

Chapter 141 - The Darkest Secrets Of Jiang Corporation

Tuesday.

Li Lanni could barely think about anything else when she entered the studio, and her increasingly reddening cheeks gave her away.

"Eh? Someone is very happy today. Tell me, did something good happen? Tell me, tell me!" Cheng Yu cheerfully pulled her chair closer and demanded gossip.

Li Lanni coughed to stop herself from smiling and showed Cheng Yu her wrist. "I got a new bracelet. Isn't it pretty?"

"Wow. It's so beautiful!" Cheng Yu exclaimed honestly. But even then, she felt there was more to it.

When did Li Lanni not have a beautiful bracelet on her wrist or a necklace around her neck, or earrings at least? She must have a collection of the pretty jewelry in her home, each worth a fortune, all of which she only treated like the accessories they were. Since when did she ever pay so much attention to a bracelet? Cheng Yu's eyebrows rose in curiosity. "Was it a present? Look at you, you're blushing! Did Ji Xiehan give it to you? What happened next? Did you kiss him in return? Wait, have you guys made love yet?"

Aaah... am I going to be a godmother soon?"

"So, gossipy." A displeased groan interrupted Cheng Yu's cheerful ramble. She looked back to see Cedric plastered next to her.

"Hey! What's wrong with you? You are the one who invaded my space, and now you are complaining that I'm gossipy?"

"Whether I'm in your space or ten meters away, that doesn't change the fact that you're gossipy." He yawned.

"You...!" Cheng Yu wanted to explode. She huffed and ignored him, turning back to Li Lanni. "Forget him. He must be sad because 'his precious' Ruby left the class, so he wants to take it out on people."

"Ruby left the class?" Li Lanni was surprised.

"You didn't know? She was not even in class yesterday. I heard she was asked to quit. Right. You have better things to do now. You don't even have time to concentrate on news that's none of your business."

Li Lanni wanted to laugh. Why did it sound like Cheng Yu was happy about Ruby's leaving?

"Are you really going to ignore me? I'm still here, you know." The hornbill at Cheng Yu's side howled for attention.

Cheng Yu rolled her eyes and ignored him. "Speaking of which, you should take a look at the news. I heard..." Cheng Yu proceeded to talk about celebrity gossip.

Li Lanni took out her phone and did a search too. Indeed, she had been so preoccupied with Ji Xiehan and other things lately that she hadn't caught up on much entertainment news.

She had just opened an article with a funny title when a more catchy title in capital letters popped up.

[THE DARKEST SECRETS OF JIANG CORPORATION.]

Without a second thought, she opened the article and found even more interesting news.

[As one of the top ten companies in the country, the Jiang Corporation has been getting better and better in the business world. Yet, here come ten SHOCKING things about this multibillion company that will make you cringe. You're welcome!

[1] In June 1981, The [censored] forced [censored] to [censored] after [censored]

[2] Many years later, in March 2011, The former [Censored] was also a part of the [censored] that [censored]

[3] Last year in January the current [Censored] followed the trend and [censored]

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After all this madness, the tenth clause was,

[10] If the Jiang Corporation takes down this post, I will release the whole article without censoring any words.

...

Li Lanni exited the article with a cringe. "What kind of nonsense is this?" Why would someone create such a catchy article then censor everything? What stupid prank was this?

Seriously, all those 'ten shocking things' were censored. The uncensored words didn't even make a sense at all. Who was so idle?

Apparently, Cheng Yu was also reading that article, and so were many students.

"Do you think the Jiang Corporation caught hold of this article and censored its content before it got released? No one could be so idle as to do this, right?" Cheng Yu speculated.

"Or... there's someone that is this idle." The thread starter was anonymous, but their style of writing made Li Lanni feel a déjà vu.

"What do you mean?" Cheng Yu leaned in and lowered her voice. "Wait. You're not thinking..."

Surely, V couldn't be that idle, right?" Cheng Yu also had the same feeling when she remembered Xia Luna's anger with Jiang Xingyu.

"She is so idle lately."

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After the class, Li Lanni went along with Cheng Yu to speak to Xia Luna.

Goldenwing Apartments.

"My dear unpredictable sister. May I know what this is all about?" Li Lanni asked curiously. No matter what angle one looked at it, Xia Luna wouldn't gain anything from doing this. She would only gain trouble at most, if the people from Jiang Corporation found out that she was the one behind it. Did she think her life was too boring and needed some trouble to spice it up?

The girl reclined leisurely in her seat, looking happier than she did in the last few days. "Does it matter why I'm doing it? It's only for fun."

Li Lanni didn't know what to say. But she was curious. "Does the Jiang Corporation actually have dark secrets?"

Xia Luna replied nonchalantly, "None that I know."

"Then why haven't they taken down the thread yet?" Cheng Yu was puzzled.

"They wouldn't take the risk. What if I actually know some dark secrets? "

"..."

Li Lanni had nothing to say at her sister's antics and looked at Cheng Yu, who was equally speechless by her answer.

They could only watch on as people started speculating and asking numerous questions about what the Jiangs had done.

Xia Luna was crazy!

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The girls went ahead to chatter all afternoon.

"Have I told you yet? Lanni and Ji Xiehan kissed!" Cheng Yu excitedly said to Xia Luna.

"What, really? Congratulations!" Xia Luna looked excited for her sister.

Li Lanni was taken by surprise and playfully jabbed Cheng Yu. "Who told you we kissed?!"

"You blushed when I asked you. Doesn't that mean you kissed? Tell us, how was it? Were his lips soft and sweet? Did you let him touch you? How far did you go? Do you think you will be making love the next time you meet?"

Li Lanni cringed from all these questions. This perverted girl.

What was worse, Xia Luna was listening too, as though she was also curious. All that was left was her asking, "Do you think I will become an aunty soon?"

She blushed a little but answered anyway. "We did kiss, but... we can't make love unless we're official, right? I mean, there's nothing wrong with doing it now, but I'm not up for casual sex, so..."

"Hold on. You're not official?" Xia Luna scoffed.

"Yeah. How can you not be official? Are you waiting for permission from the skies?" Cheng Yu seconded.

"But... he hasn't asked me to be his girlfriend."

"Then ask him to be your boyfriend!" Cheng Yu and Xia Luna said at the same time, echoing each other's thoughts.

"What? Wouldn't that make me seem too unrestrained?" Li Lanni rested her cheek in her hand and looked them in askance.

"Really? Just what nonsense have you been reading?" Xia Luna chided. "If a man truly loves you, it does not matter who confesses first."

"Go on! Ask him out and confess. In fact, chances are that you will not have to say a word before says, "Yes, my love. I'll gladly be your man." Cheng Yu deepened her voice to imitate a man's voice, making them all burst into laughter.

"In fact, do it right now. You can ask him out tomorrow after work. Xia Luna urged her sister with a sparkle in her voice.

"Uhm...now, why so soon? I can ask him about this matter later....." Li Lanni hesitated.

"Why later? Sooner the better, call him now." Cheng Yu also pressed her.

Under their combined coercion, Li Lanni took out her phone, but still hesitated, "Er... I'm too embarrassed to make a call. I can just send a message, right?"

Under her sister's and friend's waiting gazes, she tried to compose a message and kept deleting it.

Then Xia Luna grabbed her phone and typed decisively. [Xiehan, are you free tomorrow in the evening? Let's have dinner together. I have something to tell you.] Then she sent it before Li Lanni could intervene.

Within a few seconds, Ji Xiehan called back.

Li Lanni glared at the girls to shut up before picking it. "H-hello..."

A short silence followed before he asked, "At what time?"

"7pm... you can choose the venue." She was too nervous to think of it.

Ji Xiehan agreed and hung up.

Li Lanni threw her phone beside her and squealed. She had just asked a man out!

"Make sure you kiss tomorrow!"

"Kiss? Make out at the very least!"

The girls chatted away happily, not knowing that trouble was looming their way.

Chapter 142 - You Forced Me To Do This

That night, in Jiang Xingyu's villa.

"That little..!" Jiang Xingyu really wanted to curse. How dare she?

He wouldn't have known who was behind that article if Ji Xiehan had not told him how good she was at programming and hacking. She had used an anonymous user account with a fake IP address, and the real address couldn't be traced even by the most proficient hacker he could hire. It was quite obvious now.

He knew that the article meant nothing and that Jiang Corporation didn't have any dirty secrets, at least none that he knew about. However, that was not what the higher-ups thought. They thought it was risky to pull down the post because whether it was true or not, such an article would ruin Jiang Corporation's image, whether it was there or not.

The only thing they could do was get the thread starter to admit that they were only messing around - which was impossible because they couldn't even trace them.

Jiang Xingyu was on the verge of exploding. Didn't that girl leave him? What was this for? Was it fun to mess with him? Fine. It was still fine to mess around with him, but why the heck was she attacking his family's company?

He had enough of it!

He took his car keys and sped to Ji Xiehan's personal mansion.

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Ji Xiehan was feeling quite happy lately. The little beauty he had been courting for months finally warmed up to him, and she even kissed his cheek! How could he not be happy?

He thought he was at the peak of his happiness when his phone chimed with a new message. He opened it to reveal the content, and his heart almost jumped right out of his mouth.

[ML: Xiehan, are you free tomorrow in the evening? Let's have dinner together. I have something to tell you.]

He had to read the message over and over, as though afraid he had read it wrong or that he had an illusion or that it would disappear.

Maybe the way he had opened the chatbox was wrong.

He closed the chatbox and opened it again.

The message was still there.

His Lanni actually sent that?

As though to ensure that her phone was not hacked, he called her.

Then came the nervous voice at the other end, confirming that she was indeed asking him out.

"I am happy!!" He jumped and punched the air as soon as the call was hung up.

Wait. What could she want to tell him? It was something nice, right? It had to be something about their relationship. After all, they were in good terms right now, and her tone sounded like she was looking forward to seeing him the next evening.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" His excitement skyrocketed.

When he had calmed down a bit, he opened a bottle of rare wine to celebrate and started pouring some in a stem glass when the door opened.

"Look who finally decided to seek human company." Ji Xiehan mocked when he saw his friend walk in and flop onto a sofa as though he owned the place. He had ruined his happy moment.

"I'm not here to drink with you. You have to help me." Jiang Xingyu went straight to the point.

"I know what you want." Ji Xiehan took another stem glass and filled it with wine, intending to offer it to his friend, but when he remembered how much Jiang Xingyu had been drinking lately, he retracted the glass and started drinking on his own. He gave Jiang Xingyu water instead.

The latter didn't mind it. "So, are you going to help me?"

"No." Ji Xiehan rejected firmly.

"Why not?"

Ji Xiehan sat on another sofa and regarded his friend. He had become haggard in just a few days. Even then, he couldn't help. "I know you want me to find your Xia's location because of the thread she started about your family's company.

Actually, I know where she lives, but I cannot tell you because she is my future sister-in-law. I'm planning to confess to Lanni. How can I offend my in-laws even before we start dating officially?"

Jiang Xingyu stared daggers at his friend. He regretted coming here. How could he forget his childhood friend for a woman he met not long ago? Did he come to ask for help or to he dealt with dog food? This horrible friend! "Whatever. You have to help me. I am your friend." Jiang Xingyu demanded.

"I will not help you do something you will regret." He looked at his friend sincerely. "You are angry. Only when you are calm enough can I offer to help you. Even then, I need to get permission from my sister-in-law. I cannot guarantee that she will agree, and if she doesn't, I will respect her privacy."

"Whatever." Jiang Xingyu was done with this girlfriend-slave, or was it, sister-in-law slave?

He stood up and left. If he wanted to drag Xia Luna out, he had other ways to do so. He just didn't want to ever resort to this.

'Xia Luna, blame it on yourself. You have forced me to do this.'

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The next day, Li Lanni stayed back after class to try and improve her sketches. Cheng Yu stayed back too because she had been unable to complete her work on time.

Just when they were almost done and started talking about what to do later in the afternoon, Cheng Yu's phone rang. It was an unfamiliar number, making her frown.

"Hello..." she answered hesitantly.

"Sis... save me!" A muffled cry came from the other side.

"Xiao Ying!" She exclaimed in shock when she heard a familiar voice from the other side.

Li Lanni frowned when she heard her shrill cry. Cheng Yu's brother?

"Xiao Ying, where are you? What happened? Did that woman bully you?" She asked, referring to their mother.

"Do you want your brother back?" A deep male voice boomed into the speaker, instead of her brother's making Cheng Yu tremble.

"Who are you?" Cheng Yu asked after controlling her shivering voice.

"That doesn't matter. Do you want your brother or not? If not, I will give him to one of the bosses..."

"No, no, no! Please don't do anything to him." No matter how strong she tried to be, tears stained Cheng Yu's face.

"Good. Then follow my instructions. Don't you dare think of calling the police."

"Yes... yes, I will not tell the police! Where is my brother?"

Li Lanni kept her mouth shut, to minimize her presence and to not to alert the opposite party.

When the call was hung up, she finally held Cheng Yu, who had slumped onto a chair. "Who was that? They have your brother?"

"What should I do? He hung up... is he going to kill Xiao Ying? It's all my fault! I knew that woman wouldn't take good care of him, but I still left him with her. He's been kidnapped now, and I don't know what they did to him. It's all my fault..."

"Calm down, okay? Tell me what they told you." Li Lanni tried to calm her friend.

"He told me to go and find him... but didn't reveal the location. I..."

"I'll call the police. Do you trust me?" Li Lanni looked into her friend's eyes and asked sincerely.

Cheng Yu hesitated but then nodded after calming down.

"If they call again, you go wherever they ask you to go. They may ask you to break your phone or throw it away to avoid being tracked, so I'll give you mine... hide it safely. I'll let the police track it." This was more or less a trial and error, but Li Lanni was confident.

Cheng Yu nodded. It was the only choice she had now.

Just as Li Lanni was about to dash out and run to the nearest police station that wasn't far away, Cheng Yu's phone rang again. She received it and put it on the speaker.

This time, the man sounded harsher.

"Acting smart with me, huh? Do you think you can outsmart me?"

"I didn't..." Cheng Yu denied in tears.

"Your friend is rather cunning. Ask her to smash her phone immediately if you want your brother back safely."

Li Lanni was just as surprised as Cheng Yu. How did he know what they were doing? Were they being monitored? A chill ran down their spine.

"Her phone or your brother. Make a choice. I'm watching."

Li Lanni didn't want to risk it. She reluctantly smashed her phone, much to the man's satisfaction.

"Good. Now go to the underground parking lot."

Li Lanni had a strange feeling about this.

However, they might really kill Cheng Yu's brother if she tried anything funny, so they both went along.

"Enter the black car and give your phone to the driver."

Did they really have a choice? They could only mechanically follow the instructions.

"I think this is strange.." Li Lanni said and earned a glare from the buff driver.

Chapter 143 - Make Your Way Here

She glared right back at him. "What? Did anyone say we couldn't talk?" She harrumphed and remained silent. Cheng Yu wasn't in the mood to talk anyway.

The driver deliberately kept using longer routes and going in circles, infuriating Li Lanni and Cheng Yu, then only drove to private property after an hour.

Wait. A villa?

"Go on in." The man instructed.

They went in as instructed. Li Lanni held Cheng Yu's shoulder. "Xiao Ying will be alright. I will not let anything happen to him." She didn't know why she was so confident either, but she just was.

They entered the villa, the door shutting heavily behind them. They heard heavy and firm footsteps emanating from the corridor.

They grew more anxious each second that passed, and just when they were about to break down, the man showed himself.

"Jiang Xingyu!" Cheng Yu cursed.

"I. Knew. It!" Li Lanni gritted her teeth. Who could kidnap anyone from Star Art International and even use the underground parking lot that was reserved for the important figures in the company? Who else could access the security cameras and know what exactly they were doing? No wonder she felt something was wrong with all this.

"Nice to see you again, beauties." Jiang Xingyu beamed and went over to a couch. "Take your seats."

He glanced at Li Lanni as though in disbelief. "You almost ruined my plan and landed me in trouble, do you know that?"

Li Lanni scoffed and ignored him.

Jiang Xingyu didn't mind. "You both know why you're here, don't you?"

Seeing that the culprit was Jiang Xingyu, both of them relaxed. Cheng Yu even dared to scold him. "You idiot! If you are doing this to get to my friend, I swear, I will not let you see her!"

"Bloody fool. I will never let you go anywhere near my sister." Li Lanni spat. This disrespectful man did not deserve her sister.

"Heh." Jiang Xingyu chuckled and looked at one of his bodyguards. "Bring the boy."

In a few seconds, a buff bodyguard dragged a teenager in.

"Sis!" The boy tried to run to his sister as soon as he saw her.

"Oh no, you don't!" Jiang Xingyu laughed and stopped him. "Your sister still has a task to do. If she doesn't..."

He took out something from his pocket. It looked like a remote control but had a red button flickering on its center.

"A detonator?!" Li Lanni freaked out.

Cheng Yu was too shocked to say a word.

"Yup. And the bomb is in his stomach. I will press the button if you do not ask Xia Luna to make her way here."

Li Lanni gulped and glared at him. "Ha! Try another joke. No one's calling my sister over, and you are not pressing any button."

"You have only been in her life for a few days, and this is none of your business, so shut up." Jiang Xingyu glared at her. If Li Lanni was not at the wrong place at the wrong time, he would have already made Cheng Yu reveal Xia Luna's whereabouts.

"You!"

"This is between Xia Luna and I. You may be twins, but you don't get to make decisions for her. Don't anger me." He then turned to Cheng Yu. "Xiao Yu, what do you say? Do you want your brother back?"

Cheng Yu saw how scared her brother was and cursed hundreds of times in her heart. No matter who she chose, she would have betrayed the other.

Jiang Xingyu saw her uneasiness and asked one of the bodyguards for something. The man left the room and returned with a phone, Cheng Yu's phone. Jiang Xingyu gave it back to her. "Go ahead. Dial her number."

Li Lanni so badly wanted to take off her hairpin and shove it at the man's neck, but the fool may really press the detonator.

She could only watch bitterly as Cheng Yu dialed Xia Luna's number and gave the phone to Jiang Xingyu, which made her cringe. If he only wanted to call her, shouldn't he just have stolen her phone or Cheng Yu's? Why did he have to scare an innocent teenager in the process?

Xia Luna picked the call after only one ring. "Xiao Yu, are you home yet? I..."

"Xia Luna." Jiang Xingyu interrupted with a laugh.

"Why do you have Xiao Yu's phone?" Xia Luna sounded startled.

"Why don't you make a guess, honey?" He taunted, earning a fierce glare from Li Lanni, but he continued anyway. "I have the most interesting line up of the year right here with me. Want to hear it? Cheng Yu, Cheng Ying, and Li Lanni. Make your way here obediently or..."

"Damn you, Jiang Xingyu!"

Xia Luna was so angry that she could kill the bastard. How dare he kidnap the people she cared about?

She knew exactly where he was: in his villa. So she changed at record speed and made her way there.

Even though she had rushed, she didn't seem to have any sense of urgency - majorly because she knew that Jiang Xingyu wouldn't really hurt anyone for her. In fact, she would have ignored the situation and

let him give up and send Cheng Yu back. But if Li Lanni was missing for too long, Li Yuming would be worried sick, and the last thing anyone wanted to be was for more people or the police to be involved.

Xia Luna only arrived several minutes later, sauntering in like she owned the place and in male clothes and makeup that made her pass off as a young man instead of the delicate beauty she was.

"Look who finally made their way in." Jiang Xingyu said with a chuckle, giving her a once over.

"Luna, you shouldn't have come here." Li Lanni said with a tinge of worry in her voice, and Cheng Yu had the same thought despite knowing that if Xia Luna was the one who got kidnapped, both of them would rush over without hesitation.

Xia Luna walked right over to Jiang Xingyu and sat beside him, sparing Li Lanni a glance. "Don't worry sister, I needed to speak to him anyway." She looked at the man who was curiously studying her. "They can leave now, right?"

"Of course." Jiang Xingyu held out a hand towards a bodyguard who gave him a new phone. He handed it to Li Lanni. "I owe you a phone."

"I don't need your charity." Li Lanni ignored it with a scoff. All she wanted to do right now was kill him. Why was her sister even agreeing to speak to him? But since Xia Luna insisted, she could only shoot the man a fierce warning glare and head out with Cheng Yu and Cheng Ying.

"What about the bomb?" Cheng Yu asked worriedly as they stood. "Won't you remove it?"

Before Jiang Xingyu could reply, the teenager looked up at Cheng Yu apologetically and said, "I'm sorry, sis. I played along with him. There is no bomb. The detonator is fake too."

When Li Lanni heard this, she had the urge to set an actual bomb in that villa. How dare that bastard use a child?

Cheng Yu was speechless in anger and pinched his cheeks slightly. "Do you know how worried I was? How could you even play along with a stranger to prank your sister?"

The boy was truly apologetic. "I didn't know he would make you so worried. Besides, he promised to give you a permanent, well-paying job, so you don't have to struggle anymore. He also promised that if you still couldn't take care of me, he would take me to a nice boarding school so you won't have to worry about me anymore. And if mother did anything to bother our peace, he would put her behind bars."

Cheng Yu was displeased. That man had used everything her brother cared about to trick him. She didn't even care whether what he promised the young chap was real or not. It was still wrong of him.

Cheng Yu and Li Lanni were not the only ones that were angry and disappointed. Inside the villa, Xia Luna was even more furious.

She was so angry that she remained silent and sat on the sofa obediently, in fear of losing control of herself if she did anything.

"My love, you wrote a pretty long article. What now, cat got your tongue?" He teased her sarcastically.

"Jiang Xingyu, don't provoke me!" She gritted her teeth in anger. Who the heck was his love?! Wasn't he the one who cowered out of his so-called love? She glared at him, her eyes threatening to set him on fire.

"Oh, someone's got her claws and fiery eyes out. And may I know why you sound different?" Her voice was more profound than usual. It could pass off as a young man's, and in some way, it made him feel it was familiar.. When she didn't answer, he asked another question. "May I know why you are wearing men's clothes?"

Xia Luna rolled her eyes. "Get them to leave." She said, referring to the bodyguards in the room.

"You heard her." He glanced at them, and they swiftly retreated.

"May I know what I'm doing here?" She asked, and while he was distracted for a second, she shot to her feet.

Jiang Xingyu grabbed her collar, quickly making her sit back down. "You will have to try harder than that." He had known she would try such a thing.

"What do you want?"

"I'll show you." The man said before standing and pulling her to her feet, then leading her to a room she knew all too well. She didn't try to struggle and obediently let him take her to his room. There were many chances to escape. She just needed to earn his trust for a minute, and of course, she wasn't planning to leave without giving him a piece of her mind.

Making her sit on the bed, he held her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "Make that thread disappear. You know what I'm talking about."

He walked over to the dressing table he rarely used and took out a small bottle from a drawer, tossing it at her. "Get that makeup off your face too. It's repulsive."

"And how is that any of your business?" She chortled.

"I don't want to think I'm keeping a man in my room. Get it off."

She harrumphed but still did as he said then proceeded to delete the thread. She was still distracted on her phone when he went over to the bed, pulled something from under it, and before she registered what he was doing, she felt a cold sensation on her ankle and a click sound.

It shocked her, and she looked down to see her ankle chained. "Seriously?"

"You are not leaving again, Xia Luna. Now, where were we?"

"Jiang Xingyu, unlock this thing!" She roared.

"I will, but not just yet."

Xia Luna saved her breath. She knew how unreasonable he could get when he let his emotions control him. Actually, she had already guessed that he might want to lock her up. Even then, she was still slightly shocked that he actually did. Did he think she was some pet?!

Fine. She would remain silent until he got bored and let her go. If not, she could not guarantee that she wouldn't decide to murder him.

The two of them were in for long days to come.

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Li Lanni's afternoon had been totally ruined by that Jiang bastard. If he did anything to hurt Xia Luna, she would kill him!

Once she and Cheng Yu parted ways, she bought a new phone and called her mother. Luckily because she had told Li Yuming that she might be later than usual today, the latter assumed she was still in Star Art International when she didn't hear from her. About her phone, she only said that she had accidentally broken it.

After she reached home, she laid in her bed and contemplated whether to cancel her date because she no longer felt like going anywhere. But then she needed to cheer up. She still had an hour or so to get ready, so she took a quick shower before finding something to change into.

She quickly changed into a burgundy dress, put on light makeup, and left the house. She did not want to keep Ji Xiehan waiting for too long.

On the way to the main door, she stopped by her mother's studio and let her know she was going out on a date with Ji Xiehan.

"You look so beautiful, I'm jealous of him." Li Yuming gushed. "You don't need to hurry back! You can spend the night at his place too." She beamed.

Li Lanni did not know what to say. Why was everyone so eager for her to do something naughty with Ji Xiehan?

Under the teasing gaze of her mother, she swiftly left home.

It took an hour to reach the restaurant Ji Xiehan had chosen for their date. It was her favourite restaurant-'Berry Cuisine'. She had only mentioned it once in the past in passing. At that time, their relationship was not even close as now and didn't expect him to remember it. His consideration touched her. When she arrived, Ji Xiehan was already waiting for her.

When Ji Xiehan saw her arrive, he stood up with a smile and pulled a chair for her like a gentleman.

"Thank you." Li Lanni returned a smile and sat down. As coincidental as it could get, he was wearing a burgundy bow tie. Li Lanni chuckled at the coincidence. Was this telepathy?

"I know you don't like flowers, so I got you this instead." He held out a box with a crystal hair clip in it.

"Thank you." Li Lanni took it from him and directly fixed it in her hair.

Both of them were nervous for the same reason, and their interaction became a bit restrained. He was wondering what she really wanted to tell him while she wondered how he would react to her confession.

To disperse the awkward atmosphere around them, he quickly called the waiter to order their meals. Li Lanni sighed in relief; she decided to talk about it after their dinner. They ate in silence as Li Lanni gathered her thoughts. Before she realized it, she had eaten a bit too much and felt a bit uncomfortable.

"Ji Xiehan, let's take a walk." She suggested when they were done eating.

"Okay." He settled the bill and led her out.

Li Lanni was getting more nervous with every passing second. He wouldn't reject her, would he? That would be too embarrassing. But considering how he been sticking to her, he must love her too, right?

"Ji..." She was about to speak when a young lad bumped into her.

"I'm so sorry! Miss, are you okay?" The young man hurriedly picked Li Lanni's purse that had fallen and gave it to her. "Here. I hope nothing is damaged. I'm so..." he froze when he saw Li Lanni's face.

"It's nothing. You may go." Li Lanni was uncomfortable from his gaze, and so was Ji Xiehan. He held her waist protectively.

The young man looked shocked and in disbelief. Seconds later, moisture gathered at the rims of his eyes. "Phoenix!"

He would have hugged Li Lanni if Ji Xiehan didn't stop him. He was still overjoyed nonetheless, wiping the tears that had already started falling from his eyes. "It really is you. I knew I shouldn't believe all that nonsense everyone kept saying about you. I knew you would come back. Are you coming back to the team?"

"Uhm... I think you got the wrong person. My name is not Phoenix." Li Lanni replied, still shocked at his antics.

"Of course, you are Phoenix. I could get my own name wrong, but I would never mistake anyone for you."

"She said she is not Phoenix. Please excuse us." Ji Xiehan was irritated that someone was ruining their time with his tears. He led Li Lanni away right after saying that.

"She really is Phoenix!" The young man mumbled. "Would anyone get their sworn sister wrong?"

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"What an 'entertaining' day." Li Lanni sighed when they finally got rid of the young man. First, she gets kidnapped and leaves her sister in the hands of a bastard, and now someone mistakes her for someone else?

"You really don't know him?" Ji Xiehan asked.

"I don't."

Ji Xiehan looked at her and said nothing else. What if that person was from her past? In the last few months, he had discovered that her past was quite questionable. There were many things he couldn't understand, no matter how hard he thought about it.

"Could it be Luna's alias?" Li Lanni thought out aloud. Her sister had more aliases than necessary. What if this was just one of them?

"It could be. You should ask her about it later." Ji Xiehan seconded. Indeed, Xia Luna was sneakier than Li Lanni. She was more likely to have such a strange alias, and since they looked alike, one could mistake them for each other.

Yet again, the mood had been ruined. Li Lanni no longer thought it was the right time for a confession. Especially not when she had started wondering what would happen if that Phoenix name was not Xia Luna's alias but hers instead.

...

At the same time, Xia Luna was also having an entertaining evening.

Her entertainment was watching Jiang Xingyu fawn all over her and literally beg her to eat.

"You don't want to eat nuggets? Then what do you want to eat? I will have it prepared for you." Jiang Xingyu pleaded, holding the seventh choice of food. She had wordlessly rejected the last six and wouldn't even say a word.

He was on the verge of breaking down. Knowing how stubborn Xia Luna was, letting her stay hungry until she decided to eat was definitely not an option.. She would rather starve to death than relent.

Chapter 145 - Get This Done With.

This went on for hours.

"What do you want?" He placed the umpteenth food tray on the table and asked helplessly.

"Let me go."

It was the same words she had said for hours.

"No, Xia. Anything but this."

"Then leave me alone." She retorted.

"I'll forcefully feed you instead." He threatened as his patience was wearing thin.

She scoffed and looked away. "If you think this will make me submit to you, in your freaking dreams!"

"Don't be stupid, Xia Luna! Haven't you had enough already?!" Jiang Xingyu roared. It was the first time he had ever raised his voice at her.

He took a deep breath when he realized what he had just done and took her hand. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout at you."

Xia Luna retracted her hand and pulled away from him, going as far as the chain could allow. "I don't know you anymore, Jiang Xingyu."

"And do I know you? You put on an act in front of me. Otherwise, are you going to claim that you transformed from an adorable little damsel to a carefree crossdresser within one year? If not, what are you trying to hide?"

"That's none of your business." She snapped.

"It's in every way, my business." He was tired of pleading with her. "Feigning nonchalance will not get you out of here. You can keep the pretense as much as you want!" He stormed out of the room.

Xia Luna shrugged and lay back on the bed. The chain was long enough to let her sleep, but it was still uncomfortable. She ignored it and tried to sleep. She curled up in bed as her shoulders shook slightly. She tried not to be scared.

Despite her stubbornness and strength, Xia Luna had one weakness that could break her apart. She was afraid of being trapped.

When she was little, her stepmother would often tie her using ropes or chains and lock her up in the storeroom as punishment. By the time her father found out what her stepmother had been doing, it was too late. It had already affected her mental health.

She had been trying to overcome this fear, yet this was precisely what Jiang Xingyu did in the name of love or whatever reason he had. He had trapped her.

...

Xia Luna tried to lull herself to sleep. No matter what that man did, she would not relent.

When she was a kid, her stepmother had tortured her in many ways leaving a psychological scar on her. What further harm could Jiang Xingyu possibly do to her? No one could hold a candle to that woman in torturing. Reminiscing those days made her grit her teeth in hatred and disgust.

Although that was what she thought, being locked up was not the only problem. After just a few hours, she was famished. This morning she had been too rushed to eat breakfast, and because she had rushed here, she didn't have time to eat lunch either.

Her stomach hurt from all the hunger pangs. If she kept this up, she might have gastritis. She was already starting to feel slight tremors in her body.

Just as she considered calling Jiang Xingyu back, the door opened, and a maid walked in with a tray of food.

"Madam, sir asked me to bring this. I warmed it up for you."

Xia Luna was too hungry and exhausted to keep resisting. So she accepted the food. "Thank you. Also, call me Luna next time."

"Sir ordered us to call you madam." The maid trembled and answered meekly.

Xia Luna was displeased. Madam? What madam? She was not married to him, and she wouldn't be. She was not even close to being his girlfriend. Why would he ask his servants to address her as the mistress of the house? Whatever. It was just a word. It wasn't like it would do anything to decrease her lifespan.

After filling her stomach, it was much easier to sleep this time. She didn't even care that she was in Jiang Xingyu's bed or that her ankle was chained.

Just as she drifted off to sleep, she heard the door open, followed by soft but firm footsteps that she recognized all too well.

She stiffened and pretended to be asleep.

Soon, the space beside her sank, and she knew he had laid down next to her. There was no movement for a while, and she assumed that he must be asleep.

Just when she was about to let out a sigh of relief, she felt him wrap a hand around her and bring her into his embrace.

She pretended to be in sleep contrast to the turmoil within her. She waited for what he would do next, but there were no movements again. He only held her in his arms and fell into a peaceful sleep.

If he had not forced her here in such a rude manner, this would have been one of those sweet memorable moments.

"Jiang Xingyu, I need to use the bathroom." She said after a while.

Jiang Xingyu was fast asleep, but when he heard her voicing her discomfort, he woke up immediately. He opened a safe where he retrieved the key and unlocked her chain, letting her go to the bathroom.

He was still paranoid, but he couldn't possibly guard her even when she went to the bathroom, could he? Well, he could if it wouldn't be absurd and outright stupid. He could only eagerly wait for her to come back.

...

After easing her discomfort, Xia Luna looked around.

Aside from the tiny window in the shower compartment, there was a larger frosted window near the bathtub. She looked around and saw a pair of scissors on the toiletry rack. Her eyes landed on the neatly folded towels on the next shelf.

Actually, if she really wanted to seize this chance to escape, it was easy as pie. Was Jiang Xingyu testing her? He did know that she didn't care, didn't he?

She robotically walked over to the rack and picked the pair of scissors. It was sharp and... it could help her in two different ways.

Either cut the towels and use them to make a rope to climb out of the window, or stab the man and teach him a lesson before leaving. Or both.

However, thinking of something, she put the scissors back.

She went back onto the bed and naturally lay back in his arms.

Jiang Xingyu let out an audible sigh. After letting her go on her own, he remembered the large window. When she didn't come out after a few minutes, he had almost believed that she climbed out. Then she surprised him by coming back and even snuggling in his arms. He kissed her head and hugged her closer.

It was only the next morning that he jolted, remembering that he had forgotten to put the chain back on her. As expected, she was no longer in the room.

"Damn it!" He cursed. He had been careless with her yet again.

He grabbed the nearest jeans he could get and swiftly wore it, grabbed his phone, and was about to make an order when the door opened and in she waltzed.

"You..."

Xia Luna walked in with a sweet smile. "I brought you breakfast."

Jiang Xingyu looked at her in a mashup of happiness and disbelief. "You only went to make me breakfast?" Not only did she not flee, but she also brought breakfast for him!

"Wash up and eat." She smiled yet again and placed the tray on the nightstand. "I didn't cook anything; it was the maids who prepared it. I was done eating, and you had not yet left the room, so I brought it up for you."

"Oh." Jiang Xingyu was still overjoyed that she cared about him.

He washed up at record speed and started eating.

He kept stealing glances at her. To be exact, he was blatantly staring. Xia Luna chuckled and questioned. "Why do you keep looking at me?"

"You didn't leave." Jiang Xingyu was still in disbelief. She had such a heaven-sent chance. If she wanted to leave, not even his bodyguards could stop her. He could guess as much because for someone to disappear for more than a year completely, she had to be a skilled trickster.

When she saw that he was done with his breakfast, she looked into his eyes and said in a solemn voice, "Jiang Xingyu, we need to talk. You are childish and absolutely annoying. You know that, right? I was willing to give you... to give us a chance, but then you ignored me. Why are you clinging to me now?"

"Wait, what? When did you do anything aside from run away from me, Xia? The last time I thought we would talk, but you must be addicted to running away.. The moment I let my guard down, you slipped away without giving me a chance to speak with you."

Chapter 146 - Misunderstanding?

Xia Luna furrowed her brows and slapped her forehead in realization. "I had to attend to an emergency at that time so I had to leave early, and you were in a deep sleep, but I left that note and told you to... wait, did you even read that note?"

From his expression, he probably didn't read it. Xia Luna just didn't know what to tell him. If he didn't read that note then... did she misunderstand his silence?

The turn of events also dumbfounded Jiang Xingyu. Wasn't that a mushy note about how she couldn't be with him?... if that was not a rejection note, what was it? Did he misunderstand her intentions?

Xia Luna glared at him fiercely. What was the meaning of all this ruckus then?

Whatever it was, she still needed to get this done with once and for all.

"You want answers, right? I will give you the answers to all your questions." She peeked at his unreadable expression, but she could see that the fork in his hand had been gripped so tightly that his knuckles were turning pale.

"You want to know why I left, don't you? I will tell you why I left, why I stayed in hiding for all these months, and why I'm now using fake identities. But before that promise me one thing, will you?"

"What?" Jiang Xingyu was more terrified than curious. Why did she make it sound like a huge deal?

"My condition is..." she was hesitant and closed her eyes, taking a deep breath. "Jiang Xingyu, promise me you will not hand me over to the police."

"Erm..." Jiang Xingyu was speechless.

Weren't they talking about them, their love life, and their misunderstandings? How did the topic of the law and the police suddenly pop up?

Xia Luna became more anxious when he only coughed and didn't say a word. What was he thinking? It would be better if he spoke it out. His silence was making her anxious.

She clutched the hem of her shirt nervously. "I really didn't want to abandon you without explaining anything. But if I contacted you, you would be implicated." She sounded... helpless?

Jiang Xingyu gulped and stared at her. Everything she was saying was suddenly so foreign that he didn't know how to wrap his mind around it.

"What do you mean by implicating me?" He finally remembered to ask after a long pause.

Xia Luna looked like she was battling with herself to say this. "Jiang Xingyu, I'm wanted by the police. If anyone knew I was contacting you, you might have been deemed to be hiding a criminal."

"What?" It was a half-whisper. Jiang Xingyu was so shocked that no right words could come out of his mouth. He opened and closed his mouth like a goldfish, not being able to utter a peep.

He only found his voice later. "How could the police want you? What did you do?"

"I stabbed my stepmother." Xia Luna took a deep breath and replied solemnly.

The plate in Jiang Xingyu's hand found its way to the floor with a loud clatter. He looked at the woman before him in disbelief. "You're joking, right?"

And, my dear Xia, could you drop one bomb at a time?

"I wouldn't joke with such matters."

Jiang Xingyu didn't know what to think. Aside from being a troublemaker to some extent, he had always thought of his Xia as a damsel who was mild and tame and couldn't even bring herself to hit someone.

Yet now she revealed that not only did she stab someone, but she also hid away to escape charges?

Where was he? What was this universe called? Who was this girl, and what did she do to the real Xia Luna?

When Xia Luna saw how horrified he looked, her heart was filled with sadness. She stood with a shrug. "I guess there was no difference, after all. If you don't want to see me anymore, I understand."

Jiang Xingyu grabbed her hand and made her sit. "Xia, what nonsense are you saying? No matter what you did, it will never change what I feel for you. Besides, you must have had your reasons, right?"

Xia Luna's eyes grew cold as she just spat it out. "It was self-defense."

Fifteen months ago.

In her stupor and shock, Xia Luna rushed back home even though it was late at night. As soon as she was home, she locked herself in her room, hugged her knees, and sobbed.

"It's all my fault." She muttered. "Lanni, I'm so sorry."

Li Lanni wouldn't have left her home if she hadn't advised her to do so. She had told her that she would take care of her. But little did she know that she was only pushing her sister to her near death.

They did say that accidents are by fate, and humans can neither foresee nor control them, but that didn't erase the fact that the person who asked her sister to leave was her. To make it worse, she had been a coward. Her first instinct was to hide away when she felt someone else's presence.

After crying her heart out for hours, Xia Luna stood up. What was the use of crying? She had to go back to B City.

According to what her father had said, her mother must be a kind woman. If she could convince her mother to let the Xia family take care of Li Lanni, it would be much better. After all, her father could access the best hospitals in the nation.

She wobbled her way to the master bedroom and was just about to knock the door when she remembered that her father was out of the city for a business trip.

To avoid being asked questions by anyone else, she left through the backdoor. But then something caught her eye. What was Li Xiyang doing outside so late at night?

That's right. Her step mother's surname was also Li.

Heaven knew where her paternal grandmother got that scheming woman and forced her on her own son.

But that didn't matter for now because Li Xiyang was currently speaking to someone on the phone. Oblivious of Xia Luna's presence, she hung up and grinned devilishly then kept her phone away. It was a cell phone, different from the phone she usually used. Xia Luna furrowed her brows in suspicion. She definitely had something to hide.

Xia Luna momentarily forgot about where she was going. That could wait for a little. Something was fishy about Li Xiyang, and she had to know what it was.

Hence she sneakily followed the woman, keeping a safe distance.

Unaware that she was being followed, Li Xiyang grinned and sauntered her way to the kitchen and grabbed a glass of water. "One down, two to go.", she whispered in excitement with a wicked grin on her face.

Xia Luna felt chills down her spine. One down, two to go? What did that even mean?

A cold glint flashed across her eyes. She had a bad premonition. It might have meant nothing if this was any other day.

But just a few hours ago, something huge happened to Li Lanni, then the demoness made a phone call and was smiling so happily. It was not sure whether the demoness knew about Li Lanni's existence, but she couldn't rule out that possibility either. What if she knew about Li Lanni and Li Yuming and was trying to eliminate them?

Xia Luna knew it was just instinct, but she somehow felt the two were related. Her mind was in a mess. She needs to look into the matter immediately.

She was just about to go back to her room to check when Li Xiyan took out the cellphone and made another eerie call.

"Li Yuming too.

Yes.

Wait for my update."

As soon as Xia Luna heard her mother's name come out of the woman's lips, her blood boiled and she barged in without thinking, "Don't you dare!"

"Oh. Look what the cat dragged in." Li Xiyan was shocked when she saw Xia Luna suddenly barge in but controlled her expression and mocked her with a smirk.

"You hurt my sister, and now you want to hurt my mother. Li Xiyan, where is your conscience? Haven't you tortured me to your heart's content?" She raged.

"Who asked them to try and invade my territory? She replied languidly.

Not only is your sister trying to threaten my position by being alive, but she is also even trying to investigate my family as well. How dare she?! If she wants to save the world so much, why can't she become a superhero?!"

"You..." Xia Luna didn't know what shocked her more. Li Xiyan's stupidity or the fact that Li Lanni investigated Li Xiyan's family? Was her sister crazy? Why would she do that?

Chapter 147 - Murderer

But whatever it was, "There is no excuse! Li Xiyan, you are a murderer! You shameless woman, I'm going to expose you!"

"Oh no, you don't." The woman pulled Xia Luna and tackled her to the ground.

"What are you doing?"

The woman grabbed a fruit knife. "Ending you little b*tch. So you can accompany your dumb sister."

The next thing Xia Luna saw was the knife heading towards her chest. She didn't know what she did until she heard the sound of steel slicing into flesh... and it was not her who had been stabbed but Li Xiyan. She had stabbed Li Xiyan. She didn't know when it happened either.

"Ahhhhh!" A shrill scream broke the silence.

Xia Luna was horrified when she saw a little maid standing by the doorway. Several servants were rushing over to check what was going on too.

Xia Luna, who still had the bloodstained knife in her hand, trembled. "She tried to kill me. It was self-defense." She tried to explain nervously, but no one listened to her everyone started to call her a murderer

....

The present.

Xia Luna still felt disgusted and sad when she remembered the events that followed.

"No one believed me. Usually, I was cold and unfriendly, thanks to how much that woman had tortured me in my childhood.

I didn't even spare the servants an extra glance. I didn't know it made them assume I'm a bad person until that moment.

The maid who screamed, Wanwan, must have seen more than she claimed to have seen. However, she insisted that all she saw was me stabbing my stepmother. She even swore that I had a bad personality and would resort to violence when things didn't go my way. Li Xiyan, on the other hand, was too kind even to hurt a fly. All the evidences were against me.

My father's heart condition acted up when he heard the news and was hospitalized. So, I was all on my own."

Jiang Xingyu swallowed, feeling like the most useless prick under the sun. His Xia had suffered so much, yet he had not been there for her. And moreover, while she was suffering silently with no one to rely on, he had blamed her and even hated her.

Without trying to understand the reason behind her actions, he had kidnapped her friend's brother and forcefully locked her up to force the truth out of her mouth.

He regretted until his intestines turned green. Ji Xiehan had been right. His stupor had indeed made him do deplorable things.

He looked at her and took her hand, almost unable to look at her. "Xia, you don't have to tell me if it hurts."

"It doesn't make a difference Jiang Xingyu. Besides, if I don't talk about this today, I will not be able to talk about it again." She bit the bullet and continued.

"So they called the police and reported me as a murderer. I somehow ran off from the house and hid somewhere safe.

While that woman was in the hospital, I obtained evidence of her contacting Ji Feifei, a guy called Yang Su and some notorious goons."

Jiang Xingyu had the umpteenth shock of the day. "Hold on. Ji Feifei was involved too?"

"Yes, and when I found out, I was more shocked than you are. I already knew that Ji Feifei was a fake friend of Lanni's, but I didn't know she would go to the extent of teaming up with other people to kill her.

Jiang Xingyu remained silent with surprise. No wonder in the past, Xia Luna had said that Ji Feifei was the Ji family's future downfall. Even he hadn't expected that the innocent-looking little girl would have it in her to be an accomplice to murder.

But that was not the most surprising thing. He remembered that Ji Xiehan had investigated the matter before and found no leads. How come he and Ji Xiehan didn't find anything while Xia Luna did?

Xia Luna continued to narrate what happened as though it did not happen to her but to some characters in a movie. "I did find evidence of their communication. There were no voice call recordings, but I somehow retrieved their deleted text messages and presented them to the police.

However, as soon as Li Xiyao saw the light again, she refuted all the evidence. She told the police that I was a proficient hacker and that I could hack into her phone and edit anything into incriminating texts."

Before that moment, Xia Luna had never hated her skills so much before. The witch had totally used it against her.

"Well, there was nothing to prove that the texts were fake, but there was nothing to prove that they were real either, so it was dispelled. That was the only thing that could prove that Li Xiyao had a motive to hurt me. How infuriating!

And there was an issue regarding inheriting my father's legacy. My father's health had been deteriorating. If he died and Lanni and I died too, all his wealth would evidently go to his wife. It wouldn't be a surprise if she greedily eliminated anyone who could compete with her for the wealth. However, I couldn't point this out because she would cry and declare her love in front of the police—that, and the fact that it was mere speculation, not conclusive evidence.

So I was under arrest. But I couldn't let myself be arrested.

I knew that if I was jailed, that woman could create any means possible to eliminate me while in jail. I couldn't die before avenging Lanni and making sure no one would hurt my mother. So I ran away, hoping that I would find evidence somewhere.

So here I am, yet I haven't found anything in the past year."

What Xia Luna didn't mention was that in the past year, she had trained hard and learned more fighting and survival techniques so she would be able to protect her mother and sister if the need arose. She was also planning to talk Li Lanni into training. Li Lanni's physical strength had decreased a lot, and Xia Luna was not even sure that Li Lanni could swat a fly if it came her way.

A thought struck her mind, and she sprang to her feet. "I found a link among everyone that I discovered to have been involved in that accident. It's an odd coincidence that even I didn't know was possible.

Li Xiyao, Ji Feifei, Yang Su, and the few other minions were all people Lanni had investigated before. I don't know why she would do such things, honestly.

They have odd similarities too. For one thing, Yang Su and Ji Feifei both pretended to be Lanni's friends at some point. Then there's their smooth collaboration. Something must have been tying them together, and it is not just money.

I hypothesize that they knew each other before Lanni came about. Perhaps they were doing the same illegal thing together?

That was why I kidnapped Ji Feifei out of jail and tried to make her talk..."

Jiang Xingyu's jaw almost dropped to the floor.

How many bombs were his Xia planning to drop?

Everything she said made him question his knowledge of life. He had heard about Ji Feifei being arrested and all the crimes she had committed. He had also heard that Ji Feifei had broken out of jail but was soon captured. At that time, he was bewildered and speculated how she was able to break from prison.

Now Xia Luna was saying that she was the one who broke Ji Feifei out?

What kind of movie had his life turned into?

Xia Luna didn't know the turmoil she had just created in his mind and continued speaking to no one in particular. "Ji Feifei said her boss's name was P... She didn't complete the statement before the police interrupted us. P must be the first letter.

But what the hell is the whole name?

Plum? Pumpkin?

Uhm... not food, I guess. Proud? Prudence? Even more unlikely.

Philip? Paul?

I guess I'm becoming stupid."

She was so lost in thought that she almost knocked her foot on the foot of the bed. Jiang Xingyu grabbed her and made her sit beside him, wrapping her in a warm hug. "Calm down, will you? Take it slow. For now, stop thinking about it."

Xia Luna didn't try to leave his arms. "No, I cannot. This is important. I have to make that woman pay for hurting my sister. Her and whoever else worked with her or sent her."

"Yes. But think about that later. For now, think about me for a second, can you?"

He looked into the depth of her eyes that looked unsettled. He kissed her forehead in an attempt to calm her down. "Xia, I will keep my promise. I will not turn you in. But from now on, could you not hide things from me? I want to be part of your life. I want to join in your battles and fight for you.. I regret that I was not with you during the past year. But now, could you let me walk with you?"

Chapter 148 - My Duty As Your Man

Xia Luna pushed his arms off her gently. "No, Jiang Xingyu. I didn't tell you all this so you could join me. I told you so you understand why I couldn't and cannot be with you. Look, this is my battle, and I don't want to implicate anyone.

I don't even know who I'm fighting against, and I'm pretty sure that whoever it is, I'm already their target. How can I let you put your life in danger for me?"

Jiang Xingyu took her hand, placing a light kiss on her cold little fingers. "How can I let you walk into danger on your own? Xia, I would be a failure if I did that. My role as your man is to protect you."

"My man, Jiang Xingyu? Since when..." Xia Luna was dumbfounded as she asked him.

Jiang Xingyu shrugged shamelessly. "I don't remember ever breaking up with you. You only left, but you didn't dump me. As far as I know, you are still my girlfriend, and I'm still your man. And the last thing I want is for my girlfriend to leave again because she feels the need to be in hiding."

Xia Luna was rendered speechless. Why didn't she know before that this man knew how to twist facts so well? He was twisting logic in such a blatant way that she couldn't even find the right words to retort. Hell, she didn't even have the strength to retort. This was the perfect example of birds of a feather flocking together. No wonder he was a friend of Ji Xiehan.

"Xia, let me protect you. I will not let anyone hurt you. I will help you find evidence to turn that woman in as well as prove your innocence. And if there's anyone else out there that needs to be turned in, I will help you find evidence against them too. I know I'm starting to sound like a broken recorder with my rambling in circles. But you get what I mean, right?" Jiang Xingyu continued flusteredly.

Xia Luna didn't know what to say. All her life, her battles have always been hers. She has never let anyone help her, not even her father. How could she just turn into a damsel in distress and need a knight in shining armor to save her?

She was still racking her brains when her phone rang.

Worry appeared on her face when she glanced at the caller's name. She glared at the man, who was still looking at her. "It's my sister. She must have been worried all night, thanks to you."

Jiang Xingyu responded to her glare with a laugh. "Well..."

Xia Luna glared at him once more and answered the call. "Lanni."

Li Lanni sighed in relief when she heard her sister's voice. "Thank goodness you're alright. Did that man do anything to you? Should I find someone to deploy the police... no, should I hide a fifty-inch long knife and come to hack him to death?"

Xia Luna burst into laughter. "Aren't you too fierce? He did nothing to me. Not like he would be able to do anything even if he wanted to."

Li Lanni rolled her eyes. "I'm glad you are fine."

Xia Luna remembered something and switched to gossip mode, forgetting the man beside her for a moment. "How did your date go? Did you confess? Did he agree... what else happened?"

"I thought Xiao Yu was the most gossipy one." Li Lanni chuckled and sounded sad.

Rage was evident in her voice as she said to her sister furiously, "What is it? Did the bastard reject you? How dare he reject my beautiful, intelligent, and perfect sister? Tell me where he is, I will beat him into a pulp."

Her sister's thoughtfulness touched Li Lanni. "He didn't reject me. To be exact, he didn't even have the chance to reject me. Someone ruined the moment, and I didn't even confess."

"What a bummer... I was hoping I would become an aunt nine months from now." Xia Luna groaned, not only rendering Li Lanni speechless but also Jiang Xingyu, who was sitting beside her. He stared at her wide-eyed wondering, was this girl seriously talking about that before him?

"Invite him out again. This time, confess as soon as you see him." Xia Luna said, talked about a few other things, and hung up.

She was about to put her phone back when she felt her body float. Before she knew it, the man shoved her onto the bed and towered over her.

She yelped in alarm, which was swallowed by him in the next moment. She felt his cold lips on her as he kissed her. He only paused when they were both out of breath.

He said in a masculine voice, "Why don't you make your sister an aunt first?"

Before Xia Luna could say anything, without any warning, he tugged at her shirt.

Xia Luna instinctively pushed him off her with all her strength. Only her last strand of rationality stopped her from kneeing him in the groin. "What do you think you're doing?" She roared.

Jiang Xingyu was startled awake. He ran a hand through his hair speechlessly. He must have been so muddled by the fact that she willingly opened up to him that he assumed that she still loved him.

Also, he had forgotten that Xia Luna did not like to be touched or hugged, even in the past. It was only a few times when they shared a bed that she accommodated his likes and let him hug her to sleep. Last night, she did not push him away; it must have been for the same reason too. How could he take things far?

Xia Luna bit the corner of her lower lip as she observed his apologetic yet pitiful expression. She grabbed his hand and played with it, trying to explain. "Jiang Xingyu, I do not hate you. But I do not love you either."

"But you said you were willing to give me a real chance. Are you changing your mind now?" Jiang Xingyu had not missed that.

"Yes, I said I was willing to give you a chance: and no, I have not changed my mind. As long as all these predicaments are over, we can be together. I will try to love you, and even if I am not able to, I will still treat you with all the respect and care you deserve.

It's not that we cannot do this right now, but if we did, it would be because I feel indebted to you, not because I want..."

Jiang Xingyu did not wait for her to complete his statement before he shook his head vigorously. "No need. We can do it when you want to."

As a man in love, there was no way he would forcefully sleep with the girl he loves. He wanted to obtain her consent out of love. He knew that as long as she felt secure around him, she could fall in love with him.

"Thank you for understanding... and not forcing me." Xia Luna smiled at his response

Jiang Xingyu coughed. How was he supposed to answer that?

A knock resounded on the door and saved him from the awkwardness. He hurried to open it.

"Sir, I'm sorry for disturbing your rest." It was the housekeeper. "May I ask if you had made any order from Chou Boutique?"

It was not that Jiang Xingyu could not order from that boutique, but it was a renowned women-only boutique. The housekeeper found it strange to see a delivery man from that boutique claiming to deliver goods for Jiang Xingyu.

Jiang Xingyu was surprised too.

He was about to say he didn't order anything when Xia Luna spoke up. "It's my order. Please help me pick it."

"Okay." So it was the Madam. The housekeeper nodded and returned downstairs.

Jiang Xingyu looked at Xia Luna curiously. "When did you make any order, and with my card too? How do you even know my card details?"

Xia Luna looked at him like he was a forgetful idiot. "I know the pins to all your cards. You should have received an expense notification from your bank." She looked at him while fidgeting nervously. "I can't use my own cards. You will not mind, will you? I will return your money in cash.

Right. Also, could you give me a ride? I need to go somewhere, and you have to go to the office too, right? You can drop me off on your way."

When he saw her asking while fidgeting, Jiang Xingyu felt an arrow pierce through his heart. He ran a hand through his hair as his ears turned red. Why did Xia Luna look so cute right now? He almost couldn't resist kissing her lips. But he would probably get a slap for that, so he coughed to control his emotions and replied, "Wash up and get dressed then.. I will wait for you downstairs."

Chapter 149 - I Want A Daughter

He took a set of work clothes and went to another room, freshened up and changed before going downstairs. Xia Luna wasn't done yet, so he sat on the couch to wait for her. While at it, he took one of the newspapers that had been delivered a few minutes ago and started reading through it.

"Tsk." He cringed when he read one of the headlines from a slightly popular media house. [Heroes to Zeroes: Oracle Daily in hot soup for reporting false news.]

These days it was quite common for many news agencies to report news they thought was right and later finding out that whatever they had reported was fake, or it was not entirely true. But even after finding out the facts, most of them would not correct the articles, fearing that it would ruin their reputation. However, such a thing had never happened to any of the agencies under Lin Media Group. It was even more shocking that Oracle Daily, the largest and most famous agency under Lin Media Group, was the one being caught up in such a scandal.

"Lin Media Group is seriously deteriorating." Jiang Xingyu frowned as he went on to read the comparison between the news reported by Oracle Daily a few days ago and the actual facts. What a huge difference. Did the journalists even try to check through anything, or did they just hear rumors and blindly dump them into articles?

He was still immersed in the news when a maid reported, "Sir, Madam is here."

Jiang Xingyu thought the maid was talking about Xia Luna but was shocked when he heard the footsteps emanating from the entrance and froze.

Xia Luna was still here! Not only that, but she also wanted her presence to remain unknown, and his mother's arrival was definitely not going to help that happen.

He turned robotically to face his mother. "Good morning, mother, why are you here?"

Madam Jiang crossed her arms over her chest in disapproval. "Hello to you too."

She reached over to smack his head in annoyance. "You punk. You rarely ever make your way home, and now I cannot even visit my own son unless I have a reason? I guess I should have booked an appointment six months earlier as well?"

Jiang Xingyu was embarrassed by his mother's words. Now that he thought about it, it had been a while since he visited his mother. No wonder she came here early in the morning. Jiang Xingyu awkwardly coughed, "Mother, I didn't mean it that way. Don't exaggerate it."

"Yeah, yeah." Madam Jiang had a hurt expression. "Now, I cannot even say a word. Great."

Jiang Xingyu didn't know what to do with his mother, who loved to act and make a big deal out of everything. Couldn't she just be like other mothers?

His mother's voice pulled him out of his thoughts, "I called your phone, but it was unreachable, so I decided to drop by since I was on my way."

Li Yuming is holding an Art charity banquet on Friday. She has invited the Jiang Family. Your father and I are going but you must definitely be present as well."

"I understand, mother." It was on such short notice, but he would definitely be there. Even if he was on the moon, he would make sure to return on time. He wanted to grab every opportunity to get on the good side of his future mother-in-law. How could he miss such an opportunity readily served on a golden platter?

Madam Jiang was happy when she saw her son nod obediently.

Since she was done here, she wanted to leave but before that, of course, she was going to nag her son endlessly about his love life. She casually said to him, "Are you still hung up on that girl who dumped you? Don't waste away your whole life because of her. If you give up, just say the word, and I will introduce you to a very beautiful and nice girl."

"Mother, is there anything else?" Xia Luna should be done changing soon. He didn't want her to meet with his mother under such circumstances.

Madam Jiang felt sad by his words, "This is why I want a daughter. While my son finds all sorts of excuses to send me away or stay away from me, she would cling to me and spend the lonely days with me."

Jiang Xingyu tittered at his mother's theatrics. He wordlessly promised to bring her a daughter-in-law soon.

Seeing that her son didn't outright reject her as always, her eyes brightened up and she turned to leave after achieving her purpose of coming, "I'll be leaving then."

"I'll walk you out." Jiang Xingyu secretly heaved a sigh of relief.

But then at that moment...

"I'm done." A soft voice resounded from the top of the stairs.

Jiang Xingyu cursed under his breath.

Madam Jiang was shocked. If she didn't hear it wrong, it was a woman's voice. There was a woman in Jiang Xingyu's house?

She turned in excitement. No wonder he wanted to send her off so fast. But when she saw the young woman, she raised an eyebrow in confusion.

What was Li Lanni doing in her son's house early in the morning? Wasn't she Ji Xiehan's fiancée?

It was not that she minded it if Li Lanni fell in love with her son; in fact, she would be overjoyed if that happened, but she was worried that the two friends would fight if Li Lanni was involved with Jiang Xingyu before properly breaking up with Ji Xiehan.

"You punk. No wonder you wanted me to leave so fast." She jabbed her son then beamed at the girl who was equally shocked to see her.

"Lanni? It's nice to see you again. Come here. Let aunty hug you. I missed you very much."

Xia Luna balled her fists, not knowing whether to impersonate her sister or tell the truth.

It was definitely easier to impersonate her sister since Madam Jiang didn't even know that Li Lanni had a twin. However, that might make Madam Jiang misunderstand Li Lanni, and in turn, she might tell Madam Ji that Li Lanni was a two-timer. Creating a wrong impression of her sister in front of her future in-laws was definitely not one of the things good sisters should do.

Not to mention, she would create a wrong impression of herself if she lied right now.

She gulped and walked over.

Jiang Xingyu was also expecting her to impersonate Li Lanni. He was currently weaving a story about how Li Lanni and Ji Xiehan broke up already in case his mother started asking questions.

However, Xia Luna shocked him by admitting her identity. "Aunty, I'm sorry you got the wrong person. I'm not Li Lanni."

Madam Jiang cocked her head in confusion. "What? What are you even saying? You are obviously Lanni. There's no possibility of two different people being this identical."

Xia Luna nervously explained. "I'm Li Lanni's sister. My name is Xia Luna."

"Oh... are you twins? No wonder you look so similar. Xia... wait. What? Who did you say you were?"

Xia Luna gulped and repeated her name.

Madam Jiang's smile froze. "Let me confirm this. Is your father's name Xia Hanchen?"

"Yes."

From Madam Jiang's shocked expression, she could already tell that the latter must have heard about her. It was definitely time for that "stay away from my son" drama to begin.

Madam Jiang was so shocked that she had to sit. She did not know whether she was more shocked about 'that' Xia Luna being Li Lanni's twin or that she was in Jiang Xingyu's house.

So this was the girl that dumped her son. She had been wondering just what she looked like, but never in a million years would she have expected this.

When she had recollected her brain, she looked at her equally puzzled son. "You do know what type of person she is, don't you?"

Jiang Xingyu bit the bullet. "You mentioned a snippet of that the last time I was home. However, mother, some things aren't always as they appear. Xia was framed. Mother, I'm sorry, but this is not my secret to tell. So I cannot explain beyond this, but I trust her."

"Is that so?" Madam Jiang thought about it. Since her son trusted the girl even while knowing her reputation, it should mean that there were good reasons behind what happened, right?

All she wanted to be was for her son to be safe. However, that was not going to be a reason for her to stand in the way for her own son's happiness.

She looked at the nervous girl with a warm smile. "I have heard about you, they were definitely not good things. I was going to question your past, but I have faith in my son's judgment.. Since my son trusts you, I guess I should trust you too."

Chapter 150 - I'll Hold Him Down For You

Jiang Xingyu thought that his mother wouldn't accept Xia Luna after knowing the truth about her background. He was on pins and needles. But not only did she not create a ruckus as he thought, but she also accepted Xia Luna with a warm smile.

Her words relieved Jiang Xingyu. He sighed and decided to push his luck a little. "Mother, for the sake of her safety, no one can know Xia's whereabouts. Could you please not tell anyone about her?"

He thought that his mother would be suspicious and start bombarding him with questions, but she just scoffed. "Nonsense! Of course, I will not tell anyone. Since you said it is a misunderstanding, I would not want to cause trouble for my future daughter-in-law. If anything, I should be offering my help." She

smiled at Xia Luna and tried to make her voice as friendly as possible. "My dear, if you experience any problems, just say the word and I will be there to help you."

Jiang Xingyu was displeased that his mother was snatching his role, while Xia Luna was slightly embarrassed that Jiang Xingyu's mother already acknowledged her. That was not the end of it. Madam Jiang stood up and took her hand, as though wondering whether to give her the Jiang family's heirloom. "You decided to reconcile with Xingyu, right? That's great. I'm telling you; my son can be an asshole most of the time, but..."

"Mother..." Jiang Xingyu groaned. How could she say such a thing in the presence of his Xia?

"I'm speaking to my future daughter-in-law. Why do you have so much to say? No one needs you here. Go find something to fill your mouth."

She ignored her son and continued speaking to Xia Luna. "Although he can be quite a pain in the butt sometimes, I know that he truly loves you. You should have seen how hopeless he looked when you were not around. He looked like an abandoned pet."

Xia Luna held back the urge to burst into laughter. Jiang Xingyu looked hopeless when she left? But then again, it was her fault so she did not laugh.

Madam Jiang continued in a slightly pitiful tone. "I do not want to sound like I'm nagging you, but if he bullies you again, could you just beat him up instead of leaving? If you can't, tell me about it, and I will hold him down for you so you can beat him to your heart's content."

"Sheesh." Jiang Xingyu felt abandoned. Just who was her real child? Was she really his mother?

Even so, he did not mind. It was a good thing that his mother liked Xia Luna. One of the worst nightmares for a woman was to have a mother-in-law who hated her. Since his mother liked Xia Luna, it would save him all that drama of being caught in between his mother and his wife.

Besides, as a woman herself, his mother might know how to convince Xia Luna to stay in case the latter changed her mind and wanted to flee again, not that he would let the situation escalate to the point that Xia Luna would have to be on the run again. But just in case.

Madam Jiang and Xia Luna had a lot in common. The former had always wanted a daughter while the latter had always craved for a mother's warmth and love. So, the two of them hit it off so well that one would think they had known each other for ages. Both of them had endless topics to converse about.

Jiang Xingyu couldn't take it more and interrupted them before his mother could suggest forgetting about him and adopting Xia Luna on her own. "Mother, we need to go. I should drop Xia off on my way to the office."

Madam Jiang was displeased, but she could only let go. She reluctantly let Xia Luna go but only after they exchanged their phone numbers and promised to chat once in a while. Madam Jiang entered her car to let her chauffeur drive her back while Xia Luna got into Jiang Xingyu's car.

After hesitating for a while, in the car, Jiang Xingyu tried to ask casually, "Do you like my mother? The two of you seem to hit it off."

"Yeah." Xia Luna was still looking out of the window at Madam Jiang, who was getting into her car. She waved at her and tore her gaze. "Don't you find it strange? My own mother hates me to the core while a woman I just met already likes me. And it's not just fake 'love' for the sake of saving face for his son. Everything about her is so sincere."

Jiang Xingyu was glad she thought that way of his mother, but he still didn't think that Li Yuming was a bad person.

"You see, many people misunderstand you. Perhaps that's the case with your mother as well. My mother trusts you because you are my choice and I trust you. Before she knew that you are the girl I love, didn't she also think all those rumours about you are true?" Jiang Xingyu tried to console her as he started the car.

Xia Luna could not refute this. Indeed, before Jiang Xingyu spoke up, his mother had been shocked and even looked like she was going to kick her out. She seemed to believe everything she had heard.

"Perhaps what your mother needs is a reason to think better of you." Jiang Xingyu concluded.

Xia Luna's lips twitched. Like that would ever happen.

Meanwhile, in the Li villa,

Li Lanni was not very happy after she failed to confess to Ji Xiehan on their date last night. But after calling her sister and ensuring that the latter was alright, she felt better. On the phone, her sister sounded happy. Perhaps she had spoken things out with Jiang Xingyu and solved their little problem? If that was the case, she would be happy for her sister.

She sat down at the dining table to eat her breakfast in a better mood, but still, she wasn't happy about her failed confession.

Li Yuming joined her a short while later. "Good morning. You don't look as bright as I expected."

"Eer... how bright should I have looked?"

"Like a girl madly in love. I mean, you already are, but it should feel different after going on a date with your man."

Li Lanni rested her chin in her hand. 'Here we go again, the topic of love.' She thought.

But that made her realize something. Everyone around her knew she was in love with Ji Xiehan. Was she seriously the last one to find out her own feelings? Just how slow-witted was she?

"I have invited him to the charity banquet held on Friday. You will have a lot of time to talk to him then. Of course, you can also ask him out before Friday." Li Yuming pulled her out of her thoughts.

"What charity banquet?" Li Lanni asked curiously.

"Oh... I forgot to tell you. I'm holding a charity banquet to auction off my paintings." Li Yuming explained.

"Oh... but it's just a few days away. Isn't that too short notice? Will people really attend it?"

"The banquet was decided on short notice, and I couldn't come up with a better day, but don't worry. I'm sure people will attend."

Li Lanni could agree to this too. After all, this was her mother. If her fans heard she was holding any event, they would rush over even if they were only informed a few hours before the event.

This was no different from her selling her paintings. Only that this time, she was not going to take any of the income she got from them. Instead, all the money would be sent to a charity organization.

Li Yuming gave three envelopes to her. "These are some of the invitation letters. Help me give one to Xiao Yu and the other two to your Vice CEO and your professor."

"Okay." Li Lanni finished up her breakfast and left.

As soon as she arrived in the studio, she looked for Cheng Yu to give her the invitation before she could forget about it. "My mother is holding a charity banquet. Are you free to attend it?"

Cheng Yu's eyes visibly brightened up like a sunflower, and she took the invitation letter with a tiny squeal. "Of course, I will attend it!"

She was about to say more when a whiny voice interrupted. "Can I go too?"

Cheng Yu rolled her eyes at Cedric, who had just plastered himself next to her. "You are everywhere. Can you stop annoyingly interrupting every conversation?"

Cedric snatched her invitation letter with a grin. "Li Yuming is my idol. Of course, I will go."

"Hey! That's mine." Cheng Yu tried to snatch it back, but the young man had already fled.

Li Lanni laughed. "Never mind.. I'll get another one for you."

