

Chapter 991

After Jackie finished speaking, he turned around to look at Maisie. "I know about her affairs with Mr. Knowles, including the fact that she is a courtesan trained by Madam Knowles"

Maisie remained silent. Mayhap Zeta had only been following Madam Knowles' orders, becoming an assassin as well as betraying herself. She had sold her life to Madam Knowles and never considered how the consequences would be.

On the surface, Zeta indeed had done a lot of bad things. She was the one who had hatched the plan to kidnap Nollace, and she was also the one who had almost killed Colton through that 'accident' on Christmas. However, she had just been following orders.

Was Zeta really that bad? Maisie did not think so. At the end of the day, she was just Madam Knowles' pawn. If she had really been a bad person, she wouldn't have rejected Jackie when he confessed to her. Instead, she would have used him to help her get back on her feet.

She could easily win over a man's heart with fancy words, but she had rejected Jackie when he confessed his love to her. It was not that she was heartless. It was just that the path she had chosen forbade her from having a normal relationship.

At night, all of them gathered up and had dinner together. After having dinner, the kids went to play in the courtyard, filling the house with their happy peals of laughter.

As it got darker, neon light started to light up the sky, and the fireworks in the courtyard bloomed even brighter in the dark.

Maisie and Nolan were sitting on the long bench in the courtyard. She rested her head on Nolan's shoulder while Nolan cocked his head and looked at her. He wrapped his long arms around her and asked, "What were you and Jackie talking about in the courtyard today?"

"We were talking about..." She lifted her head to look at him and answered with a smile, "A secret."

Nolan pinched her nose and said, "Both of you have a secret? I demand you to confess to me."

Maisie coiled her arms around his waist, and there was a smile in her eyes. "I just told him how lucky I am to run into you. Nolan lowered his head upon hearing what she said and planted a kiss on the top of her head. "Really? I thought you hated me to the core at that time?"

She harrumphed lightly. "Hmph! That was because you were Willow's man."

Nolan was tickled pink by Maisie's answer. He rested his chin on her forehead and said, "I've never said before that I was her man."

After that, he leaned closer and whispered into her ear, "It's also my luck to meet you in this life."

Maisie lifted her head to look at him.

Suddenly, she kissed his lips before breaking herself free from his embrace and running away. She turned her head around like a kid who had achieved her mischievous goal and smiled at him triumphantly. "I'm going to light some fireworks."

Nolan touched his lips and let out a helpless smile.

When Samantha heard the doorbell she rose to her feet and went to open the door. The person standing outside of the door was none other than Kennedy. He was holding Sapphire in his arm, and Sapphire was holding a toy in her hand. When she saw Samantha, she stretched her arm forward to reach for her.

Kennedy chuckled and said, "Sapphire is saying hello to you."

Sapphire amused Samantha. She reached out for her and took her into her arms." Really? Seems to me that you know everything going on in that little head of Sapphire."

Kennedy looked at her and said, "Happy winter festivities."

Samantha met his gaze and smiled." Happy winter festivities."

One month later, Helios published his wedding photo on Facebook. All his fans gave him their blessings, and the news that Helios was getting married shook the entire Internet.

On the same day, Ryleigh and Louis got their marriage certificate. The Lucases, the Hills, and the Bouchers started the year with a bang. Of course, the Bouchers were slightly luckier than the other two families as Barbara was pregnant.

Maisie and Ryleigh went to visit Barbara at the Boucher manor. It was only the second month of her pregnancy, so her stomach was

still flat.

"My cousin sure is fast. He's finally becoming a daddy!" Ryleigh exclaimed. She seemed more excited than Barbara.

Maisie cleared her throat and chimed in, "I don't think 'daddy' is the right word to use."

Just when Ryleigh was dumbfounded, Barbara chuckled and said, "This is because the word 'daddy' has a different connotation."

Chapter 992

Ryleigh was stunned, and she quickly explained, "That's not what I meant. My cousin isn't young anymore, so I'm sure he'll be happy when he becomes a father."

"What about you?" Maisie rested her arm on Ryleigh's shoulder and teased, "When are you going to give Louis a chance to become a daddy?"

Ryleigh pushed her away and said, "Stop making fun of me." Barbara and Maisie let out boisterous peals of laughter. In the meantime, Helios and Louis came in. "We can hear your voice downstairs."

Upon seeing Louis, Ryleigh said with her mouth pouted, "They are making fun of me. Helios shrugged and walked straight toward Barbara while Louis turned his head sideways.

Ryleigh grabbed him by his collar and snarled, "Where are you looking at?"

She stomped her feet and added, "Are you going to help me or not?"

Maisie chuckled. "Ryleigh, it isn't good to tell on your cousin-in-law."

Ryleigh looked at her and said, "I'm your cousin-in-law as well."

When the thought popped up in her head, she suddenly realized the generational relationship between her and Maisie. A triumphant smile appeared on her mouth as she said, "Do you still remember what I told you in the past? I'm not trying to take advantage of you."

Maisie was rendered speechless.

Ryleigh glanced at Barbara and said, "Barbara is my cousin-in-law, and I'm your cousin-in-law." After that, she looked at Maisie again and said haughtily, "In other words, Zee, you're the youngest among us in terms of seniority in our family."

Maisie shook her head and laughed. "Alright, alright, you're right. Since I'm being extra here, I'm going home to look for my husband."

"Hey, Zee, we still need you to help us design our rings!"

Soul Jewelry released two limited custom-made wedding rings on their official website several days later. At the same time, they tagged both Helios and Louis in their post while congratulating them on their wedding, stunning the netizens. #Oh my gosh, these wedding rings are so pretty! I'm so jealous of them!# #1 heard that Helios and Louis are holding their weddings on the same day. Their wedding rings are designed by Soul, and the boss of Soul is Mr. Lucas' fiancée's best friend. In other words, she custom-made these two rings for her friends! I'm so jealous of their friendship!#

#According to the grapevine, the wedding of Mr. Goldmann and the boss of Soul

Jewelry will be held on the same day as well. All of them are going to hold their weddings on the same day! What kind of fabulous friendship is this!#

Maisie closed the magazine and put it on the table. Lucy knocked on the door and came in. "Ms. Vanderbilt, someone is here to see you.

Maisie nodded, and Lucy made way for the person behind her. When the man in a leather jacket appeared from the door and took off his hat, Maisie was stunned.

"Uncle Erwin!" Maisie shouted excitedly as she rose to her feet and walked up to him.

Erwin stood in front of her and rubbed her hair, "It has been a long time. Zee." Maisie wrapped her arms around his and led him to sit on the couch. "What brought you here? I thought you're not coming back anymore?" Erwin put his hat on the table and said, "I came back to see you. Strix wanted to come as well, but he couldn't make it as he had too many things to take care of."

"How is he doing?" Maisie asked.

Erwin nodded and replied, "He's fine. You don't have to worry about him. She had not been seeing Erwin ever since they parted ways in Stoslo. She would only occasionally be in touch with Strix, and whether it was Strix or Erwin, she considered them her dearest family members.

Erwin took a notebook out of his briefcase and said, "Strix asked me to bring you this. This notebook belongs to your mother, and he thinks you should take it."

Maisie was stunned, and she took over the notebook. When she was in Hans Palace, she had finished reading her mother's notebook.

This notebook recorded everything that had happened between her mother and Strix in the past. She also mentioned how sorry she was for her father and her toward the end of the notebook.

Chapter 993

Maisie had not taken the notebook with her because she thought this notebook was something very important to Strix as well. After all,

Strix had not been able to forget her mother even after more than 30 years.

Maisie thought of something and asked, "What about Saydie? Did she manage to find her family?"

Erwin replied, "Strix found her parents.

Saydie has gone to look for them, but I don't know whether they could recognize each other or not." After he finished speaking, he looked at Maisie and said, "There's one more thing I want to tell you about." Maisie was dumbfounded. "What is it?" "Your grandfather is still alive," Erwin said, causing Maisie to cover her mouth in shock. At that time, she believed that her grandfather had not been dead yet. After all they couldn't even find her grandfather's body, so how could he be dead?

"Then, my grandfather..." Maisie's voice was shaking.

Erwin continued in a stern voice. "Although he survived, he was so seriously injured in the accident that he was paralyzed and bedridden. The reason he couldn't tell anyone he was alive was that he didn't want you to worry about him." Maisie lowered her head and asked, "But how is he doing now? Is there anyone to take care of him?" Yeah, there is. You don't have to worry about that. He's now in a sanatorium at Stoslo," Erwin said. "He gave you the ring to preserve the de Arma family. It's just that whether you want to inherit it or not, he's going to let you decide it yourself, and he's not going to force you."

The de Arma family did not have any descendants, but Maisie was holding the heir's ring. Therefore, she could take the position of the head of the de Arma family at any time.

At night, in the Goldmann mansion... Upon taking her bath, Maisie sat in front of her dresser and picked up that ring from a box.

Nolan pushed the door open and came into the room. When he saw that she was sitting in front of the dresser looking at something, he walked up to her and hugged her from the back. He buried his head into her neck and asked, "What's wrong?"

She turned her head around to look at him and said, "Nolan, my grandfather is still alive."

Nolan was stunned.

After that, he came around to his senses and smiled. "Isn't that good news?"

Maisie put the ring back into the box and said, "Although I'm his granddaughter, I'm not part of the de Arma family. I belong to the Vanderbilts. If I take over the de Arma family, will I really be able to bring the family forward? Wouldn't I be mixing up two families?"

However, the de Arma family did not have any descendants. Although Louis was also Hernandez's grandson, Larissa had only one son. If Louis inherited the de Arma family, then no one would inherit the Lucas family,

Nolan rested his chin on his hand and fell into thought. After a while, he said, "Well, you can take over the de Arma family. Your mother is one of the de Armas, and you are Hernandez's granddaughter. The children from the mother's side can take over the family as well."

He then chuckled. "Otherwise, why do those big families who only have daughters choose to have a matrilineal son-in-law?"

Maisie rose to her feet and wrapped her arms around his neck. "So, are you willing to let me get busy?"

Nolan cupped her chin and kissed her lips. "Of course, I'm not. You'll certainly ignore me once you get busy."

As he was talking, he donned a serious expression and continued. "But I won't stop you if you really want to take over the de Arma family. If worse comes to worst, I can just leave my work behind and go around with you."

Maisie was stunned, and a surge of warmth gushed out from her heart. She threw herself into his chest and laughed so much that tears were forming around her eyes. "I'd feel bad for you if you were exhausted."

Nolan planted his lips on her forehead, grabbed her hand to place on his searing, throbbing chest, and said, "If you don't want to feel bad for me, you'll need to be more active from now on."

The next day...

Ryleigh stormed into Soul. Once she was inside Maisie's office, she shouted, "Zee.

I'm going to cancel my wedding!"

Maisie lifted her eyes to look at Ryleigh, who sat on the couch with her cheeks puffed like a hamster and put her document down, "Why?"

Ryleigh pouted and threw her phone on the table. "Look at it yourself."

Maisie stood up and walked up to the table in front of the couch. She picked the phone up and saw a picture of Louis having a meal with Xyla at a restaurant. She scrolled up to see several

Chapter 994

"See?" Ryleigh crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Hah, he must be lying when he said he wouldn't see her again because of guilt."

Maisie frowned. "When were these photos taken?" "After the Winter Festival celebrations and before we got our wedding certificate." Ryleigh stood up. "Zee, he lied to me. He didn't tell me any of these, and I only found out about it after someone sent these photos to me." Her eyes were red, and she seemed disappointed. "It's not like I won't let them be together. I can quit. He doesn't have to lie to me."

Maisie stretched her arms forward, hugged her, and comforted her, "Don't cry, Ryleigh. I'll help you to find out about this."

After that, she wiped the tears off Ryleigh's eyes and continued. "If my cousin really is a jerk, I won't let you two get married. Send these photos to me."

Ryleigh nodded. Maisie ordered the receptionist to contact Xyla for her when Ryleigh left. Xyla agreed to meet with her, and they met at a coffee shop. When Maisie arrived, Xyla and her assistant were sitting in a private room.

Maisie showed the photos to her, and Xyla was stunned when she saw the first photo.

Maisie took her seat slowly and asked, "I just want to know what is going on. Ryleigh is my friend, so I need to find out the truth for her. Of course, I'm not suspecting you either. I just want to know the truth."

Xyla's assistant took a glance at the photo and said, "Huh? Isn't this"

Xyla lifted her hand to stop her assistant. She looked at the photo and smiled. "What are you going to do if the truth is really like what you see in the photos, Mrs.

Goldmann?"

Maisie narrowed her eyes.

She was aware that things were not as simple as they seemed on the surface. Everyone in Bassburgh knew about the marriage between the Hills and the Lucases. If Louis really had been seeing Xyla behind everyone's back, the people who had taken these photos would have exposed him on social media platforms. They wouldn't have sent them to Ryleigh alone.

In other words, the target of whoever had taken these photos was Ryleigh.

As for why Louis had not explained to Ryleigh, she would confront Louis after finding out the truth about the photos. "If things really like what we see in the photos and you and Louis have gone back to each other, then, of course, I need to stop the wedding."

Maisie picked up the coffee cup and traced her finger around the rim. "Although Louis is my cousin, Ryleigh is my friend. I won't allow my friend to get bullied by other people. Besides, lightning marriages and quick divorces are pretty normal nowadays."

Xyla chuckled and said, "Shouldn't you be helping them to reconcile?"

Maisie took a sip from the coffee and said, "It depends on the situation. If the truth is really like what we see in the photos, not only will I not help them to reconcile with each other, but I'll ask her to divorce him. Even if she can't get married in the future, I can take care of her. She's my son and daughter's godmother, and my children will still take care of her in the future."

Xyla looked at her without saying anything. After a short while, she lowered her head and laughed. "I'm really jealous of Ryleigh for having such a good friend like you. I can also see why she's so easily manipulated and believes something like this."

Maisie narrowed her eyes.

It was only then that Xyla's assistant explained, "It's not like what you see in the photo. Xyla and Mr. Lucas weren't the only two people there. I was there too. Not only that, but Mr. Nixon from the academy and the crew from the film were there as well."

According to the assistant, the rest of the people had been cropped out of the photo. The assistant then added, "Besides, Xyla and Mr. Lucas kept their distance throughout the entire process. They didn't even interact with each other, and these photos are just misleading."

Maisie was stunned. She put the coffee down and asked, "Crew from the film? Are you guys filming a movie?"

Xyla smiled and replied, "It isn't a movie. It's more like a teaser for a documentary about music. The film crew invited

Professor Nixon and Louis from the music academy to help me gain a better understanding of Western and classical music."

Chapter 995

Xyla finished speaking and looked at Maisie before summarizing, "So, on that day, the director invited them into the film crew. After we finished our discussion, Mr. Nixon invited us to a musical concert..

Later, Mr. Nixon and the director bought us dinner. During the dinner, it was Mr. Nixon who sat next to me. You see that I'm talking to Louis in the photos, right? That's because he was explaining to me about music at that time." As Xyla was talking, she suddenly chuckled. "From the moment Louis picked Ryleigh over me, I knew that we're never going to make it together anymore. The last time he accompanied me to a dinner party, it was only out of friendship.

Besides, they have already gotten their marriage certificate. If I really want to be with him, I want to be his wife. I'm not in favor of being a homewrecker."

It was only then Maisie understood the whole situation. It was inevitable that the two of them would meet for business reasons, not to mention that they would have to shoot a documentary together.

However...

These misleading photos did not seem like the doing of the film crew. Since these photos were sent directly to Ryleigh, they must be someone who knew Ryleigh.

Since Xyla claimed that she was not in favor of being a homewrecker, it meant that she had a positive outlook. If these photos had nothing to do with her, who could it be?

At the Hill mansion...

∴ Ryleigh was playing games on the bed when Louis came into the room. She glanced at him and snorted coldly. "What are you doing

here?"

Louis sat at the side of the bed and asked, 'Who has upset you again?'

"Who has upset me again?" She rolled her eyes at Louis before saying, "Of course, it's you."

After she lost the game, she tossed her phone aside, turned around, and lay on the bed. She covered herself up with the sheet and prepared to sleep.

Louis was stunned. Then he laughed and pulled the sheet down. "What have I done to upset you?"

Ryleigh did not say anything in return, and it was only then Louis realized something was not right.

He flipped her around so she could meet his eyes. He could see tears shining in her eyes, and he cupped his hands on her cheeks. "Ryleigh, what happened?"

"You're hiding something from me, right?" Ryleigh lowered her head as a drop of tear fell to the pillow. "If you really want to be with Xyla, you can let me know. I'm not a mean person. I can just withdraw and,"

Before she could finish her sentence, Louis leaned closer and pressed his lips against hers. Her pupils constricted slightly, and the man before her eyes was getting blurry with every passing moment.

He thought he could calm her down by kissing her, but it seemed that he was wrong. More and more tears were flowing out of her eyes, and Louis left her lips. He lifted his hand to wipe the tears away and said, "What are you talking about? I've never said that I want to be with Xyla, so please don't say that again, okay?"

Ryleigh sobbed and began hitting him with her hand. "Even until now, you're still lying to me."

Louis was left with no choice, so he clamped her hands together and lifted them above her head. "I'm not lying to you. Did someone tell you anything, Ryleigh?"

Ryleigh turned her face sideways. "So why are you dating her behind my back?"

"... I am dating her?" Louis was dumbfounded. However, he remembered something and looked at her fixedly. "Did someone say something to you?"

Ryleigh bit her lip and snorted lightly.

Louis let go of her and sat up. His face sank slightly as he asked, "Did Xyla say something to you?"

This time, it was Ryleigh who was stunned. She sat upright and replied, "What do you expect her to say to me? That you guys went to a concert and had dinner together in secret?"

Louis did not say anything in return. Sure enough, his guess was right.

Seeing the dark expression on Louis' face, Ryleigh threw herself on the bed and said, "Get out. I don't want to see you now."

"Ryleigh..." Louis took a deep breath and said disappointingly, "You don't trust me?"

Ryleigh was stunned, but she closed her eyes and did not say anything.

Chapter 996

Ryleigh did not know if Louis was worth her trust. Maybe it was not because she did not believe in him, but it was just that she... She cared too much.

Louis turned around and was about to leave. However, Maisie just happened to walk up to the door at that moment, so she leaned against the door. "Where are you going?"

Ryleigh heard her voice, turned over, and sat up, looking as if she was extremely aggrieved. "Zee..."

Maisie glanced at her, walked up to Louis, and gave off a pregnant smile. "Are you going to find Xyla and settle the account with her?"

Louis rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I'm only going to ask her..."

"She has nothing to do with these photos." Maisie passed by him and walked toward Ryleigh.

Louis was stunned, while Ryleigh was also taken aback.

Seeing that Ryleigh had been crying again, Maisie chuckled. "You fool, were you just going to sit aside as Louis was about to go to Xyla and give her hell because of this matter? How much longer would this matter continue if I were not to come over?"

Ryleigh was a little puzzled. "Zee, do you know something?"

Louis came over, and he was still bewildered at what Maisie had just said. "What are the photos about?"

Maisie handed him the photos in her hand. He grabbed them, took a look at them, and frowned.

Ryleigh pulled Maisie. "Zee, what's going on?"

Maisie poked her head with her fingertips. "You should always get to the bottom of things first before starting to cry. How old are you? You're still acting like how Daisy would. Do I still have to take care of you like your mother?"

Ryleigh asked hesitantly, "Then, should I call Mr. Goldmann 'Dad' from now on?"

"He wouldn't want a daughter as dumb as you are," Maisie gave off a despising look and then stared at Louis. "I asked Xyla about the photos. You were shooting the pilot film of the music documentary at that time. The director's team and Charles Nixon from your academy were all there too."

Louis nodded. "Yes, these photos were taken during the shooting, but what you see in the photo isn't the truth. This photo... It seems to have been photoshopped. Charles was by my side at that time."

Charles and the others had all been removed from the photo to make it look like only the two of them were on a date. Ryleigh was momentarily astonished and looked at him. "If you guys were only shooting a pilot film, then why did you hide it from me?"

Louis felt helpless. "Even if I didn't tell you, you'd still get to know when it's released. Apart from that, I have absolutely nothing to do with Xyla, so I don't think I need to explain everything to you all the time. It is up to you to decide whether you want to believe in me or not." If she were to have faith in me, all explanations would be redundant because the truth would soon be revealed. 'But these photos are clearly part of a scheme. So, if I were to explain everything to her without getting to the bottom of this matter, all my efforts would be in vain if she still didn't believe it.'

Ryleigh did not say anything. Maisie glanced at her. "Ryleigh, who sent these photos to you?" Ryleigh paused for a split second. "I don't know either. These photos were originally sent to my email address."

"They were sent to your email address?" Maisie was stunned for a short moment and wondered. "Does anyone else know your email address?"

Ryleigh shook her head. "No one knows about it, only some of my former classmates, but they wouldn't try to contact me out of the blue, right? And the email account that sent me those photos isn't listed as one of my acquaintances either."

It seemed like the person who knew Ryleigh's email address was a total stranger.

But those who knew Ryleigh's email address could only be her acquaintances, but that person actually created a new account just not to raise suspicion.

At Blackgold...

Maisie walked to the administration department, and all the staff smiled and greeted her when they saw her. "Mrs.

Goldmann."

Maisie smiled at each and every one of them, walked to the door of the office, and knocked on the door.

Chapter 997

Nolan was looking down at some documents. "Come in."

Maisie pushed the door and went in, while Nolan picked up the coffee on the desk and took a sip from it. His eyes had not left the documents ever since she came in, and he thought it was Quincy who had entered his office. "What's the matter?"

Maisie walked around the desk, approached him, and reached out for him, but Nolan grabbed her wrist immediately.

Seeing that it was her, Nolan pulled her toward him, had her sit in his arms, and rubbed the bridge of her nose. "Did you just ambush me

"You're the one who's so focused on your work and didn't realize that it's me." Maisie wrapped her arms around his neck and sat closer to him. "Did you think that it was Quincy?"

He smiled. "If it were him, I'd send him to Afrenika."

Maisie stroked his cheek with her fingertip while he instantly grasped it and kissed it." Are you here to pay me a warm and lovely visit again?

Maisie got up from his arms, went around him, and hugged him from behind. "Keep dreaming. I want you, my husband, to help me look into an email account."

Nolan asked Maisie to send him the email address.

She watched from the side as he operated on his laptop until he traced the email address back to its source IP address. She was momentarily stunned when she saw the findings. "Bassburgh Private School?

Colton and Daisy's school?"

While she was still pondering about it, Nolan pulled her back into his arms." Aren't you going to reward me?"

Maisie felt itchy when he bit her ear and avoided him with a chuckle. "Stop it. This is serious."

Nolan kissed her and smirked. "Have I ever been serious in front of you?"

Maisie kissed his neck as he breathed heavily, but she drew the line on his neck and only caressed him under his suit.

Nolan lowered his gaze and stared at her. His gaze dimmed as he lowered his voice." You bad girl." She stopped just before things got even more intimate, got up, gave Nolan a sideways glance, raised her eyebrows, and said with a chuckle, "So, you can now play by yourself."

Nolan wanted to grab onto her, but she ran away. He stared at her as she left, feeling slightly angry and amused. "We'll see how I get back at you tonight."

Maisie gave the IP address to Ryleigh, and the latter was surprised and a little confused. "But I don't know anyone from Bassburgh Private School..."

Maisie lifted her gaze and stared at her." You seem to have forgotten that someone is teaching there."

Ryleigh paused for a while and thought of something all of a sudden, and her expression looked as if she was in a daze." T-This is impossible. It can't be him. Why would he do this?"

When Nolan found out that the email was sent from the private school, Maisie knew who it was immediately.

He was very likely to be the one who had done it.

“Zee, could you have made a mistake?” Ryleigh looked at her, obviously hoping to hear from Maisie that it was her mistake.

Maisie sighed helplessly. “He did it because of you.” “Me?” Ryleigh was stunned again.

“Can’t you see it?” Maisie propped her chin against her palm and gave off a pregnant smile. “Joe had a thing for you when we were in high school.”

Ryleigh was frozen in place. She could not tell if Maisie was joking anymore, and she was even more shocked by the fact that

Joe liked her.

“But why would...” Ryleigh could not help but clench the glass in her hand, and she lowered her gaze.

“Why would Joe fall for me? The three of us had a great time together while we were in high school, and he and I were like great buddies and besties. Why would he have a thing for me?”

“A beacon doesn’t shine on its own base. You’re looking at your relationship with him from within, so it’s only natural for you not to be able to see everything clearly.” Maisie leaned back in the chair. “Didn’t you realize back then that Joe’s attitude toward you was different from that that I got from him?”

She then added, “He’d help you queue for lunch. He’d get the juice you like prepared for you on time every time we headed to the canteen. He didn’t even remember what I like to drink, but he could remember yours like it was the back of his hands. Whenever you ran into trouble and asked him for help, didn’t he always try his best to help you? And when you faced difficulties, he was the one who comforted you by your side and listened to your problems. Not to mention that his gaze looked different when he was looking at you.”

Chapter 998

Ryleigh could not even utter a single word after a long time. She had always regarded Joe as her best friend-she would even categorize Joe as one of her confidants because he understood her so well.

However, she did not know that Joe understood her because he did so with all his heart.

“But... Why didn’t he tell me?” Ryleigh could not understand.

Maisie picked up the teacup, and her eyes were fixed on the rippling tea. ‘The feelings that he has for you are more than friends but less than lovers. Once he crosses the line and tells you what he’s wanted to tell you all this while, some things will never return to how they were before that, and that can ruin a friendship.’

Having said that, Maisie raised her gaze and glanced at Ryleigh. 'Are you sure that you wouldn't be frightened by him and stay away from him after confessing to you all of a sudden back then?' Ryleigh did not know what to say for a while. After all, she had never thought about the answer to the question. "What would I do if Joe had confessed to me back then? Maisie placed her hand on the back of Ryleigh's hand. "I know you've always regarded Joe as your best friend, but no matter what, you have to come forward to solve this matter yourself."

"What?" Ryleigh was taken aback and then pursed her lips. "But what if this is a misunderstanding..." "I'll apologize to Joe in person if that's the case. Ryleigh, if you really don't want your relationship with Joe to go beyond a point of no return, go and tell him everything in person. If you can still be friends after that, then take him back as the friend that you value the most in life. But if you can't move on as friends after that, you can only take it as a misfortune." Maisie paused for a bit, stood up slowly with her arms propping against the desk, and picked up her handbag. "Some things have to be made clear as soon as possible."

Ryleigh remained motionless in her chair after Maisie left. She lowered her gaze, pursed her lips, took out her phone, and found Joe's

contact number from her phone's contact list.

That noon...

After Joe finished with his last class, he came to the place where Ryleigh had asked him to meet her at, which was a park near their old high school. Joe got out of the car while Ryleigh waited for him on a swing, swaying back and forth gently. She raised her head when she sensed footsteps approaching, and for a moment, she felt so familiar and yet so strange.

Joe smiled. "Why would you think of asking me out all of a sudden?"

"Joe, I heard... I heard that you have a thing for me." Ryleigh looked away, remained silent for a short while, and suddenly asked him with a euphemistic tone, "But we've always been great friends, so it's impossible for you to fall for me, isn't it? There must be a misunderstanding, right?"

In fact, she hoped that she was mistaken too, and she wished to hear him deny everything.

After a moment of silence, Joe did not answer her directly but sat down on the swing beside her. His lips then moved. "Do you want the truth?"

She nodded absentmindedly.

"Yes." Joe turned to look at her and responded and then continued while she was still lost in her astonishment. "I've always liked you."

They exchanged gazes for a minute, but she looked away hurriedly and stared at her feet without saying a thing. Joe turned to face her. "Ryleigh, I thought about confessing my feelings to you after our graduation, but I didn't have the courage to do so back then."

Ryleigh could not help but clench her hands tightly and just listened to him quietly. "I know I would definitely scare you if I were to have confessed to you back then, and I'd surely lose the chance to stay by your side as a friend."

Ryleigh frowned. "But, why can't we go back to being,"

Joe held the back of her hand.

Ryleigh was astounded, seemingly frightened by his actions, and forgot to react for a short while.

"I can't," he said as he leaned forward and stared at Ryleigh. "I can't just treat you as a friend, nor can I pretend not to care about you. I regret it now. I regret that I didn't tell you how I felt back then, even if it meant getting rejected by you."

Chapter 999

Ryleigh retracted her hand subconsciously. "Joe, but I've always only regarded you as my best friend. I've never thought about-"

Joe grabbed her by the shoulders, and his action made Ryleigh feel even more unfamiliar. "Joe, you-"
"Ryleigh, you once said that you wouldn't marry Louis, and it's just an arranged marriage..." Joe stroked her slightly cold cheek with his palm. "But the way you treated him when you were in the hospital made me realize that I might lose you very soon."

Ryleigh moved Joe's hand away, and her expression became slightly more serious. "Joe, you're the one who sent those photos to me, aren't you?"

He did not deny it, nor did he admit it. "What would you do if it's indeed me?"

Ryleigh's shoulders trembled, and her lips moved slightly. "Why would you do this? I believed in you, Joe. I didn't believe it even when Zee told me that it was you, and I thought that she was mistaken."

Joe tightened his grasp on her shoulder and bent over to get closer to her. "Because I want you to leave him."

Ryleigh's body froze slightly as she stared at Joe's possessive gaze in shock while he held her cheek. "I thought about giving you my blessings, but I realized that I couldn't do so. I'm sorry, Ryleigh, please forgive me for being selfish."

He wanted to kiss her, but Ryleigh pushed him away abruptly. "Joe, but I can't do that!"

Joe was astonished. Still, he stepped forward and clutched her shoulder even harder. "Have you fallen in love with him?"

"I... I..." Ryleigh was astonished by this question.

'Have I fallen in love with Louis?'

Thinking of the various arguments that she had had with Louis in the past, although they were all infuriating, she really did not hate it.

Just when she was a little distracted, a lip pressed down against hers forcefully, stealing her breath at once.

Ryleigh's expression changed in shock, and she resisted even more intensely. She started pushing harder and harder, but he came at her even more fiercely too.

A sharp slap slashed through the air and pierced into the sky.

A mark appeared on Joe's cheek, while Ryleigh's face looked pale as she shuddered from head to toe.

She did not even take a glance at Joe and ran away. Joe turned around. "Ryleigh!"

Ryleigh ignored him, raised her hand to wipe her tears, and continued to run forward. Her car was parked across the road, so she just stepped out off the sidewalk without noticing the red light.

Joe's expression changed in an instant when he saw something, and he yelled, "Ryleigh Hill!"

Ryleigh turned her head, and what caught her eye was a truck that was charging toward her. The horn and brakes sounded at the same time, overwhelming the whole section of the road.

Ryleigh was pushed away abruptly before she knew what was going on, and she fell to the ground immediately. The truck was forced to stop in the middle of the road, and the nearby vehicles honked as they had to slow down.

A few passersby ran over and asked her if she was alright, but her ears were buzzing, and she could not hear a thing that they were saying.

However, when she slowly turned her head around and looked over, Joe had already been swept under the truck.

She was shocked, and her pupils dilated gradually as beads of tears rolled down her cheeks.

In the evening, at the Blue Bay villa...

Nolan was watching a drama with Maisie on the couch when her cell phone rang all of a sudden, and the smile on her face stiffened instantly after picking up the call.

Maisie sat up abruptly, and Nolan put down the remote control. "What's wrong?"

She rushed upstairs. "I need to get changed and go to the hospital."

Nolan chose to accompany her to the hospital in the end. The two arrived at the hospital and saw Ryleigh sitting in the corridor with a wound or two. She seemed to be at a loss and looked bewildered.

"Ryleigh!" Maisie dashed toward her, and Louis, Helios, and Barbara just happened to come out of the elevator at this time.

Chapter 1000

Seeing that Ryleigh's body was trembling, Louis dashed straight up to her, squatted in front of her, and held her cold hands. "What happened?"

Maisie looked at her at the same time.

Ryleigh burst into tears. "I'm sorry... I'm truly sorry... I really didn't mean it..." She was at a loss, felt afraid and uneasy, and all her emotions surged over the top in a single moment, causing her to break down.

Louis brought her into his arms as she kept shaking, crying, and apologizing.

Maisie noticed something when the doctor came out of the emergency room at the exact moment and asked, "Which among you is Joe Watson's family member?" Ryleigh stopped crying, pushed Louis away, and stood up tremblingly. "I... I'm his friend." The doctor walked up to her. "Do you know any of his family members?"

Ryleigh was unable to speak, so Maisie approached the doctor and answered, "I'll contact his family on behalf of the hospital, but may I know what happened to him?"

The doctor looked solemn and sighed. "I'm sorry, We've done everything within our capability."

Those words struck like a thunderbolt in Ryleigh and Maisie's ears.

Maisie was stunned in place, unable to return to her senses, while Ryleigh staggered backward as if every single ounce of energy had been drawn from her body, and her eyesight began to go dizzy.

Seeing that she fainted all of a sudden, Louis supported her immediately." Ryleigh!"

He then picked her up and ran toward the emergency room.

Helios and Barbara were unaware of what had happened, so they could only stare at Maisie.

Nolan stood behind Maisie, then walked over and wrapped his arms around her shoulders after a short while. He did not say a word and only accompanied her silently.

Ryleigh had a long dream, dreaming of scenes from back when she was in high school.

"Ryleigh, what would you like to eat today?"

"Ryleigh, you didn't do your homework again? Take mine, and remember not to copy everything word by word. If not, the teacher will find out about it."

"Ryleigh, what movie do you want to watch on the weekend? And what do you want to eat? I'll treat you to some snacks."

"Do you want the truth?"

"I've always liked you."

The scene shifted to the day when they graduated. When they were getting ready for the graduation photo, some students teased that Ryleigh was too fierce, not gentle, and she would not be able to get married in the future.

And Joe, who was standing behind Ryleigh, heard those comments. "I'll marry Ryleigh if she can't get herself married in the future."

Ryleigh turned around, took off her hat, and threw it at him. "Are you saying that I won't be able to get myself married in the future!?"

Seeing that Joe was smacked, several classmates laughed.

Ryleigh slowly opened her eyes, and everything turned into smoke and disappeared in front of her eyes at the end.

Tears streamed down from the corners of her eyes and drenched the pillow.

Louis stood at the door but did not walk inside. Maisie and Nolan came over when he was about to turn around and leave.

Maisie asked hoarsely. "Is she awake?"

Louis nodded.

Maisie stood at the door, took a glance inside, and said to Louis. "I already know the truth of the matter, and this might

affect your relationship, so..."

"I know." Louis turned to look at Ryleigh. "I'll be with her as she gets through it. If one year isn't enough, then make it a few more years." Maisie lowered her gaze and said nothing.

Three days had passed after this incident. Ryleigh was in the same state throughout all those days-she did not talk nor eat, and all she did was stare out the window in a daze.