

The Glass Ship 2i

Delon held on to his coffee as he strolled lazily into the lobby of Man Logistics. His white long sleeve shirt was worn over fitting jeans. Boot-like shoes and a heavy mentality chain completed his stand-out looks from others in a neatly organised and perfectly calibrated logistics company.

He approached the counter and began casually, "Good morning. I have a meeting with Wilfred Man." He leaned lazily against the counter and took a sip of coffee.

The receptionist's eyes widened and grabbed the phone. "He's here." she said in a whisper loud enough for Delon to hear. She slammed down the phone and hurriedly led Delon towards the lift lobby. "This way, Mr Wong."

"Oh, I thought I was just 'he' "he laughed.

The receptionist looked at him with discomfort before hurrying ahead to call the lift with her work pass. One of the lift doors opened immediately. She held the door for Delon to enter the lift before coming into the lift herself.

Delon knew that the receptionist was stealing glances at him. But he ignored her to check on his hair bun in the lift mirror. It didn't take long for the lift door to open. He was led to a conference room on the sixth floor. He found the oval-shaped conference table almost full with everyone dressed in dark suits. They all turned to look at him as he entered the room. The receptionist quickly retreated out of the room, closing the door behind her. Delon looked around and saw a last empty seat at the centre on one side of the table, but nobody offered him to sit or even a greeting.

Delon frowned in amusement and said more to himself "I supposed that's my seat."

A severe-looking man seated diagonally opposite Delon who looked to be in his seventies, put on his glasses and referred to the papers on his table. "You are..." he made an extensive pause. "...Delon Wong." He took off his glasses and looked directly at Delon with unblinking gaze. "You would know that the Man family is reputed in Singapore, and we called you here..."

Delon stared into space as he sipped his coffee. He recalled the final moments with his mother in hospital a year ago.

Julie laid still in the hospital bed. An oxygen feeding tube was strapped to her nose. Her face was thin and pale, but her eyes was looking intently at Delon standing by. "You would be relieved that I will be gone soon?" she gasped.

"You know it's not that, mummy." Delon said shiftily.

"It's not your fault." Julie said.

Delon looked moved. "It's not your fault too."

"But it is." Julie whispered.

Delon frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"I never told you about your dad."

Delon's eyes widened. "I don't want to know about him, I don't need to know about him, we were happy without him, weren't we? Why talk about him now?"

"He might look for you after I am gone," Julie said stoically. "You should know who he is."

Delon looked revolted. "Why should I? I don't want to have anything to do with him or..."

"Your father is Milfred Man of Man logistics." Julie said.

Delon slapped his forehead and slumped to the floor. "What did you have to tell me? Now I can't get it off my head!"

There was a long and mournful beep from the vital sign monitor.

As he rose slowly in disbelief, his mother had all but gone. "Mummy!" he gasped. "What am I supposed to do?"

The old man's rambling brought Delon's thought back to focus. "You are but the son of a mistress...and this is a difficult..."

Delon raised his hand at him, but was looking straight ahead. The old man looked a little startled and paused.

"Could I ask: Who is the lawyer in charge?"

A middle-aged man seated directly opposite Delon answered. "I am Anthony Tan from AT Law. I am the appointed lawyer by the late Mr Man to execute his will."

"Are you the only executor?" Delon asked again. He noticed the old man looking frustrated when he heard the question.

"His son, Wilfred Man..." Anthony referred to a man seated next to him. "...is also the appointed executor."

"As I was saying..." the old man began again.

"What are the terms of the will?" Delon asked with elevated volume. There were audible gasps in the room as the old man was forced to stop again.

Anthony passed a piece of paper to Delon. "Mr Man has left you with a ten percent share of Man Logistics."

The entire room became silent.

“What are the conditions?” Delon asked.

“There are no conditions.” Anthony replied tightly.

“What happens should I surrender my right to inheritance?” Delon asked. “What happens to that share?”

“It goes to Mr William Man, his younger brother.”

Delon turned to face the old man. “Which is you, isn’t it?”

The old man looked startled. “Mr Wong...”

“I thought I was ‘the mistress son’, wasn’t I?” Delon jeered with viciousness. He turned to Anthony. “Could you draft an addendum that I wish to appoint someone to represent the share that I own?”

Anthony raised his eyebrows. “You mean someone in Man Logistics?”

“Of course.” Delon replied impatiently. All eyes turned towards William.

“Who might that be?” Anthony asked.

“The CEO.” Delon said, looking at Wilfred. “I will inherit the shares as per the will if the CEO is willing to accept my appointment.”

There were loud gasps again as Delon and Wilfred looked at each other.

“Prof, there is someone outside the classroom waiting for you.” A student called out from the classroom door to Delon.

Delon looked over to acknowledge but continued rounding up the conversation with a group of students. When he saw the last group of students out of the classroom, he noticed a heavily built man in a polo T-shirt and jeans standing outside. He had a backpack and was wearing sneakers. He didn’t look too different from how undergraduates usually dress except that he was noticeably older. He approached when Delon appeared at the classroom door.

“Are you Prof Wong?” he asked quietly, looking at Delon’s metallic chain that has slipped out from under his shirt.

“Yes, I am.” Delon replied rather guardedly. “What can I do for you?”

“I have a letter for you.” He swung his backpack to the front and extracted a letter for Delon.

Delon did not take the letter. “What is it regarding?” he asked.

The man continued looking at his chain as he held out the letter. "My father would like to see you."

"Who is your father?" Delon asked.

"Milfred Man."

Delon frowned and took over the letter slowly. He looked at the man curiously and asked, "Who might you be?"

"I am Wilfred," he replied robotically.

"You are his son?" Delon asked.

Wilfred gave a small nod.

Delon noticed that Wilfred was not looking at him, and he asked a little more gently "Do you know why he wants to see me?"

"You are his son," he blurted.

Delon was a little taken aback. "All right, I will look at the letter and see how it goes," he told Wilfred as he made to return into the classroom.

"I need to have your reply now" Wilfred said as he followed him into the room.

"Now?" Delon looked offended. "Then tell him no. Whatever that is."

"Are you going to see him at the hospital?" Wilfred asked.

"What are you talking about now?"

"He is dying in the hospital, and he would like to see you." Wilfred said.

Delon looked curiously at him. The odd mismatch between the severity of the information and Wilfred's almost monotonous delivery was strangely intriguing. He let out a sigh and opened the letter. He scanned the letter quickly and looked at Wilfred, whose eyes dropped to his chain again.

"Have a seat, I would like to ask you some questions." Delon told him.

Wildfred put down his backpack on a table and sat. Delon pulled up a seat and sat facing him.

"Why do you think your father wants to see me?" he asked.

"Because he is dying, and you are his son." He answered mechanically.

"This is like talking to AI." Delon lamented to himself. He closed his eyes for a moment, and asked again. "He wants to meet me because: Option A – he thinks big about family ties, or

Option B – he feels guilty towards me, or Option C – he thinks I am angry with him, or any combination of options?”

“Option B”. Wilfred answered immediately.

Delon’s eyes widened. He tried again “He is Option A – dying in a few months’ time or longer, or Option B – dying imminently within the next few days?”

“Option B.” Wilfred answered, if possible, faster than the last.

Delon looked at the letter again and considered. He nodded and took out a pen to write on the empty side of the letter. When done, he folded the letter and placed it back in the envelope.

“Here,” he told Wilfred as he handed him the letter. “Pass it to your dad.”

“You are not coming to the hospital?” Wilfred asked.

Delon shook his head. “Just pass him the letter and I won’t have to see him.”

Wilfred held the letter in his hand and looked rather struck.

“Be a good bro and hand him the letter.” Delon urged him. “I am sure he will like it.”

Wilfred looked into Delon’s eyes for a moment before keeping the letter carefully in his backpack. He swung the backpack over his shoulder and pushed in his seat before making for the door. Seeing him off, Delon made a light tap on his backpack, saying “Thanks for coming.”

Wilfred almost jumped and turned to stare at him. Delon was startled but forced a smile and managed to say, “Take care.”

Wilfred stared on for a split second before he turned and left, leaving Delon a little wide-eyed as he returned to his table to pack up his things.

“Could you check with the CEO if he is agreeable?” Delon asked Anthony.

Anthony exhibited the tiniest of frustration as he turned towards the Wilfred.

“That aligns with my father’s intention of having Mr Wong inherit the shares.” Wilfred replied without looking at Anthony. “I agree.”

William blew out in frustration. He picked up the papers on his desk and dumped it back in a huff.

“Could the addendum be drafted now?” Delon asked loudly. “I will sign it and hopefully, never need to come back again, ever.”

“The Man family is not a place that you come and go at your choosing, Mr Wong.” William told him severely.

“How does it feel?” Delon taunted him. “To have what you want yanked off from you, just when you thought you had it all?”

“I advise you to be careful with your words.” William snarled at him.

Delon gave a laugh. “Mr William Man, awarded young businessman of the year in 1988, council member of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, accompanied the then Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew to China in 1993, and the true architect behind the huge network of Man Logistics in China. The setting up of this logistics hub, which is the largest in Southeast Asia, nicknamed the Glass Ship, was without a doubt, a master stroke of your ingenuity.”

The whole room became quiet. William sat up, looking intently at Delon.

“I only knew that Milfred Man is my father last year.” Delon continued. His tone now turned icy. “He asked to meet me before he passed, but I declined and explained to him in a letter why. I want nothing from the Mans and nothing with the Mans. Your family reputation and wealth are great in your eyes. In the eyes of an academic like me, I don’t stoop to the same level.” He finished his coffee in a gulp before looking at William satisfyingly. “I could have surrendered this right to inheritance. But people who cannot accord basic courtesy and call me the son of a mistress do not deserve good will.”

His smile returned as he continued. “Milfred Man retired as the CEO three years ago, retaining only 10% of the company in his name. His son took over as the current CEO and the remaining share of the company. That 10% would have made you the largest shareholder, wouldn’t it?”

William stood up. “You checked on us! What is your game?” he demanded.

“I quote my professor Huang Jianli in NUS: ‘We academics believe that the pen is mightier than the sword. Give us a pen and we will change the world.’ I can’t change the world, but I can you teach you a lesson in respecting others.”

“You!” William pointed to him and fumed.

“The addendum is ready.” Anthony said, as he passed a document to Delon.

Delon took over the document and signed. “Good luck, CEO” he told Wilfred as he returned the document. He got up and began walking to the door. “I won’t be seeing you again, Mr Man,” he told William as he opened the door and strode off.

