorry Mommy,” Mei-Li apologized. Melendez couldn’t help but chuckle to himself. Mei-Li was as outspoken as Lim was, though Lim didn’t seem to notice most of the time.

“How about The Little Mermaid?” asked Melendez.

“But we always watch when we visit Tía Gabi,” said Mei-Li.

“Allright, so something else,” Melendez sighed. The kids finally settled on Monsters Inc., so Lim and Melendez had Mei-Li and Carlos sit in between them.

“Mommy, I’m going to get to meet Mulan when we go to Disneyland, right?” asked Mei-Li.

“I hope so, Ài. I know you really want to,” said Lim, “And hopefully Carlos gets to meet Buzz Lightyear.”

Melendez smiled as he turned on the movie, Mei-Li and Carlos settled in between him and Lim. Mei-Li was hugging her stuffed Mushu while Carlos held his Buzz Lightyear. As the movies played through, Melendez couldn’t help but observe the pictures on the walls. There were six of them in particular that he was most fond of: one was from the maternity photo shoot when Lim had been pregnant with Mei-Li and another one was from the day Mei-Li had been born. Two others were the same only it was Carlos’s birth and the photo shoot beforehand. The last two were their favorite pictures from their engagement photos and their wedding pictures.

Once the movie was over, Melendez let Mulan out to go to the bathroom before she settled into her bed in the living room and then Lim and Melendez carried Mei-Li and Carlos upstairs and tucked them into bed, though they were both animatedly talking about their upcoming trip to Disneyland since it would be their first trip for the both of them. Lim and Melendez went to their room and began to change into their pajamas and Melendez said, “I don’t think either one of them are going to sleep tonight.”
Lim laughed, “Well, maybe they’ll sleep during the six hour car ride then,” they crawled into and Lim couldn’t help but notice how quiet Melendez was, “Is something wrong, Neil?”

Melendez shook his head, “No, I just can’t believe we’ll have been together nine years this upcoming February.”

“I know, we’ve managed to stay together, hardships and all,” admitted Lim.

Melendez leaned over and kissed her, “But I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

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