

Flour

Lisa Wong had a habit of losing things. When she was five she lost practically every small object given to her, when she was twelve she lost her mother's favorite earrings, and when she was eighteen she lost her brother's new car. And now, now she lost the most important object in her life -- the object that she would be jobless without. Her freaking magic flour. Where in the world did it go?

Lisa huffed as she opened one of her cupboards for probably the eighth time that morning. She didn't have any appointments but it was best to be prepared, and she couldn't do that if her magic was missing. With a sigh, Lisa swung the cupboard door shut and promptly received a faceful of papers flurrying down from the counter.

"Damn it," she muttered, scooping up the papers and depositing them back in their place. She probably needed to throw them away -- recycle, whatever -- but there might be important stuff. She knew for a fact that those particular papers had something to do with unanswered wedding invitations. A soft beeping noise behind her interrupted the silence and Lisa rose from the floor. Her tea was ready, which meant putting her search for magic on hold.

The electric kettle was still emitting low gurgling sounds when Lisa placed her mug next to it. Normally, she would have warm muffins or waffles to go with her tea, but in her frenzy to find her magic flour, she had also neglected to buy regular flour. Grumbling, Lisa poured herself a sad cup of tea and brought it up to her lips. A loud knock at her door startled her and she jumped, spilling tea down her front. She hissed as the hot liquid splashed against her.

"Oh for the love of--" She slammed her mug on the counter and grabbed a dish towel before moving to answer the door. If it was a salesman, she'd shut the

door, and if it was Hejovah's Onlooker she'd *definitely* shut the door. If it were the police-- well let's just hope it's not the police.

She reached her door and gave herself a once over to make sure her pajamas weren't sopping wet (they were). The door swung open to reveal a young man, standing rimrod straight and wearing a suit that Lisa could only believe cost thousands of dollars. He had a somewhat neutral expression which morphed into one of disdain once Lisa opened the door. *Oh how wonderful-- a snob*, she thought and wrinkled her nose.

"Hello, I'm looking for Ms. Lisa Wong," the man spoke and Lisa could practically smell the pretentiousness radiating off him. "You wouldn't happen to know where she would be at this hour... Miss?"

Lisa raised her eyebrows and blinked at the man for a moment. "You're kidding, right?"

The man pursed his lips. "I can assure you I am not," he said. Lisa gave him a look, but opened the door wider and waved him in. He stepped into her living room and immediately almost tipped over.

"Watch your step," Lisa snickered, hopping over the carpet of papers left on the floor. She reached the circular jumble of chairs and gestured for the man to sit with a flourish of her arms. His face was incredulous as he carefully stepped over the papers and to the seating area. Gingerly, he sat down on the edge of a sofa and Lisa tried her best not to laugh. Lisa sat in the seat across from him and leveled her gaze at the man.

"Do... do you know when she'll be in?" the man asked, unable to sit in the silence.

"Who?"

"Lisa Wong-- your boss?"

Lisa snorted at that. “Sweetie, I don’t know how you found out about me but I definitely don’t work for anybody,” she said, laughter clear in her tone.

The man’s jaw dropped and he struggled to raise it. His gaze travelled from the messy interior to Lisa’s tea stained shirt, before finally landing on her face in horror. “*You’re Lisa Wong?*” His voice was strained, with either shock or fear, Lisa couldn’t tell.

“The one and only,” she smiled, leaning back in her chair. “I don’t believe I caught your name.”

“Um, Raphael-- Raphael DuPont,” he muttered. Raphael’s eyes trailed the ground. Poor man was embarrassed.

Lisa took pity on him. “Well, Raphael, clearly you didn’t come here to gawk at my house, so what’s your offer?”

The man, who Lisa realized was barely out of his teens, looked up confused. “Huh?”

“You do have a job for me?” Lisa said, impatience threading her voice. She didn’t like people wasting her time, especially bratty teenagers.

“Oh,” the boy’s face lit up. “Oh yeah! Sorry, uh, my father normally deals with this kind of stuff.” Lisa nodded encouragingly. “You know Calloway Design?”

Lisa raised an eyebrow, already seeing where this was going. “Let’s say I do.”

The boy nodded. “My father wants you to find something for him. At Richard Calloway’s inheritance celebration gala in two weeks.”

If Lisa had been drinking something, it would have surely come out of her nose. She choked on her own spit as it is. They were targeting Calloway Design? Was this kid’s dad crazy?

The kid seemed to notice Lisa hesitation and sat up straighter. “My father knew you wouldn’t be certain,” he reached into his coat and pulled out a thick package, “so he told me to give you this down payment.”

Lisa raised an eyebrow, reaching for the package. “How much?”

“One million.”

The noise Lisa made wasn’t human. This kid’s old man was willing to fork over a million dollars just for her to accept the job? She mulled it over. Two weeks was barely enough time to set anything up, especially by herself. Would this be a two-man job? The thought gave Lisa a headache -- two-man jobs were always a pain in her ass.

Lisa thumbed through the money and looked up at Raphael. He fidgeted in his seat, glancing between her, the package in her hands, and the floor. Lisa rose up from her chair and the boy followed. She silently led him to the front door and opened it for him. He looked at her in confusion.

“I don’t under--”

“I’ll think about it,” Lisa interrupted, practically shoving the boy through the door. He turned around, still perplexed. “You’ll get a call from me before the day ends. I’m keeping the money.” With that, she shut the door. She could hear a muffled sound of surprise through the wood as she walked away. Collapsing onto a chair, she looked at the package in her hand. She had some shopping to do.

...

A man carrying a large sack of god-knows-what bumped into Lisa, almost sending her sprawling into the stand in front of her. She whipped her head around to tell him off, but he had already disappeared into the crowd. With a

huff, Lisa turned back to the matter at hand. She was standing at the storefront of her usual supplier. She held two bags of flour, neck swivelling as she eyed her choices. One of the bags was bright yellow with purple lines running horizontally along the paper. It had no words on it except bold, black *Flour* printed on the front. The other bag was a solid blue color, a brand logo printed on the front and an explanation of the flour's origins written on the back. Both packages boasted the shiny purple sticker declaring the flour magicked.

"Miss can I get you anything?" The face of a vendor she had never seen before popped up in front of her.

Lisa glanced up at her. "For Lisa Wong."

The vendor raised her eyebrows and slipped a little leatherbound book from her apron, flipping through it. She nodded to herself as she found the name. Gesturing for Lisa to wait, the vendor disappeared in the back. She appeared moments later with a plain red bag of flour in her hands. Lisa already had her cash in hand.

"What effect are you going for? If you don't mind me asking," the vendor asked as she placed the flour in a bag, handing it to Lisa.

"Shapeshifting," Lisa said simply. The vendor's eyes lit up and she nodded excitedly. It wasn't a common effect people chased after, so it often piqued the interest of those working in the Underground.

After a quick exchange, Lisa walked away from the vendor with the bag of flour in her shopping bag. The vendor had told her it was half price, and who was Lisa to say no to cheap groceries? She weaved her way in and out of the crowd, dodging booths selling the really shady items--magicked eyes, drugs, death spells. She had no business with those. The thought of her meeting that morning sprung into her mind.

The question wasn't whether she could do it--of course she could-- but whether she was willing to steal from the Calloways. Especially after Richard Calloway's whole ordeal. She stepped over a trickling stream of magical who-knows-what and slid past a particularly mean looking vendor. The client clearly had money and she could definitely con more from the kid if she really tried, but was risking her life worth a few million dollars? Lisa slowed to a stop in the middle of the walkway. The answer was yes.

Fishing her phone out of her pocket, Lisa dialed the recently entered number. The other line picked up after a few rings.

"Hello?"

"Hey kid," Lisa said, a grin forming over her face, "tell your dad I'm in."

...

"Did you see that fountain?"

Lisa winced as her accomplice, an overly excitable work friend named Sam, spoke into her ear rather loudly. With a slight grimace, she reached up and adjusted her earpiece.

Her friend was still chatting amiably. "Do you think they'll have good hors d'oeuvres? These rich people always have really fancy stuff, like snails, but I never thought it tasted that good--"

"As interesting as all this is," Lisa interrupted, "we have a job to do and I didn't agree to split the money just to have you babbling in my ear all night."

Sam grumbled something but Lisa had already tuned them out. She scanned the entranceway and what lay past, taking in as many faces as she could. Many were familiar, she would have to be careful even with her new face.

She could hear a faint rustling over the earpiece again and then barely masked chewing sounds.

“Can’t you wait until we actually start before you start eating?” Lisa snapped, speaking as quietly as she could. The last thing she needed right now was the people passing by thinking she was off her rocker. All she heard was a non-committal noise in response and she sighed. It was fine, she didn’t need Sam’s help until she got inside anyways.

Smoothing the front of her dress, Lisa walked through the tall, ornate gates and into the extravagant courtyard. To her chagrin, Sam was right -- the fountain was pretty amazing.

Lisa’s in-ear crackled to life and she sighed.

“Don’t sigh at me,” Sam snapped through the device. “I’m just checking to make sure that you have your recharges.” Lisa gently patted her purse and felt the comforting shape of her magic candies. She gave Sam an affirmative, smiling politely at an elderly woman that gave her an odd look for talking to herself.

Lisa grimaced as she walked across the courtyard -- she hadn’t adjusted her clothes to fit her new body and she was beginning to regret that decision. For what was supposedly a private event, the place was packed. Many old faces from previous jobs passed by her, but there was an odd amount of new, young faces. *That’s strange, Lisa thought, Mr. Calloway never associates with younger businesses.*

“You’ll never guess who’s around the corner from you.” Sam’s voice cut into Lisa’s thoughts again, making her jolt.

“Sam,” Lisa sighed and squeezed the bridge of her nose. “Just tell me who.”

“Man, you’re no fun.”

Lisa rolled her eyes. “We’re on a job!”

“That doesn’t negate my point.” Sam’s voice had a lilt that made Lisa want to reach through her earpiece to strangle them. “It doesn’t matter anyways, if you walk two feet forward you’ll find out.”

Lisa was about to question Sam when she bumped into someone walking by.

“Excuse me.” There was a pause and Lisa looked up, only to come face to face with Richard Calloway. He had a look of mild surprise. “Mrs. Abernathy, a pleasure to see you. I wasn’t sure if you’d show up tonight.”

Lisa slapped a smile on her face and made a show of pushing her now-graying hair behind her ear. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world! Besides, what’s a little rumor here and there?” She laughed airily while grimacing internally. She probably could have done with a little more research on her subject, but she’d have to make do with what she knew.

Richard was looking at her strangely before stating, “It’s not a rumor, Mrs. Abernathy.”

Lisa gaped but quickly recovered. “Well, no matter,” she waved a hand dismissively, “the company was due to be yours anyways.” She gave him what she hoped was a kind smile. He seemed to take it, as he smiled back politely and excused himself.

“I can’t believe you just spoke face-to-face with a murderer!” Sam chirruped over the in-ear.

Lisa rolled her eyes. “Isn’t that a bit much?” she murmured, turning in place trying to find the caterer with drinks.

“Um, no? He pushed his father off a balcony and then threw his mother over because she was a witness! He’s psychotic.”

“If his parents were anything like the articles made them out to be, I don’t blame him.”

Sam gasped over the line and began babbling about something or other, but Lisa tuned them out. She finally found a waiter carrying a bubbly purple champagne and swiped a glass before retreating to a wall to survey the room.

The ceilings were high and the higher floors had balconies that ran around the room, pillars holding up the ceiling more for show than support. Lisa frowned at the prospect of having to socialize her way up to the higher floors.

“You remember where it is, right?” The in-ear crackled to life again and it took every fiber in Lisa’s body not to scream.

“Of course I remember where it is, now shut up for five minutes!” Lisa hissed, earning some strange looks from passers-by. Lisa rolled her eyes and lifted her glass to take a sip when Sam practically shrieked.

“Wait!”

Lisa heaved a sigh and snapped, “What?” That really earned her some glances from the people around her.

“The champagne is magicked,” Sam was saying, their voice rushed, “if you drink it, it might interfere with the magic you already ingested.”

Lisa reeled back from the glass she was holding. She quickly placed it down on the tray of the next passing waiter and shuffled away. “Thanks, Sam,” she whispered. Sam hummed in response and, for once, was silent. “Alright, what’s the inside of the building look like?”

“A boat-load of fancy-shmancy looking guards milling around,” Sam said. “Think it’ll be a problem?”

Lisa just smiled, knowing Sam couldn’t see her. They could probably tell what she was thinking. Quickly, as if she had a purpose, Lisa strode up the large marble steps, past the stoic guards, and walked into the grand hallway. Sam was right: there were hundreds of people, half of which were black-suited guards. Lisa raised an eyebrow--why were these guards wearing sunglasses at night?

The in-ear crackled as Sam coughed. “If you look at the back of the room, there are heavy blue curtains. If you can get past those you’ll find a doorway and that’ll lead you to a hallway. Another door to the basement should be along there.”

“You double-checked that it’s actually in the basement?” Lisa murmured, slipping past an elderly couple that had already had too much to drink. She pursed her lips. Acting as Mrs. Abernathy would’ve been easier if she had brought a guest, but all was well considering Mr. Abernathy passed months before. Still, it was unseemly that she was walking around alone.

“Of course I’m sure,” Sam scoffed. “I’m not an amateur.”

Lisa snorted quite un-ladylike in response and coughed to cover the sound. A guard passing by her smiled sympathetically. Lisa nodded at him and hurried away, striding across the expansive marble floors. The room was absolutely massive, and for no reason.

She dodged familiar faces and those who wished to speak with her. She needed to get to the back wall before any of the festivities started. As if summoned, the lights dimmed and a spotlight lit up the center of the room. *Of course*, Lisa cursed and quickened her pace.

“Thank you all for coming,” the gracious voice of Richard Calloway echoed through the room. Lisa reached the wall. “I can’t even begin to tell you how grateful I am to those who showed. As you all know, this is my right by birth. I have prepared long and hard for this position, and I hope to go above and beyond your expectations.” At this point, Lisa tuned him out.

Lisa pulled the heavy curtain away from the wall and shimmied behind it. Her hand was on the doorknob when a woman spoke up behind her.

“Ma’am, where are you going?” Lisa turned to face the person and saw the shiny badge on her hip. A guard, just her luck.

“I’m just looking for the bathrooms!” Lisa tittered. “I’ve been having issues-- you know how those come with age!”

The guard raised her eyebrows, her eyes hidden by those weird sunglasses, and walked closer to Lisa. Lisa tensed, but the guard walked past her and opened the door for her. “The bathrooms will be the down the hall just a bit, to the left. The door is painted white,” the guard directed. Lisa smiled gratefully and headed towards where the guard pointed.

“She’s gone,” Sam spoke up after a minute.

“Oh thank god,” Lisa said, breathing out audibly and immediately spinning around to head towards the basement door. “How much time?”

“About ten minutes before the cameras for this hallway come on,” they said and yawned. “By the way, it’s been fifty-three minutes since you ate your scone.”

Lisa just stopped herself from yelling at Sam. Instead, she silently took one of the candies from her purse and popped it into her mouth. A strong, if not pleasant burning sensation followed the path of the candy, then spreading to swirl throughout her body before she could feel it settle into her bones.

“You could’ve told me, oh I don’t know, five minutes ago?” Lisa snapped as she found the metal door to the basement. She twisted lightly at the doorknob but it didn’t budge.

She heard a non-committal noise from Sam’s end. “It slipped my mind.” Lisa could hear the amusement in her friend’s voice and grumbled as she fiddled with the lock to the door. She heard a faint click and twisted the knob, the door gliding open.

Lisa was able to see the first three steps and then the rest descended into darkness. *I guess rich people don’t believe in bright lighting*, she thought, not

wasting a second to start walking down. Sam was humming quietly into her ear and Lisa almost tripped down the stairs when she realized what song it was.

“Are you seriously singing the Magenta Leopard theme song?” Lisa whispered, stifling laughter.

“It’s fitting, isn’t it?” Sam whispered back before resorting to their normal tone. “Once you get off the stairs it’ll be like, smack-dab in the middle of the room for some reason. I think it’s in like... a treasure chest or something--” they snorted, “--they definitely have a security system in place.”

Lisa mumbled a thanks and focused on not falling down the dark staircase.

...

A knock on the door interrupted Lisa’s nap. She blinked groggily, lifting herself from the plush couch and wiped the drool from her cheek. Her living room was dark, the dusk-time lighting filtering in through her windows. The knock sounded again and Lisa grunted out a ‘Coming!’ as she stumbled to the door. She slowly pulled the door open.

“Hi!” A young girl stood on Lisa’s doorstep. She was kicking at the welcome mat, her shoes lighting up every time it hit the ground. “Are you Lisa Wong?”

“Yeah...” Lisa responded hesitantly. “What can I do for you?”

The girl fidgeted with a small envelope in her hands and kept her gaze towards the ground. “My mom wanted to ask you to do a job,” she held out the envelope. “We don’t have much but we would be very grateful if you agreed.”

Lisa squeezed her eyes shut and sighed, the exhaustion from her earlier job settling on her shoulders like a blanket. Her skull was pounding from the excessive magic use and her muscles hurt from all the skulking around.

“Listen, I don’t think I’ll be able to help y-”

“Please!” the girl cried. “We really need your help.”

A pang hit Lisa’s heart and she clenched her jaw. “Come back in a few weeks, okay?” she said softly. “I promise I’ll help.”

The girl lowered her head and nodded, murmuring a thanks, before running off. Lisa sighed as she stared into the darkening night, listening to the crickets chirp noisily. She closed the door and walked to her kitchen, turning on all her lights on the way.

Pouring a cup of tea, Lisa rubbed at her head. The mission at Calloways had gone as well as it could have. She had obtained the blueprints for Calloway’s vanity project and passed it along to the DuPonts, had a few more brush-ups with Mr. Calloway himself. She slid to the floor. The magic use had taken a worse toll than usual. A ringing had begun in her ears and it felt like her head was going to combust. The rest period before her next assignment would have to be longer--she would have to be careful with her magic dosage next time too.

Lisa threw back the rest of her tea and stood up carefully. She inched her way to her living room and collapsed onto her couch. Pulling a blanket over her legs and settling her head into one of the pillows, Lisa exhaled, already feeling the pull of sleep. All her problems could be fixed with a little rest.