

Chapter 1231

“Sandy is now dead.” Tanner approached Pearl with mixed emotions surging from the bottom of his eyes. “So how about you stay by my side on behalf of her from now on?”

Pearl’s shoulders trembled, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. “What have I done to deserve this?”

“Indeed, you haven’t done anything. You can blame it on the fact that we’re now tied to each other.” Tanner grabbed her by her neck and pulled her closer, his eyes bloodshot. “Everything would have been better if you hadn’t appeared in my life. Without you, Sandy and I wouldn’t have gotten to where we are today, and she wouldn’t have chosen to end her life either.” Looking at the tear that was rolling down from the corner of her eye, Tanner pushed her away and turned away from her. “At this point, even though this is not the right thing to do, we can only move on with what we have since we’ve already made the wrong choice in the first place. Pearl Santiago, if you don’t want these photos to be sent to your parents, you can only stay by my side obediently until you’ve made it up for the child that we lost.”

Tanner left. Watching the door close, Pearl was stunned and looked glazed. She was clearly indoors but felt as cold as if trapped in an ice cellar.

Naomi knocked on the door of the office. After getting permission, she pushed the door open and walked in. “Ms. Vanderbilt, are you looking for me?”

Maisie stood in front of the bookshelf and was flipping through a book. She turned to look at Naomi, put the book back onto the shelf, and asked with a smile, “Would you like to go on an outing together on the weekend?”

She was startled. “An outing? Is it some kind of activity organized by the company?”

“Of course not.” Maisie sat back in her seat. “I’m the organizer of this outing, and only a few people will be there. Ryleigh’s due date is expected to be somewhere in the middle of next month, so I’m arranging an outing for her to relax before she goes into labor. Since the both of you are quite close to each other, let’s go together.”

Naomi smiled. “Okay then, I’ll definitely be there.”

Maisie nodded, and she picked up her cell phone and sent a text message to Barbara after Naomi went out.

At this time, at the Spring Ripple Neighborhood...

Barbara had just finished breastfeeding the baby, and after putting the baby to sleep, she handed her over to the nanny to bring her back to her room. When she came to the study, she saw Helios sitting behind the desk, revising a script.

Helios stopped writing when he heard some movement, raised his head to look at her, and smiled. “What’s the matter, Mrs. Boucher?”

Barbara walked behind him and placed both hands on his shoulders, “Seeing that you’re so busy with work, I’ve come to give you a massage on the shoulders.”

He held the back of her hand and turned to look at her. "Is that so?"

She leaned over and wrapped her arms around him from behind. "Zee has invited us to an outing this weekend."

Helios smiled. "Didn't she go on a trip with Nolan? Why would she think of asking us to go on an outing out of the blue?"

"Ryleigh's baby is due next month." Barbara rested her chin on his shoulder and tilted her head against his. "But your cousin is still a bachelor."

Helios frowned, pulled her to the front, and looked up at her. "Is my cousin the main point?"

Barbara hugged him. "Of course, Zee specifically requested that you should bring your cousin along."

He squinted and smiled. "Is that so? Then I'll have to ask him about that."

Helios called Francisco right after the conversation.

Francisco seemed to be outside, and some background noise came from his end of the call. "There's an outing. Do you want to come along?"

Francisco wondered. "What kind of outing are you talking about?"

Helios responded, "Maisie invited me and your cousin-in-law."

Francisco kept quiet for a few seconds and then rejected him directly. "No, you people are all couples, yet you want to drag me along with you? Don't you think it's a little too much?"

Helios smiled and seemed to have guessed that he would say that "I didn't say that it's only the four of us. There may be others 100"

Francisco remained silent again

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Barbara stood by and watched until Helios finished the call. She then asked, "Did he agree to come along?"

Helios placed his phone on the desk, stretched out, and hugged her. "He's agreed to it, but I'm putting my bet on the fact that he'll be livid when he finds out that we intend to arrange a blind date for him."

Barbara smoothed his collar. "Zee claimed that the chances of this girl getting together with Francisco are as high as 90%." "Is she that certain?" Helios narrowed his eyes slightly, and he seemed to be a little curious about who the girl that Maisie mentioned was.

Barbara lifted his head, made him look at her, and chuckled softly. "You'll know by then, won't you?"

On the day of the outing, Maisie and Nolan took the two kids to the outskirts of the town to pick a spot before anyone's arrival. They finally chose a place with beautiful scenery that was very suitable for camping

The water in the lake was very shallow and looked clear, so crystal clear that one could see the pebbles and clusters of aquatic plants at the bottom of the lake from the bank.

“Dad, Mom, there are a lot of tadpoles!” Daisy squatted on the cobblestone bank and laughed happily when she saw a school of tadpoles in the water that got scared and hid in the cracks of the stone when they saw humans approach.

Colton looked disgusted. “What’s so good about staring at tadpoles? They’ll one day grow up to be ugly frogs.”

Maisie and Nolan set up the tent, and she turned and glanced at them both, “Be careful not to fall. Your clothes are very expensive.”

Nolan lifted his gaze to look at her and could not help but laugh. “Are the kids or their clothes more important?”

“Their clothes,” she answered without any hesitation.

Besides, the lake is so shallow that it can’t even reach the kids’ knees, so how can it drown them?”

Nolan squinted. “What about the kids and me? Who’s more important?”

She replied instantly, “The kids.

Nolan was at a loss for words.

Maisie sneered and got closer to him. “The kids are more important, but I have only one husband.”

Nolan nodded with satisfaction upon hearing that answer. “That’s more like it!

Louis and the others arrived only when they had gotten half of the setup and the grills all set up. All the ingredients for the barbecue were in their car.

Louis carried a lot of things in both hands, while Naomi came along with them. Naomi supported Ryleigh, and both of them were a short distance behind Louis.

Maisie turned to Colton and Daisy and said, “Go and help your uncle carry all the ingredients.” “Okay!” The two little rugrats ran over to help.

Louis put down the bags that contained food and looked around. “Is anyone else here yet?”

Maisie stood up and looked at the four-wheel-drive that was driving in their direction from not far away. “Isn’t that them?”

Naomi and Ryleigh turned their heads and looked over, only to see Helios and Barbara getting out of the car with multiple bags of all sizes. “We’re a little late. Sorry to have made you guys wait!”

“Godfather Helios!” Because Daisy had not seen Helios for a long time, she ran over, intending to ask him to carry her, but Colton grabbed her by the back of her collar.

Colton looked helpless. “Just how old are you now? And you’re still asking others to carry you around? Shameless.”

Helios laughed, walked up to the two little rugrats, lifted his hand, and rubbed their little heads. "It's been a long time since I last saw you two, and you two little rascals are still so enthusiastic."

"We're no longer little rascals," Colton replied seriously while Helios took a better look at them as his grin widened. "We've grown into bigger rascals."

Barbara looked at the two of them. "You kids are growing so quickly now. Neither of you was this tall the last time I saw you."

Daisie pouted, looking all aggrieved. "Mom also complained that we're growing so quickly, so we're going through all the clothes she buys too quickly."

Barbara giggled.

Francisco appeared from behind them. He wore a cap, carried a sling bag on his shoulder, and had a pair of headphones hanging around his neck, looking extremely casual.

The two rugrats stared at him curiously as this was their first time meeting him.

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Barbara introduced Francisco to the two of them. "This handsome man is your godfather's cousin."

"Oh!" The two little rugrats nodded in a daze and greeted him politely. "Hello, uncle, it's nice to see you."

Francisco glanced at the two of them.

'They should be Maisie and Nolan's kids, shouldn't they? They look alike.'

Barbara looked at Helios. "I'll go over and help them out first."

Helios nodded. "Okay."

Barbara walked toward the campsite with the two children while Francisco stared at the site and crossed his arms. "Why do I have a feeling that I've been tricked here by you guys?"

Helios lowered his gaze, smiled, and placed his hand on Francisco's shoulder. "Since you're already here, it's dumb not to make the trip worth it, isn't it?"

Francisco clicked his tongue and looked at the camp again. He was slightly startled as he saw someone.

Naomi squatted beside Maisie and set up the barbecue with her. She added charcoal to the grill and set it on fire in a matter of minutes.

Maisie looked at her. "You're quite skilled."

Naomi replied with a grin, "I participated in quite a few camping activities organized at the academy back then."

Ryleigh nodded when she heard what Naomi said. "Yes, yes, it was during our sophomore year. I remember that Naomi was the captain of our group at the time."

Maisie raised her gaze and looked in Helios' direction. Seeing that she was staring in their direction, Helios turned his head and glanced at Francisco, and as if he had realized something, he patted him on the shoulder. "I won't stop you if you want to go back now."

He then walked toward the campsite.

Francisco was amused for a short while and caught up to him. "Since I've followed you here, I'll just put up with the rest of the trip."

Naomi did not notice the addition of a few more people around her at all until she heard Francisco's voice. She stopped moving immediately and stared at Francisco, who was picking up firewood, with Louis in surprise.

The moment she met Francisco's gaze, she turned her head away in a hurry, and she was at a loss instantly.

Maisie, who was squatting right next to her, noticed something and pretended to smile as if she did not know anything. "That's the second heir of the Bouchers. You might not have met him before this."

Naomi returned to her senses and smiled with an evasive gaze. "I... I've met him a few times."

Maisie narrowed her eyes. "Is that so?"

Naomi nodded, bowed her head, and started to skewer the food. Seeing her blushing cheeks, Maisie could not help but sigh with a helpless smile.

'She really looks like a young girl who's just beginning to know what love is.'

They started roasting the skewers immediately after everything was ready, and the two little rugrats could not wait to get their hands on those foods and send them into their mouths when they sniffed the wafting aroma.

Barbara and Maisie laid a picnic mat on the grass and placed all kinds of snacks and fruits on it.

After the barbecue was served, everyone was in a hurry to taste it. Daisy chewed loudly. "Hmm! The beef skewers that Dad roasted are so delicious!"

Ryleigh handed her a shrimp. "Little foodie, come, this is your favorite."

"Thank you, Auntie Ryleigh!" Daisy was in an overload of happiness when she ate the shrimp. After finishing her food, she said, "It would be nice if Wayion were here, but it doesn't matter. I'll eat a few more skewers on Wayion's behalf."

Cotton gave her a sideways glance at that moment. "Just admit that you want to eat more."

Daisy snorted softly. "That's none of your business, busybody."

Ryleigh did not forget to hand Naomi a few skewers.

Naomi took them from her. "Thank you."

The four men sat down on the picnic mat at this moment too. Nolan sat beside Maisie and the children. It was only natural for Louis and Helios to sit beside their wives, and the vacant seat beside Naomi was the only one left empty.

Except for Louis and Ryleigh, the other two couples understood what was happening between Naomi and Francisco.

Ryleigh looked at Naomi and simply felt that she would feel embarrassed to sit next to a strange man. "Naomi, why don't you sit by my side?"

Barbara raised her head abruptly. "You're pregnant. How convenient would it be if you were to have to move around to make space for Naomi? It's all right. We're all friends. It doesn't matter wherever she sits."

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Helios poured himself a glass of red wine." Barbara is right You're pregnant, and your husband has to take care of all your needs already. So just leave Ms. Topaz to the others. Someone else will take care of her for you."

Ryleigh frowned

'What just happened? So what if I'm a pregnant woman? I'm worried that Naomi would feel awkward and embarrassed.

That's why I asked her to sit by my side.'

Louis seemed to have sensed what Helios and Barbara meant, so he took a glance at Francisco and Naomi, and then wrapped his arm around Ryleigh, who was sitting next to him. "Helios is right."

Ryleigh elbowed his waist sullenly.

Maisie took the wine bottle and poured some wine slowly. "Do you need someone to take care of Naomi? Naomi is the only designer that Soul Jewelry has, so I'll definitely take good care of her."

Ryleigh thought what Maisie said made sense and stopped worrying immediately. Naomi pursed her lips,

Thave to sit right next to Francisco, so how can I not feel nervous?'

At that moment, Maisie turned to her and asked, "Naomi, do you want some fruit wine? I brought two cans."

In order to relieve her tension, Naomi nodded. "Yes."

The fruit wine that Maisie handed over was peach flavored. She wanted to open the can but could not manage to do so. After seeing her struggle for a minute, Francisco reached out, grabbed the can from her, and opened it for her. The whole process was as smooth and slick as it could possibly be.

Naomi's heart was pounding as she took the can from him and whispered, "Thank you."

Francisco responded with a faint hum.

The picturesque scenery and quiet woods were filled with chatter and laughter throughout the whole meal, and everyone raised their cups. "Cheers!"

"I haven't had such a satisfying and poetic life for a long time." After saying so, Barbara suggested with a grin all of a sudden, "Why don't we play a game?"

"It won't be Truth or Dare again, right?" Ryleigh said with a downcast face. "That's no fun for someone as heavily pregnant

as me

"Why play Truth or Dare when we can play another game?" Barbara took out a stack of playing cards. "Let's play Locate the Joker!"

Ryleigh was stunned. "What is locate the Joker?"

Barbara drew a Joker card out of the stack of cards and explained, "We'll take turns dealing the cards. Whoever gets the Joker must complete a single or double-player mission. Sounds alright to you guys?"

Maisie nodded. "Yes."

Neither Nolan nor Helios objected to the idea while Ryleigh and Louis both nodded, so everyone looked at Francisco and Naomi.

Francisco shrugged. "I don't mind it."

Naomi hesitated for a few seconds before nodding. "I'm fine with it."

Seeing that everyone had nothing much to say, Barbara proposed to divide everyone into two groups. Naomi was naturally assigned to be in the same group as Francisco,

Barbara handed the cards to Maisie, and starting from Maisie, each person would be dealt two cards, and no one could reveal the cards in their hands, not even to themselves. After all, the game was popular because of the enigma that the game brought to the occasion.

After the cards were revealed, the group that possessed the Joker must complete the designated single- or double-player mission

When everyone revealed their cards, it was Louis who had the Joker. Ryleigh glared at him. "Just what kind of sh*tty luck do

you have here?"

Louis was rendered speechless.

Barbara covered her mouth and giggled. Zee, you can now come up with a mission for them."

Maisie rubbed her chin and gave it a proper thought, then turned to Nolan and asked, "What do you think will be suitable for them?"

Louis stared at them. "You two, don't go too far."

Nolan raised his eyebrows and placed the wine glass right in front of his lower lip. "Then you guys should do 50 one-handed push-ups."

"50!?" Louis was furious. "My dear cousin-in-law, are you kidding me?"

"What's wrong with that? And allow me to remind you that your wife's pregnant, so there's no way she can help you out with the mission." Nolan looked at him. "So just bite the bullet and give us 50 push-ups. It's not that many for a real man."

Louis stood up. "You're truly a ruthless piece of crap!"

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Louis completed 50 one-handed push-ups. In the next few rounds, Louis pulled the Joker another three times, Maisie drew it twice, and Helios got it once.

Barbara gnashed her teeth. "I refuse to believe that you'll always be so lucky, Francisco."

Francisco crossed his arms and said calmly, "Jeez, this game is so boring. I haven't even gotten the chance to experience the game at all."

It was Nolan's turn to deal the cards next. And when the cards were revealed, Francisco's smile froze because the Joker was in Naomi's hand.

Naomi did not expect that she would get the card at all, so she was even more flustered. "I'm sorry, I..."

'Karma's really a b*tch.

Barbara glanced at Francisco, who was still sneering just minutes ago-his arrogance was indeed very disagreeable to her eyes." Sure enough, God is still fair to everyone. Didn't you say you haven't gotten the chance to experience the game? How does it feel now?"

Francisco took a deep breath and smiled." It's fine. I'll just take it as an experience."

Nolan handed the task of assigning the mission over to Maisie. "I'll leave it to you."

"Let's go with a two-player mission this time." Maisie thought about something, looked at the two of them, squinted, and smirked. "You two will be munching on a wafer roll."

Francisco frowned. "What kind of mission is that?" "I'll show you how." Maisie picked up a wafer roll and held it with her lips. She then turned to Nolan, who immediately understood and ate the wafer roll with her in a 'Lady and the Tramp' style.

Staring at this scene, Naomi was dumbfounded.

Am I about to. :

"What? Must we go that far?" Ryleigh was astonished for a split second and looked at Naomi worriedly. "This doesn't seem fair to Naomi."

Barbara smirked and waved her hands. " It's just a game. Besides, it's not really a kiss. They don't even have to touch each other's lips."

Ryleigh pondered over it and thought it seemed to make sense.

But when it came to kissing, Naomi's ears turned extremely flushed-she was so nervous that all her fingers were intertwined, interlocked, and entangled at the same time.

"Apart from this, is there any other task that I can do?" Francisco opened his mouth.

Naomi was slightly startled while everyone else stared at him.

Nolan squinted slightly. "100 one-handed push-ups. Would you prefer this?"

"Okay, it's just 100 push-ups." Francisco got up and started doing one-handed push-ups on the side.

Barbara looked at Maisie, and the latter shrugged.

I didn't expect Francisco would rather choose to do 100 push-ups than complete a double player mission. Is the information wrong?

While Francisco was doing all the pushups, Naomi sat silently at the side.

When the barbecued food on the table was almost finished, Maisie and Barbara stayed back to clean up while the children went to the lake with Naomi and Ryleigh for some fun.

Barbara leaned over to Maisie. "Didn't you say that there's a high probability? Why do I feel that Francisco doesn't seem to be interested in Ms. Topaz?"

Maisie took a glance at Naomi, "But the thing is that Naomi has a thing for that kid Francisco."

Barbara had realized that during the meal and snorted, "Then Francisco deserves to stay single for the rest of his life Over there, Naomi squatted by the lake and helped Daisy collect pebbles.

Daisy walked up to her all of a sudden and whispered to her embarrassedly, "Aunt Naomi, can you accompany me into the forest for number two?"

Naomi got up with a smile. "Okay."

Daisy took her hand, and the two went straight into the woods,

Louis and Francisco were setting up the tents, and when they came out of the tent, they saw the two of them going to the woods together

Daisy covered her stomach throughout the whole journey when she came to the forest with Naomi. She suddenly thought of something and turned around anxiously "I don't have any tissues. What should I do now?"

"I have some " Naomi took a packet of tissues out of her handbag and handed it to Daisy

"Thank you, Aunt Naomi. Please stay here and wait for me!" Daisy ran behind one of the stumps,

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Naomi smiled, "Alright, I'll wait for you." She stood in the woods and looked around. A rustling sound could be heard every now and then.

"I'm done, Aunt Naomi," Daisy walked out from behind the tree and tidied up her clothes.

Naomi looked at this beautiful and well-behaved girl and couldn't help but pinch her cheeks.

Daisy suddenly saw something and pointed. "Aunt Naomi, there are a lot of wildflowers there. Let's go take a look."

She then hopped over, with Naomi following close behind. "Take it slow."

At the campsite, Maisie walked to the lake and saw Ryleigh and Colton picking up seashells. She looked around. "Where are Daisy and Naomi?"

"They're over there..." Ryleigh looked over but didn't see them. "Eh?"

Louis walked over, "Are you looking for Naomi and Daisy? They went into the woods."

Maisie paused. "Why are they in the woods?"

Colton stood up straight and answered, "I heard Daisy say that she needed to go to the toilet, and Aunt Naomi went with her."

"It's been too long. I'll go and find them." Maisie started walking toward the woods, but Louis stopped her. "You don't need to. Someone went along."

Maisie was curious and looked toward the campsite-someone was missing.

Maisie nodded. "I guess there's nothing to worry about then."

Ryleigh turned around. "What were you talking about?"

Louis walked to her with a smile and put his arms around her shoulder. "Nothing. It's been a long day, so let's get you some

rest."

On the other side...

Low hills surrounded them, and patches of grass separated the shallow lake. There were clean and elegant-looking yellow and white flowers, which looked beautiful among the greenery.

Daisy's eyes shone. "Wow, what flowers are these? They're so pretty!"

Naomi didn't expect the woods to hide such a beautiful and heavenly place. She smiled and replied, "These are daffodils."

"Daffodils?" Daisy scratched her head. "But they look different from the ones in school."

Naomi gave a light chuckle. "Because these are wild daffodils." She was surprised when Daisy started plucking them."

Daisy, be careful. It might be slippery,"

Right after she said that, she slipped and fell to the ground.

Daisy got one of the flowers and turned to look at her. "Are you alright, Aunt Naomi?"

Naomi took a deep breath and smiled, "I'm fine."

When she was trying to get up, she realized that she had twisted her ankle. She felt someone approaching and turned to look

Francisco walked over with hands in his pockets and looked at Daisy, "Aren't you afraid of the wolves wandering around here?"

Daisy frowned. "Don't try to scare me. There are no wolves in the woods!"

"Cough... Your mom is looking for you. She says there won't be any barbecue for you if you don't go back now." Francisco looked very serious while saying that. Daisy immediately forgot about the daffodils and stood there for a few seconds before throwing the flower away, "How could she do that!?" She then ran off angrily.

"Dai-" Before Naomi could call out her name, she had disappeared, and only the two of them were left in the woods.

Naomi sat on the ground and felt a little embarrassed, so she tried to make it less awkward, "Why are you here?"

Francisco looked down at her and didn't really answer. "Why are you in such a situation every time I see you?"

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The first time was at the cafe when she hadn't brought any money, the second time she had been arguing with someone about the price of fixing a car, the third time she had been stuck in the rain while walking around, and the fourth time she had fallen off the stairs and he had had to carry her...

Naomi was even more embarrassed because he was right.

He put a hand in front of her, and she froze before looking up at Francisco.

Francisco looked at her. "Do you expect me to carry you back instead?"

She was frantic. "No, of course not!" She grabbed his elbow and slowly stood up, but the pain in her ankle made her take a sharp breath.

Francisco looked at her right foot. "Twisted your ankle?"

She nodded.

Francisco helped her walk to a tree so that she could sit under it and knelt to remove the shoe on her right foot.

Naomi put out her hand. "Let me do it."

"Does it make a difference if I do it?" Francisco removed her sock too and looked at her. "It's still removing."

Naomi pressed her lips together and thought, 'Of course there's a difference! No man has touched my foot before.'

“Your foot is so swollen it looks like a pig’s leg.” Francisco helped her massage it, but she was in so much pain she yelped and covered her mouth. “I’m sorry.”

He frowned and looked at her. “Why are you apologizing?”

Naomi looked down. “I’m afraid that... you might think that I’m too noisy.”

Francisco paused and suddenly looked at her. Naomi felt uncomfortable from his stare, so she looked down to avoid eye contact.

After a long pause, he suddenly said, “You’re such a weird woman.”

She was surprised. “What?”

“You’re from an affluent family and are so careful in whatever you do. You seem to be meek but are quite brave.” After he said that, he looked at her. “You’re bravest when you’re watching horror movies.”

Naomi paused for a moment while she pressed her lips together, not replying. She wasn’t meek.

She was very careful because she didn’t want to be hated. She wanted to blend in with everyone but couldn’t join in their conversation, so she was very careful.

Francisco looked at her and felt that she looked like a poor little bunny. He suddenly turned around. “Come on. Guess I have to give you a piggyback ride back.”

Naomi was surprised when Francisco, who was looking forward, said, “It’s going to rain soon. Get on if you don’t want to get wet.”

Naomi couldn’t hesitate anymore. She put her shoe back on and climbed onto his back.

Francisco carried her. “You look so skinny, but you’re actually quite heavy.”

The dark clouds started rolling over, and it seemed like it was going to rain.

Everyone at the campsite sat under the tent and drank tea.

Maisie looked toward the woods, “Why aren’t they back yet?”

Nolan put down the teacup. “They probably found somewhere to hide from the rain. With the years of training that Francisco went through, survival in the wild wouldn’t be an issue.”

Barbara nodded in agreement while she looked at the rain. “The rain is too heavy now, and we don’t know when it’s going to stop. When it slows down, let’s go look for them. I’m sure Francisco can protect Naomi well.”

Daisie put her cheeks on her hands and was daydreaming about barbecue. That terrible fellow had tricked her!

The rain stopped at night when the woods were already dark. A fire could be seen in a space under a huge rock where the rain didn't hit. The two people drenched by the rain were drying their jackets by the fire.

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Francisco sat near the fire and added wood to it, then looked back at Naomi, who was leaning against the stonewall. She was curled up, hugging her legs as if she was freezing.

He stood up, walked over, squatted down in front of her, and touched her forehead. It wasn't burning, so she probably had a low fever.

He stood back up, took the dried jacket, wrapped it around her, and pulled her into his arms.

Naomi was surprised. Maybe she was feeling very cold, but the moment when she was in his arms, she felt warm and comfortable.

You'll feel better after you sleep." He gently pressed her head toward his chest.

Naomi listened to his voice and felt his heartbeat, then suddenly smiled. "Just like a dream."

Francisco looked down. "What dream?"

Naomi felt like she was floating, put her arms around his waist, and snuggled. "I like

Francisco heard her mumble the rest of the sentence and beamed. After a moment, he whispered, "What do you like?"

Naomi's breath slowed, and he smiled after noticing that she was asleep. Naomi's face was on his shoulder, and her breathing was gentle, a warm breath on his neck.

He looked sideways at her and played with her hair before his eyes lingered on her lips.

Nolan, Helios, and Louis searched for them by following the source of light. Helios saw something and immediately pulled them both aside.

Louis was surprised. "What's going on?"

Helios shushed him and looked toward the cliff. "We don't need to bother them as long as we know they're safe. They'll come back when the sun is back up."

"But we're here to look for the-"

Before Louis could finish, Nolan tapped his shoulder. "Helios is right. Let's go back."

After they both walked away, Louis paused and tried to keep up, "Are we being unkind?"

Nolan glared at him. "Do you think interrupting them is a kind thing to do?"

Louis finally understood. He nodded and followed them back.

Once they were back, Ryleigh worriedly asked, "Didn't you find them?"

Helios smiled. "Yes, they're safe."

Ryleigh looked behind them, and it was pitch black. No one was there. "Where are they then?"

Barbara and Maisie walked out from inside the tent.

Nolan stopped in front of Maisie and smiled with his eyebrows raised.

Maisie looked toward them and asked him, "They're together?"

He smiled. "They're having an intimate moment."

Maisie couldn't help but smile.

Louis said something to Ryleigh that made her freeze on the spot. "What!? You're not worried that something might happen to Naomi, leaving them alone?"

Barbara put her arm around Helios' arm and smiled. "Ryleigh, why do you think Francisco might do something to her?"

Ryleigh paused. She had no idea why she would think that way, but they didn't seem to know each other. "They don't know each other but are spending time together. If you don't bring them back, what if... Naomi is a lady. She can't spend time with a stranger

"Haha!" Barbara couldn't help but laugh. "Ryleigh, what if she wanted to spend time with him?"

Ryleigh was surprised. "What are you talking about? That's not possible..."

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Maisie walked over and put her hand on Ryleigh's shoulder. "Don't worry about

Naomi. Francisco won't do anything to her.'

"Zee, you and Barbara are acting so weird today." Ryleigh moved her hand away as she realized something. "Why does it feel like you know something that I don't?"

Louis coughed. "You're just not thinking far enough."

Ryleigh stomped on his foot which made him take a sharp breath. He had to endure that because she was his wife.

Nolan hugged Maisie by her shoulders. ' Alright, it's getting late. We should all get some rest. They'll come back tomorrow morning."

The two of them went back into their tent, followed by Barbara and Helios.

Ryleigh held onto Louis. "Tell me what is happening."

Louis hugged her. "Little lady, I'll tell you when we're back in the tent."

Ryleigh frowned. "Don't lie to me."

Louis helplessly said, "I won't"

The night grew darker, and the moon peeked out from behind the dark clouds.

Morning broke, and the fire was out.

Naomi slowly opened her eyes because she was feeling hot. It was already really bright outside.

But when she opened her eyes, she took a sharp breath.

The two of them were sleeping on some dried grass. Francisco slept next to her with his arms around her while she curled up

Her heart pounded upon seeing that his face was inches away. She wasn't dreaming -she was really in his arms!

Naomi closed her eyes and smiled, then slowly leaned on his chest. He was driving her crazy. How could she adore him so much?

"Naomi."

The voice coming from above her head made her freeze. She was so embarrassed to be caught in the act.

She slowly looked up and into Francisco's eyes and suddenly sat up, "I'm sorry, I... I didn't mean it."

Francisco turned around, propped his body up with his hand, and looked down at her.'

What didn't you mean to do?'

She choked. She couldn't say that she had leaned closer to him after waking up.

Francisco stared at her. "Do you remember what you said last night?"

"1 Naomi paused because she didn't remember. "What did I say last night?"

Francisco leaned on his side and on his hand while his lips parted. "You said... You like... spending time with me."

Naomi was stunned, and her heart stopped. She was so nervous she couldn't look into his eyes. "I... Did I say that? I don't remember

Francisco put out his hand while she was stunned and pulled her into his arms. She put her hand on his chest and looked at him with eyes wide open, her heart pounding,

She didn't see him leaning in for a kiss. Her hand on his chest balled up because she was almost out of breath,

Francisco looked at her blushing cheeks." Breathe."

She took a deep breath. Francisco turned away and laughed when he saw her fumbling.

Naomi paused and sat up straight. "Why are you laughing?"

Francisco put his hand to his forehead but couldn't stop laughing. "I might just kill you by kissing you."

Naomi's face turned red.

Francisco sat up and leaned in. "I was worried that if I went on, you might die." "Went on...Naomi's eyes darted around because she didn't know where to look.

Francisco pushed her chin up. "What do you like about me?"

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'This question again.'

Naomi looked at him. "Do I need a reason?"

Francisco smiled. "Do you know me well enough? How can you admire me if you don't know me? Are you not afraid that I might be a bad person?"

Naomi looked down and slowly said, "I know you're not."

Francisco ran his finger over her lips. "How did you come to that conclusion? Do you feel safe when you're around me?"

She frowned, a little confused.

"You're so innocent." Francisco stared at her. "You're not careful enough with men. If it were other men, do you think you could be safe staying with a guy?"

Naomi pressed her lips together. "But you're not them."

"I'm not, but it was because I suppressed my feelings." He let go and sat up with his back facing her. "You need to be more careful with men."

He stood up and walked to where the fire was to pick up his jacket and put it on, then looked out at the sky. "The sun is up. Let's head back."

Naomi looked down. If he weren't going to be with her, why did he kiss her?

Francisco and Naomi got back to the campsite, and everyone turned to look at them.

Barbara smiled and said, "I told you, safe and sound."

Naomi lowered her head because she felt that they knew, so she was a little embarrassed.

Francisco frowned. "You really didn't care if we survived?"

Helios chuckled, walked to him, and put his hand on his shoulder. "We went looking for you and didn't want to interrupt" The last part was only audible to Francisco.

He paused.

Maisie walked toward Naomi. "Are you hurt?"

Naomi shook her head.

Barbara smiled. "She wouldn't be hurt with Francisco around."

Maisie held her hands. "You must be hungry. Have some breakfast."

After breakfast, they packed up around noon to return to the city

After their outing, Naomi didn't see Francisco for a long time, as if nothing had happened and it was just a dream.

Naomi sat in the office, daydreaming. The design in her hands was half done. She immediately snapped back when she heard a knock on her door. "Come in."

Lucy opened the door and walked in, then said shyly. "Naomi, um... Could you help me with something?"

Naomi nodded. "Sure."

Lucy played with her fingers. "My parents are asking me to go on a blind date, but I don't like the man they've set me up with

Could you.. mess it up for me?"

Naomi paused for a moment. "You want me to mess it up on your behalf?"

Lucy nodded and said in a sad tone, "You

know that even though I talk a lot, my mind freezes when it really matters. I am afraid that I might be unable to come up with an excuse to reject him.

"He hasn't seen me before, so you can just mess it up. It doesn't matter how."

Naomi thought about it and said, "Alright, let me handle it.

"You're the best, Naomi!" Lucy ran over and shook her hand. "You're my savior!"

That afternoon, Naomi went to the restaurant with the photo that Lucy had given her. She looked around for a bit and noticed a man sitting at the corner table, so she looked at the photo.

She walked over. "Excuse me, are you Mr. Roswald?"

He looked up at her and stood up. "Yes, that's me. You're Lucy?"