

A Birthday Present

Fan Fiction

based on the TV series 'KungFu: The Legend Continues'*

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The third day after Paddy's departure for Ireland brought considerable sadness to Caine's future daughter-in-law, although those emotions disconcerted her only until she finally decided to do something totally unsuspected. After hours of being caught between fits of crying and fear of failure, she was now going to replenish her knowledge of healing herbs by devouring one of the Shaolin priest's ancient books.

She skimmed through some of the manuscripts, but the memory of her best friend turning away from her after she had presented him with F.A.'s verse about the Dragon Child swept through her mind like a wave, back and forth.

Finally, when she was running her fingers over the backs of the books on the shelf again, she realized something special. An old leather-bound bulk of rice paper pages seemed to emanate a rather unmistakable flow of warmth.

Oh, *please*, she sighed inwardly, though smiling, why can't the universe leave me alone with wonders like this just for once?

Nevertheless, of course, she finally took the book from the shelf and opened the cover. It was a book about orchids.

Alright, she knew that orchids were somehow connected with healing, but she had never really heard anything special about them. They were certainly not her favourite species of flower, but she acknowledged their frail exterior that translated into immensely strong charm.

Paddy, she thought, *Paddy's gone back to Ireland.*

She gasped and had to sit down, the book resting on her lap. Sliding backwards into the chair behind Caine's huge lacquered desk turned out to be difficult, and she had to apply a great deal of concentration in order to lower herself down slowly enough.

She sighed and continued reading.

Orchids had been cultivated for approximately the last 2,500 years. They had been used in remedies, but also been put to decorative use.

Yep, she had known that all along...

Ti scanned the most important information about the plant's healing powers and was, at least for a couple of minutes, distracted from her depressive thoughts. Then some rather unpleasant sounds dragged her back into the here-and-now again.

Something heavy had fallen on the floor in the adjoining TaiChi room. Someone groaned. Then a second voice said, 'You are troubled, my son. I can feel it.'

Peter's girlfriend smiled maliciously. The hotshot cop, a Shaolin himself, had experienced a regression back to the stage of a KungFu beginner. Of course, if anyone asked *her*, Caine would always be the better fighter when it came to weaponless fighting, but – she smiled again, only this time with deep sympathy and a good degree of infatuation – Peter's lack of concentration was due to the care and responsibility he felt for her and for his child.

Orchids had always been used as aphrodisiacs.

Okay, she thought, Peter's... coming... over – hold it...

The rhythm of her breathing had changed to irregular and heavy. Something was going on inside her, something she would most certainly have to put a stop to... if she could... if she wished to spend this afternoon with their friends, as they had planned, anyway.

Maybe the book would stop presenting her with erotic allusions, involuntary as they might have been. She could feel the levels of specific hormones rise in her body.

The oldest documents about orchids had been handed down in China, even Confucius mentioned their scent and put them into the character 'lán' to mean gracefulness, love, purity, elegance and beauty.

Peter was standing in front of the desk now, still sweating, and leaning over to her.

... as aphrodisiacs.

„Sorry, lovey, I'd better go take a shower first“, he said, obviously realizing the fact that she was blushing.

Which was, however, a misinterpretation on his part. Pictures of what certain flowers were employed to promote were dancing in her head.

„No way“, she said, deliberately ignoring her father-in-law to be, who was currently working on something that was simmering in an earthenware pot on a table at the far end of the room. „Kiss me first.“

In Chinese gardening, orchids were considered to be symbols of love and beauty.

They kissed. As always in the course of the past couple of months, she found the scent of his freshly sweat-soaked body pleasant rather than annoying.

Pheromones, she thought.

Some species of orchids perform asexual reproduction...

Peter took her head into his hands and caressed her.

... They produce offshoots or plantlets through the accumulation of growth hormones at that point...

Something stirred inside her. This strange, though by now well-known feeling again. She couldn't help rising towards his tempting figure.

These shoots are known as...

... Ah, shoot. Kiss! Orchids in vases stand for harmony.

At the other end of the room, Caine cleared his throat.

Whereupon Peter turned his back towards his father – probably, Ti thought with the petty remainder of clarity left in her mind, probably so as at least not to *force* him to see what they were doing. Obviously, her boyfriend's hormones were out of control, too...

In the art of Chinese gardening, orchids also stand for little girls.

This thought hit her with the force of a tornado. Was this why she had felt she *had* to read the book? Was this finally the 100% assurance that their little girl was one day going to resemble a vulnerable and rare, yet at its core strong kind of precious flower?

Fear rose from her stomach to her head and made her blush even more.

Peter stiffened and helped her sit down again.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah, it's nothing. Must be my hormones. You know, pregnant women *do* tend to be a bit whimsical."

After all, there was a subspecies of orchids that had hallucinogenic effects.

She sniggered. "Oh, by the way, speaking of my whimsical side, Pete..."

"I know. I've gotten you the blueberry cakes you wanted for the party, and the completely milk-free soy cream for lactose-intolerant F.A., also that special kind of cat food..."

He paused and looked so much at a loss that she just had to kiss him on his nose.

"Thanks, Pete. I was actually thinking of something else, though."

"Which would be...?" He grabbed the back of the giant chair for support. His girlfriend was a pretty strong-headed woman, he knew *that*.

"Which would be custard. Plain and simple." Ti felt so content, every thought of MacDermot vanished.

Peter looked astonished. "Custard?", he asked. And silently wondered, 'For the *cat*'?...

"Yes, sir. Custard. Homemade."

"Whoa!"

"Don't worry, I'll see to that. You just get me the ingredients, will you?"

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Of course Peter would do exactly that, since he had no other choice whatsoever. He knew that only too well.

Half an hour later, the smell of sweat had been replaced by the scent of deodorant, the application of which had been accompanied by Ti lecturing her boyfriend (*some orchids are used in perfume production*), and the room was filled with the fragrances of exotic herbal mixtures, beeswax candles, cakes and custard.

Behind all this pleasant olfactory inspiration, however, the distinct smell of a highly-processed cat

food still lingered, the name of which was a homophone of whiskers. Ti had tried feeding her feline friend with freshly cooked meat, cereals and vegetables, but – as usual – pussy wanted things her own way. Peter smiled.

After all, this wasn't just any old household. They weren't even expecting a normal child.

He was glad that these days there had been enough distraction in the form of both complicated cases at the precinct and private parties to make him stop being afraid of the legendary traits of his unborn daughter and start looking forward to holding her in his arms. Which, in spite of the unpredictable date of birth that had been prophesied, would still be some time yet.

He started feeling a bit better. Until he remembered that with the acknowledgment of the prophecy, he had also embraced a seemingly uncontrollable way of life.

Just to make the whole thing even more unusual, Ti had invited her friends over to celebrate the day she had chosen as the alleged birthday of the stray cat that regularly visited the loft.

And surprisingly, apart from Kermit, they had all agreed to come. At five thirty. Skalany, both F.A. and her mother, T.J., Ming Li, and finally Marylin and her three kids.

At five twenty-eight, the anticipation reached its peak. At least on Ti's part. And judging from what Caine's son could see.

At five forty-three, a baffled Peter found his bride caught up in a passionate pillow fight with T.J. and Marylin's baby son. And the cat, too.

Ti was probably right, hormones made pregnant women appear like tigers, babies and clowns all at the same time. Something was going on with her today, though, he could sense that, and the son of the Shaolin put this observation down to the fact that Paddy was back in Ireland again and had not called her yet.

Luckily, though, she didn't look sad at the moment. To be honest, she had a rather sly smile on her face...

... when the custard-stained cushion that Marylin had fed her child on landed on the hotshot cop's face.

What a pity! He could have imagined different ways of employing that yellowish mass of delight... Delicious thoughts rushed through his mind like water gushing through high-mountain rapids...

Wham! Another pillow was stuffed onto his mouth. Mitch had given in to her little brother's pleading and joined their effort to suffocate the cop.

Skalany and T.J. offered to help them as well.

This was definitely some sort of emotional lightning conductor that exceeded the range of ways cops should behave. They were all starting to act like little kids, and they seemed to be enjoying it.

They *all* did, including him, Peter Caine.

The son of the Shaolin had to do something. Immediately.

His eyes flew across the room.

Unexpectedly, he saw Kermit standing at the door. The cavalry, at last!

"Get me the red thing from the middle shelf in the bathroom, and fill it with what's in the pitcher on the window sill", Peter gasped, laughing, only to get another slap with a pillow.

He started wondering where all the cushions had come from.

He also started wondering how his father had got so many of them, and why.

Seconds later, when Mitch, with T.J.'s help, had turned the Shaolin cop onto his back, his head to one side, thus forcing him to look at the raised platform near the wall, the cop realized that there were even more of those fleecy items in the room: Caine had furnished the wooden treatment table with every sort of cloth, pillows and textiles one could possibly think of.

Peter started wondering whether his father had done this for a specific purpose.

The apothecary didn't think this was necessary because someone was going to be in need of a strong but padded support for her back very soon... did he?

Fortunately, at this twist of thought, Kermit came back, throwing the red object Peter had asked for into his friend's hands. Brushing away a couple of down feathers that were tickling his nose, the son of the Shaolin managed to unscrew the stopper.

All he could do in the ensuing couple of minutes was giggle at the spluttering and snorting faces around him who had been sprayed with cold water from an otherwise innocent hot-water bottle now having been put to a more creative use.

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Originally, Kermit Griffin had not wanted to join the party. That kind of social event was not the sort of thing he usually attended. However, after having watched some of his colleagues act like madmen, he started to enjoy himself.

For the others, of course, he still displayed his 'the king is not amused today' face.

His ex-mercenary senses had immediately registered the pillowed platform and a number of possible reasons for this strange fact.

He had also realized that Peter had looked at the custard bowl longingly three or four times, each time refraining from helping himself to a portion.

Several possible reasons for this behaviour crossed Kermit's mind, and he found none of them particularly amusing. Decidedly, he took the serving spoon, filled a bowl and handed it over to the Shaolin cop to lead his friend to presumably less dramatic thoughts.

Something was definitely going on. He'd better find out what it was. Maybe the fact that he, upon being called by Peter, had put down the present he had brought with him on a shelf near the door was actually turning out to be a good idea. Maybe he could cheer his friend up with it now.

After all, orchids were flowers that resembled rare beauty and... harmony.

Must have read that somewhere, he thought.

He went to fetch the flowerpot and put it down on the table, which earned him a warm thank you from his fellow cop and a kiss on the cheek from his hostess.

If he was lucky, Kermit thought, Peter would sense the love his friend and colleague felt for every member of the Caine family, even the unborn one - despite the fact that the latter one challenged Kermit's logical view of the world. And its mother celebrated birthday parties for cats.

He allowed himself to throw an affectionate glance at Ti. She smiled at him, although now with a clearly strained look on her face.

And at that moment something happened that scared the ex-mercenary to the bone.

He heard the voice of his best friend's girlfriend in his mind. Audition, he thought, or, as Peter puts it, a 'link'. Stay calm, Froggie, he told himself in a more or less desperate attempt to display his characteristically sarcastic way of speaking. But his insecurity remained.

As did the voice.

It remained in his head, and it also sounded insecure.

Kermit, I'm frightened.

How was he supposed to transfer an answer to her? Ti obviously didn't want the others to hear, otherwise she would have said this aloud.

Probably the best way was to put his arm around her shoulders as decently as he could, and just think what he wanted to tell her... Yeah, this might work...

I know. Just keep on breathing.

Griffin watched the young healer with intense attention.

That's not my problem, I can deal with it.

She had received his message, no doubt. The pleading eyes of the QiGong master touched his heart.

What is your problem, then?

Listen, Kermit, I cannot tell this to Peter. He'd be frightened to death. So please don't tell him. I just need a friend to listen to me, because as it looks like, I'll have to face my fears at some point within the next couple of hours or so.

Which undoubtedly meant that he had guessed right. The baby was on its way.

Why hadn't Peter realized? Oh, he was still devouring the wobbly, creamy, proteine-rich substance...

Don't look at him, Kermit, please! Let him enjoy the party and gather strength.

Shouldn't you be the one to...

The look on her face was more effective than a punch in the solar plexus would have been.

I want you all to stay on for a while, until... aw, you'll know when.

Alright. She wasn't the kind of person who acted as people expected her to, after all.

Kermit, how could I possibly meet other people's expectations? I don't even know if I'll be able to live up to the expectations of my own family. You don't have to go as far as to deal with the legend of the Dragon Child to know that. I'm afraid something might go wrong – what if I fail, what if I can't stand the pressure? I don't want to be taken to the community hospital, that would probably deprive me of my dignity and my self-determination, and, more importantly, also deprive my family of the peaceful welcome they wish to give to the new blossom on their tree...

Kermit's head tilted like a C64 monitor. Data overflow.

Only a single piece of information lingered at the back of his mind, although he couldn't remember her actually saying it. He knew for sure that this was one of those days when feeling the baby's kicks couldn't really make Ti happy. On the contrary, the constant movement inside her made it impossible for her to gain contact with her child, let alone her own excitement and anticipation.

Kermit didn't know what to do, but suddenly sympathy rushed through his heart and stirred him. If he felt insecure although he wasn't even involved, wasn't it Ti who had the infinitely more valid right to do so? After all, she was the one about to venture into a matter of life or death.

The hardened cop took her hand as discreetly as possible and guided his friend through the pain until it subsided.

Peter grabbed the serving spoon and shoveled the rest of the custard into his mouth. Obviously, Griffin thought with grim pleasure, the son of the Shaolin had indeed realized what was going on. The IT cop wondered when his best friend would muster a sufficient amount of courage and join their little group of conspirators.

Until that happened, however, Griffin was willing to respect Ti's wish; the party had to go on. He caught the cat and put it onto Ti's lap – an act that immediately rounded up Mitch's little brother and, to Kermit's surprise, Skalany to a little cuddly-kitten get-together.

The merry mood returned to everyone.

Finally, Kermit was the first to detect the slightly distorted look on Ti's face, and he knew this was it. He found a way of escorting the others out without really telling them what was about to happen, although he couldn't fight the notion that his sister had known all along; then he came back to wish his friends all the best.

When he finally left, he was happy to know that he had managed to refill the hot-water bottle, only this time as intended by the inventor, so Ti would feel the comfort of a fresh supply of warmth if she needed it – or, if she waited a little, the comfort of alleviating coolness. After all, he knew that she was about to enter into quite a different kind of pillow fight.

Only Peter, Caine, the ancient Tibetan midwife Ming Li and, of course, the cat would be there to assist her. And all he, Kermit, could do was pray for them and stick to useful thoughts.

The tough cop smiled when he suddenly received another message from the loft, though he knew it would be the last one in a very long time.

Kermit, open your mind and share my experience.

He immediately knew that Ti was indeed in contact with her child and herself again, and he wished from the bottom of his heart that what she anticipated would soon and smoothly turn into reality.

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