

Chapter 431 - Lend Me Your Embrace

Xiaoshi's phone rang, a reminder flashing on the screen.

She was full of regret when she saw it. "I have to go home now. I need to finish up on some work."

"I'll drop you off." He offered as he picked up his car keys.

She was suddenly happy about having taken a cab this morning, she had no reason to reject the ride. She nodded and followed him to the parking lot.

When they arrived at her residential area, he opened the door for her.

She got down and unconsciously rubbed her fingers against the bracelet on her wrist. With a smile, she invited, "You must be tired after a whole day of work. Why don't you stay for dinner?"

She clearly saw the astonishment in his eyes and had the urge to take back her words. Did she just invite a man into her house? Those who didn't know would think too much of it!

However, there was nothing wrong with a boyfriend going into his girlfriend's house, was there?

She wanted to slap herself when she thought about it. He was merely a fake boyfriend. How could she think up such nonsense?

The man knew his place, he didn't do anything aside from obediently sitting on the couch and finding something to talk about.

To alleviate the awkwardness, she went into the kitchen and started preparing to cook. She soon returned with an apron draped over her and tied her hair into a messy bun as she asked, "What would you like to eat?"

"Anything is good. Do you need help?"

She wanted to say no and cook on her own, but she knew that she may indeed need help with everything she was going to cook. "Help me prepare the ingredients."

"Okay."

They made their way back to the kitchen one after another. Luckily, she had an oversized apron so she gave it to him. At the time, he had just picked up a knife and was washing a tomato at the sink, so he naturally raised his arms for her to help him put it on.

Perhaps he thought nothing of it but she was flustered, okay? She swallowed a gulp and held the apron in front of him. Just take it as helping Xiehan put on his coat.

Of course, the man before her couldn't possibly pass off as her cousin no matter how hard she tried to imagine him that way. She couldn't help but notice how masculine his body looked. He stood still as she tiptoed and pulled it over his neck, then circled him to tie it behind his waist. As if he had done nothing wrong, he resumed washing the vegetables and went ahead to chop them.

To be exact, he had really done nothing wrong. It was her brain that was doing something wrong.

Trying to maintain her sanity, she found the tools she needed and started cooking.

"What do you like eating?" The man asked to break the silence.

"I don't know... I'm not a picky eater either." She responded, remembering that there wasn't anything she disliked eating since she was young. "Except carrots!" She quickly added.

"That makes two of us." He laughed at her funny reaction.

"You don't like carrots either?" She was surprised by the coincidence.

"I didn't. My mother liked to add them into practically every meal she cooked and would ramble on about all their health benefits. Even so, I would pick them all off my plate."

She burst into laughter, imagining a little Xichen sneakily throwing away the carrots when his mother was not looking.

"What about now?" She asked curiously. "Does she still force you to eat them?"

"Not anymore." He shook his head, a sense of sadness suddenly clouded his eyes. "Sometimes I wish she could."

Understanding his words, she was suddenly stumped. "She... I'm sorry."

He chuckled. Knowing that she had misunderstood him. "Oh no, she isn't dead... Though my real mother is."

"You were adopted?" She asked curiously."

He shook his head. "Not exactly. My mother died having me and my dad remarried. Because he married her within six months of my mum's death, everyone was displeased with her.

My uncles and aunts kept comparing her to my mother and saying that she was not worthy of being with my father, and that she was merely a substitute. However, she didn't take it out on me. She loved me as though I were her true son. I only found out that she was not really my mother when I was a teenager."

Xiaoshi blinked. She was not new to people treating other people's children as their own but it was still a little surprising. "And then what happened?"

His own words filled his heart with bitterness. "It turns out, not only was she being emotionally harassed by being compared to my mother, my father had been constantly assaulting her too. She had been holding it in for my sake. As soon as I came of age, she decided to leave."

The reality was more painful than she had thought. She gently patted his shoulder.

"It's alright now. Sorry, I talked about such solemn things." He smiled.

"No, it's alright. I don't mind lending an ear." She smiled as she uncovered the casserole. "Also, you lent me your ear before."

He smiled at her. "That was my job, and you have thanked me enough for that. However,"

"However what?" She glanced up to meet his complicated gaze.

"I won't mind if you lent me your embrace too." He grinned.

"Huh?" His words caught her by surprise. What was he trying to imply? When her mind finally wrapped around his words, she cleared her throat. "But you are no longer sad. You don't need it."

"How can you say that? I am very sad, okay? Look how gloomy I am." He put on a dramatic sad face, then laughed the next instant.

"Who flashes that kind of smile when they are sad?" She rolled her eyes at him and slapped his shoulder using a mitten.

"Don't you know that there are people who smile, laugh and appear cheerful just to mask the sadness within them?" He continued laughing, but she couldn't refute his words anymore.

To get it done once and for all, she leaned onto him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

He smiled dotingly and let down the things in his hands, wrapping his arms around her. Her scent permeated through his nostrils, making his heart beat faster than usual. When she tried to pull away, he didn't know what came over him but he pulled her to himself to continue hugging her.

When Cedric left work, Cheng Yu met him in the parking lot as usual.

He hugged her and gently pecked her forehead. "Where do you plan to go now?"

"My place." She answered tiredly. "Though I have a feeling that woman might try to find me again. Perhaps she knows where I live."

The woman she was talking about was doubtlessly her mother.

"Your mother is a psycho. She called my mum and told her to ask me to stay away from her daughter." He laughed when he recalled what had happened when the two of them had left the park the last time.

Cheng Yu frowned in disgust. "That bitch. What did your mum say?"

"Nothing." He grinned. "Because I snatched the phone and gave her a piece of my mind. Yu, how have you managed to live under the same roof as someone so venomous?"

"You have no idea." She frowned when she thought about the kind of life her mother had made her live.

He pulled her back into his embrace as he fondly patted her head. "Don't worry. You don't have to live that way anymore. I will be here for you."

"Cedric, why are you so kind?" Her eyes stung slightly as she held his waist.

"Am I supposed to allow people to bully my girlfriend?" He raised his eyebrow. "Yu, although I don't have much power for now, as long as I'm here, I will not let anyone put their finger on you." Even if it means using his family influence, he would use it to protect his girlfriend.

"Thank you, Cedric." She rubbed his back and promised herself to be a strong woman and not burden him.

"Are you attending the graduation ceremony tomorrow?" He asked.

She pulled away instantly. "Shoot, I forgot all about it. Are you attending it?"

It was postponed due to some reasons and was being held the following day, so it had slipped her mind.

He nodded. "Yes I am. I even got everything ready. I even got us a matching outfit. You promised to go with me."

"Aw, I was planning to sleep the whole day." She felt bummed.

"But the graduation ceremony doesn't take the whole day. Yu, please come with me." He looked like he would start acting like a baby if she insisted on saying no.

She didn't want him to have to use the pitiful approach so she nodded. "Okay, I will accompany you.. But after that, you have to let me sleep."

Chapter 432 - The Onset Of A Nightmare

The old Ji Mansion.

Since Lin Jian was pretending to be Ruby's boyfriend, it made sense for him to use 'paying aunt Lin a visit' as an excuse to see Ruby. Xiehan had sent him a message to remind him of the right time to make his appearance.

When he arrived, she was in the gazebo in the front yard, reading a book. She looked so absorbed in it that it would take courage to interrupt her.

Scratch that. He was simply scared. Previously, he had been carefree around her. Even when she suddenly gave him the condition to prove his love to her, he had not been this nervous around her for a second. However, now that he knew she was Xiehan's sister, he couldn't help feeling pressured.

He had seen how protective Xiehan was of his cousin, Xiaoshi. If he did the slightest thing and upset his sister, wouldn't that man hack him to death?

When she felt the presence of someone in the gazebo, she looked up and frowned when she saw him acting sneaky, looking like he was battling between leaving and staying. "What's wrong with you?"

He shrugged to indicate that nothing was wrong. "Is aunty home?"

She nodded and resumed reading her novel.

He made himself comfortable beside her and was puzzled when she continued reading and giggling like he didn't exist. "Ruby, are you going to ignore me?" How could she be so unwelcoming?

She looked at him blankly. "Haven't you already made your presence noticeable? That's all you needed to do and it doesn't mean I should force an awkward conversation with you."

Hearing her words, he looked hurt. She was so sharp-tongued. "Ruby, can't you give me a little face? Are you going to discard you after gaining my help?" He complained.

Finally realising what she was dealing with, she closed her novel while using her fair fingers as a temporary bookmark and looked straight at him. "Lin Jian, did you overthink something? We may be putting on an act but that doesn't make me your girlfriend. Don't try to play 'the abandoned boyfriend' with me, okay?"

"But you promised to give me a chance." He pointed out accusingly.

She nodded. "Yes I did. And I've yet to decide whether or not you really deserve it. Buzz off."

"You're so fierce." He lamented.

"Get lost." She didn't have enough patience to deal with him.

Seeing as she was not in the mood to chat with him, he could only make his way into the mansion and deliver the tonics he had brought for Wen Lin.

In reality, Ruby didn't initially have much anything against Lin Jian. As long as he had stopped fooling around, she may have given him a chance since she liked him too. However, she changed her mind when his name once again exploded on the entertainment section's tabloids. His name had been tangled in yet another scandal with an international model. Was this man ever lacking in scandalous news?!

What was worse, he didn't even bother to explain. He acted as though nothing had happened. How could she tolerate him?

Hence, she waited until he had left before she entered the house.

"You stupid bitch, why are you here?" Seeing as there was no one else in the living room, Ji Feifei venomously attacked Ruby.

The latter gave a slight laugh and raised her eyebrows. "I should be asking you that, Ji Feifei." She deliberately emphasised on the word "Ji", making Ji Feifei's skin crawl. Even so, she would never allow herself to lose her composure around this loser.

She scoffed. "I don't know what you are up to, Ruby, but let me give you a warning. No matter how hard you try, you will never be able to sow discord between me and my parents."

Ruby blinked as though she had heard something surprising. "And why are you so sure that I want to sow discord between you and your parents? Do you know of a specific reason?" Besides, did she have any shame, claiming someone else's parents as her own even while knowing that they were not in any way related?

Her words baffled Ji Feifei. Why did she sound so odd? Could it be that she didn't know the truth? If this b*tch knew the truth, Ji Feifei didn't think she would remain silent. She would have caused a ruckus eons ago.

But if she didn't, why did Xiehan bring her here? That didn't sound right either. She suddenly thought of a reason and her eyebrows knitted.

"You bitch, don't you ever try to seduce my brother!" She pointed a finger at Ruby accusingly.

"Ji Feifei, I didn't know you were so disgusting." Just who was seducing whose brother? She lowered her voice. "As for creating trouble, since you want me to do that, watch me."

Before Ji Feifei could let out a curse, she caught sight of her mother descending the staircase so she shut up. She wanted to put on an act but Ruby beat her to it, sobbing like she had suffered too much.

"Feifei, what will I do? Will my father not want me anymore? I already lost my mother and I feel very sad. If I lose my dad too..."

Wen Lin was intending to have the helpers prepare fruits for the girls but before she could call for them, she saw Ruby cry and her heart shattered. She rushed over and gently patted her. "Ruby, what's wrong?"

As though she had suddenly lost control of her emotions, Ruby leaned against Wen Lin's shoulders and cried. "Aunty, I don't know what to do. My dad is still so mad at me. I feel like I've lost everything overnight."

Wen Lin felt as though her heart had been broken into pieces. She had never felt this hurt even when she saw her own 'daughter' Ji Feifei cry. She patted the girl's back and pulled her into her embrace to coax her. "Ruby, you're a good girl. Your dad will soon understand you. Just give it some time, okay?"

Ruby felt her entire body freeze when Wen Lin hugged her. This feeling...

It was different from when her foster mother hugged her before. Finally in her biological mother's embrace, she realized just how much she had longed for such a moment. Her fake tears instantly turned into real ones, and she choked on her sobs.

At the side, Ji Feifei gritted her teeth when she saw her mother embracing Ruby so fondly. She faked a smile and tapped the girl on the shoulder. "Ruby, how about we catch a movie? You will feel better."

Ruby shook her head and looked up at Wen Lin with teary eyes. "Aunty, can I hug you a little longer, please?"

Wen Lin didn't know why her eyes stung but she pulled Ruby into an even tighter hug. She must be acting this way because she had missed her mother too much. The poor thing...

'I should treat her better from now on.' She made a mental note.

If Ji Feifei knew what her 'mother' was planning, she would have slit her own throat.

She never would have known that this was merely the onset of her nightmare.

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The next morning.

Cheng Yu's phone rang just when she was finishing up on her makeup. It was a message from Cedric. [I'll pick you up.]

Since they had agreed to go together, she smiled and responded with an "okay" before finishing up on her preparation.

Cedric must have been on his way when he sent her the message, because he arrived in ten minutes. She was done so when she received a call from him, she splashed a little of her jasmine-scented perfume onto her wrist, grabbed her purse and keys and rushed out.

The man was leaning against a ferrari in the parking lot. He was clad in a dark blue tuxedo that was of the shade as the dress she was wearing. It was indeed a couples outfit, but what was up with the ferrari? Did he have to be so flashy?

"Babe, you look beautiful." He took her hand as she approached and spun her around, then hugged her.

"And you look so breathtakingly handsome." She pulled away and looked him up and down in awe. "My god! Will I really still be your girlfriend by the end of the ceremony?"

He smiled at her words, then nodded seriously. "You're right. That's indeed something to think about. You run the risk of losing me, so you better hold onto me and take good care of me lest another girl snatch me away."

"Idiot. Let's go." She slapped him on the shoulder as though reprimanding him for being so narcissistic. This must be a side effect of spending too much time with Lin Jian.

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In his villa, Lin Jian sneezed three times in a row.

He glanced at the ceiling, looking lost. Why was this happening so often? Were there many people with grudges against him?

Chapter 433 - The Moon Rises After Sunset

Li Yuming's Villa.

Lanni rushed over after being called by her mother in the morning. They would depart at 11, so she had some time to chat with her.

Li Yuming smiled brightly and led Lanni to her old room. There were a few gowns on the bed as well as new shoes and accessories.

She smiled as she touched the hem of a delicate, cream dress. "Are these for me?"

Li Yuming nodded. "Do you like them? You can wear one of them this afternoon and keep the rest for occasions that may need them."

Lanni frowned curiously. "This afternoon?"

Realizing that it had slipped her mind, Li Yuming slapped her forehead. "The national art exhibition is being held today. Would you like to accompany me?"

Lanni felt her hands suddenly tremble. She recalled that there was indeed such a thing. How could she forget about it? Although her mother didn't remember to give her an invitation, it didn't seem right for her to not go to support her.

Li Yuming saw how helpless Lanni looked and her heart sunk. Even so, she understood that her daughter had gotten quite busy after getting a job. She took her small hand and rubbed it gently. "It's alright if you already have plans for the day. It's my bad for forgetting to tell you about it earlier."

Lanni felt guilty. "I'm sorry, mum. It's just that I already promised dad to go to Lakeside City today. I don't think I will make it back in time for the exhibition."

"Lakeside City? You are not going to the Xia family, are you?" Li Yuming was startled.

"I am. Luna and Xiehan are coming too."

Li Yuming relaxed slightly when she heard that Xiehan was going along. Even so, she couldn't pretend to be comfortable about the fact that Lanni was going to that place. How could she be at ease? However, if she pointed out her insecurity, it would only trigger a fight and that was the least desired thing at the moment.

She swallowed and casually asked, "

Why did he tell you to go over on such short notice?"

Lanni was relieved when Li Yuming did not react explosively to the news. She had come out with it since she didn't want to hide things from her mother, but she hoped that the latter would not be against it. Hearing her question, she rubbed the vracelet on her wrist as she explained.

"Dad didn't think of it before. He thought that I would definitely say no if he brought it up, but I know he really wants me to go."

Li Yuming sighed. "You know that I don't want you to go. However, I don't want to fight about it."

Lanni hugged her. "I don't want to fight about it either, mum. I'll take care of myself."

"Be careful, okay? Both of you." Li Yuming insisted as she hugged her daughter emotionally.

"We will." Lanni returned the hug but was suddenly confused by her mother's words. Both of us...? Although they both knew that she was going with Xiehan why did she suddenly feel like her mother's words meant something else?

Before she could think much about it, Li Yuming pulled her to her painting studio.

Lanni looked around and was awed by the new paintings that she had not seen before. Were they going to be displayed at the exhibition?

That didn't seem right. The paintings for the exhibition should have been submitted at least a week earlier. However, she was sure that they were new. Her mother's talent had improved tremendously.

Li Yuming smiled when she saw her looking around with her eyes full of worship. The best kind of acknowledgement she could ever receive was appreciation from the only people who mattered to her.

She smiled dotingly and took out a scroll, opening it up in front of Lanni. "This is for you."

Lanni opened it immediately, curiously studying it. It was a simple landscape painting with a calm sky and a river flowing downhill, between two rows of colorful trees. The sun had just set, and its last, final rays reflected onto the river, giving the whole painting a calming effect. It was almost hypnotizing as she stared at the river for a long time. She glanced at the tiny name written above Li Yuming's pen name: [Sunset].

"Do you like it?" Li Yuming asked.

Lanni returned to her senses, realising that it was indeed a painting made specifically for her. Something about it made her feel a strong connection at first glance.

"I love it. Thanks mum." She hugged her and her gaze trailed back to the painting. The more she looked at it, however, the more she felt that there was something odd about it. It was almost as though there was something missing.

After a few more glances, she finally realized it. "Mum, is there another piece? Was it from a set of two?"

"No. It's the only one." Li Yuming denied it. As if something had snapped in her mind, she hurriedly Lanni away. "I made cupcakes earlier, I'll let you carry some during your trip. Give some to Xiehan later."

Lanni didn't think too much about it and followed her out of the studio. If she had glanced at the painting behind the door, she would have realized that it was the second piece of hers. They were almost identical; only that the other piece was less vibrant, with the rising full moon powerfully shining its rays against the flowing river. When placed side by side, one would realize that it was indeed one continuous piece. [The moon rises after sunset]

Li Yuming must have been prepared before. She exited the kitchen within a few minutes, carrying a small colorful basket with her. Aside from a box of cupcakes, there were oranges and apples.

She was just about to complain about her dislike for oranges when she paused. It wasn't that Li Yuming didn't know that. However, she realized a fact when she thought about it. Weren't oranges and apples recommended for pregnant women? Why would her mother give her that?

Li Yuming shrugged when she noticed her gaze. "Just carry them on your trip. No one's eating them here anyway. If Xiehan doesn't like them either, you can give them to your friends."

Lanni nodded but her eyebrows slightly raised. Li Yuming should know Xiehan's preferences better than anyone. How could she not know that the only fruit Xiehan liked was pineapples?

Was she thinking too much...?

Deciding not to ask and shatter her little fantasy, she carried her basket back and waited for her father to pick her up.

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As soon as Lanni stepped out of the door, Li Yuming contacted one of her security details. "Get a team to follow the young miss."

Actually, she was wondering whether she should follow Lanni herself. If the Xias did anything to her, how could she stay calm while entrusting Lanni's life to bodyguards?

After thinking through it a few times and reminding herself that Xiehan would be there too, she sighed and sat down to calm herself. Bodyguards would be sufficient. If not, at least she should trust Xiehan, right?

...

In the end, Li Yuming was too worried for nothing.

Not only were the Xias looking forward to seeing Lanni, they welcomed her warmly too.

Xia Hanchen proudly paraded himself with each daughter holding onto one arm. He must be the happiest man in the world.

He smiled as he introduced Lanni to his family. "Cupcake, this is my cousin. You can call him Uncle Yuguang."

"Hello, Uncle Yuguang." Lanni politely greeted the young-looking man before her, finding him familiar.

"They are already so old. Why do you still use such childish names on them?" An old man with a head full of white hair walked into the living room, shooting Xia Hanchen a glare.

Xia Hanchen smiled in response to his words. "Who what if they're old? They will forever be my cupcake and my pumpkin even when they're 50. Father, how have you been?"

"Grandfather." Luna greeted the elderly man too, and Lanni finally understood that he was their grandfather.

Xia Hanchen helped Lanni to the elderly man's side as the latter sat on a comfort chair. "Father, this is my other daughter, Lanni. This gentleman is her boyfriend, Xiehan. The man beside Luna is her fiancé, Xingyu." the forgotten sons-in-law were finally remembered.

The elderly man studied Lanni from head to toe, as though confirming her identity.

She smiled gently. "Grandfather."

He hurled out his hand to take hers. "It's been years. How have you been?"

"I've been fine." Lanni was not used to the man's scrutinising gaze, so she wanted to recoil to the side. However, she felt more comfortable when she saw Luna's reassuring smile, and she held the elderly man's hand.

The latter was pleased. "I have been hearing about how talented you are. Besides, you girls have grown into beautiful young women, just like your mother back then. I wonder what this punk was thinking, messing up when he had married such a beautiful and kind woman."

"Father!" Xia Hanchen roared at the side.

The elderly man shot him a glare. "Am I wrong?"

Chapter 434 - Secret Mission

Lanni smiled gently and said nothing to interrupt the father-son verbal battle.

Xia Hanchen glanced at his father and wanted to say something, but when he remembered that his daughters were present, he shut his mouth and turned to Lanni instead. "That didn't go exactly as planned but cupcake, you will get used to him after witnessing his insanity for a while."

Lanni chuckled at his words but her gaze stayed on the elderly man. Before she could say anything else, an elderly yet elegant woman made her way to the living room. As though she had been expecting them, she excitedly greeted Xiehan and Xingyu.

It was only after chatting with them for a while that she looked at Luna and Lanni. The preference was evident.

Lanni didn't know if it was because of what Luna had told her before, but she subconsciously shuddered when the woman got close to her.

The woman didn't seem to realize this as she jovially confirmed what she had heard of Lanni. "Of course, my granddaughter would be intelligent. She has the blood of the Xia family in her after all."

Lanni smiled, though she was a little uncomfortable about the hidden message in the compliment. Was she merely expressing her pride in her smart grandchildren after hearing about their achievements, or was she trying to indirectly imply that Li Yuming was not smart?

No matter what it was, Lanni was not planning to kick up a fuss about it. She focused on her grandfather, who was friendlier to Li Yuming.

However, the elderly woman clearly wasn't going to mask her displeasure. She fondly asked Lanni, "How have you been? I was worried that you would turn into a deceptive fox after being raised by that kind of woman."

Lanni felt a dull ache in her heart and wanted to explode. But when she remembered how her father ended up marrying Li Xiyan, she shrugged. Perhaps the old lady still disliked Li Yuming even after so many years. In response to her question, she gently grinned and said nothing.

Luna realized her sister's emotional turmoil and held her hand soothingly. Actually, she didn't like it either. No matter how horrible her relationship with her mother was, she couldn't stand it when people kept talking crap about her. After all, she was the person that Lanni cared most about.

As if casually stating it, Luna glanced at her grandmother. "Grandma, it's been so many years and mother has long left father." Before anyone could react, her eyes drooped as she added, "How sad...she and father divorced and he ended up with a criminal. On the other hand, she is so lonely and only has us on her side."

Her words sounded like she was casually talking about her parents, but the old lady frowned. Why did it sound like Luna was personally attacking her?

She was clearly reminding everyone that not only did Old Mrs. Xia drug her own son and get him together with a criminal, she had also caused him and the love of his life to separate for years. Not only that, but she was also pointing Old Mrs. Xia out for not letting go of past hatred, and was trying to destroy the relationship between a mother and her child even though it had been so many years.

Xia Hanchen shot his mother a look then patted Lanni's shoulder in fear that she would be sad. "Cupcake, don't be upset. Your grandmother only means to say that she is happy that Yuming took such good care of you. Look at you, you have become so beautiful."

Lanni glanced at her grandmother once more, then at her father. In the end, her gaze trailed at Xiehan who was sitting opposite them with Old Master Xia.

Although the man was playing chess and chatting with Old Master Xia, Xingyu and Xia Yuguang, some of his attention was on Lanni. When he felt her gaze, he looked back at her and his brows slightly twitched.

She met his gaze and her heart picked up its pace. It was as though they had communicated their thoughts through that simple gaze.

'Honey, I have a strange feeling about them.' She thought as she peeked slightly at her grandmother.

'I think so too.' His eyes seemed to say. Although they did not say any words, they understood each other's doubts.

Luna's hand tightened around Lanni's, so much that the latter had to shake it off. Lanni's actions jolted her out of her deep thoughts and she stood up, excusing herself to go to the bathroom.

She had gone upstairs, so Lanni made an excuse and followed her after casting Xiehan a glance.

The most confused person was Xingyu. Why did it feel like his fiancée, best friend and sister-in-law were conducting some secret mission and leaving him out of it?

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On the first floor.

When Luna realized that Lanni was following her, she grabbed her and pushed her into a room, holding a hand over her mouth.

It took a few seconds for Lanni to register what was going on.

"What happened?" She whispered.

Luna locked the door and looked around to make sure there was no hidden camera before she sucked in a breath. "Grandmother is acting strange."

"I think so too." Lanni was glad that Luna understood it, it saved her the effort she would have needed to explain.

"She bugged our dad to bring us back but ever since she met you, she has been doing nothing but trying to provoke you. I don't know whether she is trying to provoke you or make you hate and blame our mother. Either way, I'm starting to have doubts about her."

Lanni caught on a point and raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Our mother..."

Luna slapped her shoulder. "Whatever. I don't like her anymore but that doesn't change the fact that she is my biological mother too. For this reason alone, I will not let anyone scheme against her." As though worried that her reason did not make much sense, she added, "Take it as me thanking her for the fruits."

"What fruits?" Lanni feigned ignorance.

"Please. Do you think you really fooled me into believing that you are the one who prepared the oranges and apples for me? Besides, aside from the fruits, she sent bodyguards to protect you...and me too."

The second part baffled Lanni but she didn't have much time to think about it. "Do you think we should bug grandmother?"

Luna immediately shook her head. "She is too wary. Let's think of another way. Before then, we have to go back now or they will find our disappearance odd."

The sisters made their way back downstairs. When the elderly lady saw them, she looked up and let out a gentle laugh. "Twins can be quite strange sometimes, can't they? They even want to go to the bathroom together. Did you find the common bathroom?"

Luna knew that it was no ordinary reason, the elderly lady was merely testing her to find out what they were going to do upstairs.

"We didn't. After taking several turns on the first floor, we couldn't find it and we didn't feel the need anymore so we came back."

Lanni nodded to second her sister's far-fetched excuse, then found the right opportunity to change the story. "Grandpa, do you like to play chess? We can play one round together."

"It's almost time for dinner. Let's play once." Old Master Xia called her over, and Lanni sat opposite him.

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After dinner, Old Madam Xia suggested for her granddaughters to stay back for the night.

However, Xia Hanchen was strongly against it. "Luna can't be away from her fiancé. Xingyu would never be comfortable about it."

"What's wrong with her staying back? And isn't it just a night? Is he trying to imply that I cannot take care of my granddaughter?" The woman was furious.

"No one said that." Xia Hanchen was speechless.

Before he could say something to further offend the elderly lady, Lanni spoke up sweetly. "Grandma, Luna and I have matters to handle tomorrow so we cannot stay back. We will come to visit again soon, how about that?"

The woman harrumphed. "Did Li Yuming tell you not to trust us? Is that why she had to send bodyguards to spy on us?"

That reminded her of what Luna had said. Li Yuming sent bodyguards?

After her initial shock, she raised an eyebrow. "Grandma, you and mother don't totally trust each other after what happened in the past. You didn't think she would have taken good care of your

granddaughter for twenty years, so I don't think she would feel safe knowing that her daughters were in your home."

"You..." Old Madam Xia held back a curse when her son patted her shoulder. She went to have a word with her sons-in-law who were engrossed in an in-depth conversation with Old Mr. Xia.

Making sure that Lanni and Xia Hanchen were talking about something, Luna secretly slipped back into the building and snuck to the master bedroom.

Chapter 435 - The Xia Family

Lanni felt her heart lurch in her throat when she saw her grandmother go back into the house. Would Luna be alright?

When no one else was noticing, Xiehan squeezed her hand. "Luna is good at this."

"I know. But I'm still worried." Her body was stiff with tension. Luna was pregnant. If anything happened to her or the baby, she would never be able to forgive herself.

"If you look anxious, they will start to suspect you." Xiehan leaned by her ear and whispered. He was right, so she took deep breaths and tried to calm down.

Glancing at her slightly parted lips, he pressed a kiss on them.

Her eyes went wide, then her cheeks flushed in embarrassment. "What the hell are you doing?" There were other people around!

He grinned evilly. "Getting them to stop looking at you."

Well, he had succeeded. Xia Yuguang, who had been sneaking glances at her, was now playing on his phone while the maids at the side desperately found things to do and mind their business.

...

Upstairs.

Luna did not expect to find anything useful at first glance. However, she did find many suspicious aspects. For example, there was an unnoticeable fingerprint sensor on the doorknob of the study room door, and if one was careful to notice, there was what looked like a jade rose above it. Upon closer inspection, she realized that it was a camera that must have been set to take pictures of intruders.

Luckily, hacking was her forte. Besides, she had been to this mansion when she was younger and knew her way around. From her observation earlier, not many things had changed. Even God was helping her.

Just in case she needed it, she had always carried a gel with her whenever she went. While it looked as harmless as a lipgloss, it was a gel virus with fatal effects; it could disable a fingerprint lock and force it open within seconds.

Once she got in, she used the desktop to disable and erase her movements from all the surveillance cameras in the house then proceeded to check around.

She didn't have much time and could only use the chance to make herself familiar with the study. Her eyes almost popped out when she saw a painting that looked like what Lanni had described before.

Her gaze narrowed. This painting of Cedric's great great grandfather should be in the Old Ji Mansion's library. What was it doing in the Xia Mansion's study? Because she was not sure, she took a picture to ask Lanni for confirmation later.

Just as she was about to touch it, she received a text message from Lanni. The old lady was coming upstairs!

She quickly exited the study and went to the communal bathroom nearby. By the time the old madam saw her, Luna was on her way back from the bathroom. She had even left her hands slightly damp as an alibi.

As expected, the old madam looked relieved when she saw that Luna had indeed gone to the bathroom. She even flashed a smile. "I've been meaning to say, don't hold it in for too long or your stomach will hurt. You are expectant and should be more cautious."

Luna flashed back a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "Understood, grandma."

The old madam was visibly shocked. Luna didn't ignore her!

She was used to Luna's explosive temper from before. Not only could she explode at the slightest provocation, but she was also fond of giving people a penetrative stare, one that made people feel like she could see right into their hearts. Moreover, she held grudges for ages. The old madam had not treated her too well before, so logically, Luna should not be smiling and calling her grandma.

If it wasn't for the slight curve on her lower abdomen, the elder madam would have been convinced that she was looking at Lanni.

While she was still trying to figure out what was odd about the young woman, Luna brushed past her. "Grandma, my family is waiting for me. I have to go."

The elderly woman frowned. What the heck did she mean? Was she trying to imply that she was not part of her family?

She was yet to figure this out when Luna disappeared down the stairs.

...

"What are you girls up to?" Xia Hanchen flicked the twins' foreheads when they were on their way back.

"Ow, dad!" Lanni rubbed her forehead and looked up at Xiehan, who was sitting beside her, to complain.

Xingyu was sitting opposite them. He glanced at his fiancée, who was waiting for him to rub her forehead, then at Lanni and Xiehan. "I want to know too."

Lanni and Luna exchanged glances. If they told their dad and Xingyu about it, that would mean that more people knew about the matter.

"Dad, why don't we tell you about it when it's settled? Xingyu, you too." Lanni said reluctantly.

It wasn't that she didn't want to tell them about it, but the walls had ears. They could only explain when they were certain that it was just the five of them.

Xia Hanchen harrumphed. "You better not be committing a crime."

"Of course not! We are innocent little babies. How could we go against the law?" Lanni chuckled as she put on an innocent face.

"Innocent babies?" Xingyu and Xiehan exchanged glances and laughed. Like anyone would believe that.

...

As soon as they arrived in B City, Lanni, Luna and Xiehan rushed to Lanni's apartment. It was already 9pm and Xingyu would not let Luna go back on her own, so they brought him along.

After settling on the living room couches, Luna took out her phone and showed Lanni the pictures she had taken. "Is this the painting you saw in the Ji Mansion library?"

Lanni was shocked when she saw it. "This is it! Wait, there's a slight difference. The one at the Ji Mansion does not have this signature." She pointed at a signature at the bottom left corner. It should be the original artist's signature and pen name.

Luna was baffled. "One of them is a counterfeit?"

"I don't think so..." Lanni frowned. She had touched the painting at the Ji Mansion and it didn't seem to be counterfeit.

Xiehan looked over too, and saw what she was pointing at. However, "I don't think any of them is a fake. They are both authentic. One of them must be a legal copy."

Luna frowned slightly. Her gaze met Lanni and she seemed to have understood something too. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Lanni made a search online and when she was done, she was baffled. "There are only two of this painting that have ever existed. I don't think it's a coincidence that they happen to be with the Ji and Xia families."

Xingyu couldn't make head or tail of what was going on so Luna explained it to him.

When he had grasped the situation, he thought about it and asked, "What about aunt Yuming's appearance? Do you think it's a coincidence that she was close to the Ji family for a while then married a man from the Xia family?"

"What the heck?" Luna almost dropped her phone.

Xiehan frowned, while Lanni gasped. "It sounds far-fetched, but it does make some sense. Why did our mother marry father? And why does she keep insisting that the Xia family is treacherous no matter what we tell her? Besides, what does she know that she thinks would put my life in danger?"

Xiehan tried to pin the facts together but he shook his head in the end. "Aunt Yuming got close to the Ji family because of me. As for why she married uncle Xia, I cannot make a guess."

Jiang Xingyu was at it again.

"What if you were just an excuse?" His words were directed at Xiehan.

Luna shot him a glare. "Can you not say such terrifying things?"

Xiehan cleared his throat. "What are we investigating again?"

"Right. The boss of Galaxis. But what if the Xia family also has something to do with him?" Luna contemplated. "Grandma is acting strange..."

"Grandpa too." Lanni added. "I don't want to think this way but why does it feel like our dad is strange too? They might know something."

"Do you think we should ask him?" Luna suggested.

Lanni tilted her head to glance at her. "Are you crazy? If we think he is strange, why would we ask him?"

"Because he might know something. He might be acting strange because he knows that we are trying to uncover something that might put us in danger. Isn't that what mother said to you?" Luna shrugged.

Xiehan thought about it and suggested, "Don't interrogate him. We can just tell him a few details for the sake of testing his reaction."

"Good idea." the three of them agreed.

Meanwhile, Ji Feifei locked herself in her room and made a call. A deep voice answered after a single ring.

"What is it? Did you do it?"

"Boss, I think I've been found out!" She cried.

A series of curses resounded. "Stupid b*tch!" If she thought she was being suspected, why was she so brainless? Didn't she know that her phone could have been bugged?!

Chapter 436 - Trapping The Impostor

Just as the man on the other end thought, Xiehan had hacked Ji Feifei's phone so they were able to overhear her phone call on his laptop.

When the call ended, Xingyu asked, "The man on the phone is the boss of Galaxis?"

"Should be." Luna guessed.

"I've talked to him before, and although he has always used a voice changer, that sounds like his tone. She can contact him directly and that means they are close. We are close to our goal."

"Let's split up." Luna suggested. Since this would make their task easier, the others agreed by nodding their heads.

Luna thought about it and suggested, "Lanni, get mother to talk. Xiehan, follow Ji Feifei. I will interrogate father."

"What about me?" Xingyu, who had not been given any role, asked in a tone full of complaint.

Luna wanted to ignore him but when she thought about it, she massaged her eyebrows. "Follow me to interrogate father."

That evening, when Cedric dropped Cheng Yu back at her apartment, both of them were tired and famished.

The graduation party had not lasted too long. When it ended, the two of them had decided to take a walk and have some fun before going back.

"I feel happy." She giggled her way into the elevator while he followed her. This was the best day of her life. It wasn't just because of the academic accomplishment nor was it solely because of her job. He was beside her during the most important day of her life, this was the best kind of achievement she had ever received.

Her friends had sent her gifts since they were occupied today. Besides, the ceremony was exclusive to members of Star Art International so Lanni and Luna would not be able to get in even if they wanted to.

On the other hand, her mother didn't even send a simple congratulatory note, let alone a gift. If this was before, she would have been sad and hurt. However, with Cedric by her side, none of it mattered. She was still overjoyed.

"Let's cook." She suggested when they entered the house.

He was hungry so he nodded.

Luckily, she had stocked up her kitchen recently so they had everything they needed.

As usual, he stood to the side and carefully watched as she cooked. However, his gaze was more fixated on her than on the ingredients on her chopping board.

When he couldn't hold in the urge anymore, he gently wrapped his arms around her waist from behind and kissed her neck.

She felt ticklish and nervous as his hot tongue brushed against her skin. The hairs behind her ears rose as she dismissed him. "Sit aside and wait for the food."

He tightened his arms around her waist with no intention to let go. "But I want to eat you instead."

She was stunned for a second before her eyes went wide. She had not expected him to utter such words so casually.

She was just about to push him away when she felt something stiff against the small of her back. He really meant it...

With a racing heart, she could only try to maintain her sanity and continue cooking. Since it was already a bit late and they were hungry, she cooked noodles and they were ready within a few minutes.

She served them in bowls and he had to let go of her so she would set the food on the kitchen island. Sitting opposite her, he quietly wondered whether he had pushed her a little too fast.

It was just a speculation at first, but when she silently ate, washed the dishes and tried to make her presence scarce, he knew that he was right. He could only bite the bullet and trap her before she could rush him to leave.

"Yu, it's already so late. And I'm tired..."

As expected, her voice turned stern. "Cedric, we are only in a dating relationship which hasn't lasted long. We cannot keep spending the night together."

From what Lin Jian had told him before, she would grow distant if he didn't clear the misunderstanding as soon as possible. He bit the bullet and tried to explain himself. "Yu, I'm not trying to pressurise you. Whether and when you want to take our relationship to that step is up to you. Please don't feel obliged to do anything."

She looked relieved, but he could tell that she didn't entirely believe him.

He tilted his head to look at her as he added, "I will wait until you are ready."

Tonight... I'm indeed really tired and I don't want to answer to unpleasant questions so I cannot contact a chauffeur from the Han family either. Will it be okay for me to stay if I will sleep in the living room?"

She so badly wanted to curse. Why was it that no matter what he asked for, she couldn't bring herself to say no? She was tired so she could understand how he felt. Besides, he had already promised to behave himself. It would not make much sense if she still rejected him.

She was about to say yes to him sleeping on the couch when she remembered that night at the beach. He had slept under uncomfortable conditions and gotten so ill that she was about to die from guilt. How could she let that happen again?

"Forget it. You can sleep on the bed. Just don't think of doing anything inappropriate."

"Got it." He nodded joyously.

In actuality, she wasn't against doing anything with him. She was just not ready for it yet.

Luckily, the guy did as he promised. Aside from hugging her arm and sleeping soundly, he didn't do anything even though it was evident that he wanted to do something.

She smiled at his sleeping face and pressed a gentle kiss on his lips.

The following day.

Xiehan went to pay his parents a visit and most importantly, to see how his sister was doing.

He had already told her of his visit so as soon as he stepped out of the car, Ruby rushed to him with a smile on her face. "Brother."

Xiehan rubbed her head and quickly withdrew his hand. "You can't call me that yet. At least not here...until we have dealt with that impostor."

Ruby nodded obediently and looked around to ensure that no one was eavesdropping before she said, "That will be soon. She is getting more riled up by the minute. Last night, she almost blurted out her displeasure for me in front of our parents."

"Isn't my sister awesome?" He chuckled. It had been a few days, so he was getting more used to having a sibling change. Besides, Ruby was more loveable so he was more willing to be close to her than he had ever been with Ji Feifei.

"Quick, reward me." She acted spoiled, taking advantage of the fact that no one was around.

He chuckled and patted her head as a form of praise. "Rile her up even more. Make her slip up."

It would be hard to explain Ruby's identity to their parents, since they would be full of questions and might startle the snake. However, if they let the old couple know that Ji Feifei hated Ruby, they would begin to question why Xiehan brought the latter into their home.

Besides, Ji Feifei's distress might cause her to unintentionally reveal a flaw.

When he was done explaining a few matters to her briefly, they pretended not to have met each other and went into the house separately.

"Brother!" Ji Feifei rushed up to him when she saw him while she was on her way downstairs.

Xiehan ignored her with a hint of disgust in his eyes and went to speak to the butler. "Are my parents home?"

"The old master is in his study while madam went to pay a visit to Madam Lin. Young master, would you like a cup of tea?"

"Thanks, I'm alright." He said and started heading upstairs.

Ruby saw the perfect chance and grabbed it.

"Brother Xiehan, hello." She greeted sweetly.

The man turned around and smiled at her. "How have you been? Are you feeling better?"

"Mmh. I'm alright now. Uncle and aunty treat me well." She responded, sneaking a glance to the enraged Ji Feifei. She was directly provoking her.

'Xiehan spoke to everyone but ignored your passionate greeting. How does that feel?' Her eyes mocked.

Ji Feifei was on the verge of exploding. As soon as Xiehan disappeared up the stairs, she violently grabbed Ruby's hair. "Who the heck are you calling 'brother Xiehan'? Is he your brother?! I'm asking you!"

Ruby was about to retaliate when she caught a movement behind Ji Feifei. She fell onto the floor even though she had not been pushed, crying pitifully.

"I only wanted to show some respect since he is older than us. I'm not trying to steal your brother from you, please trust me."

Ji Feifei was about to curse her for acting exaggeratively when hurried footsteps resounded.. In the next second, Wen Lin rushed past her and helped Ruby up while she glared at her." Feifei!"

Chapter 437 - Impostor

"Feifei!" Wen Lin glared at Ji Feifei as she held Ruby gently and helped her up.

By the time Ji Feifei realized what Ruby had been planning all along, it was too late. She could only grit her teeth. "Mum, she is faking it. I didn't push her!"

"Aunty, she pushed me." Ruby sobbed, knowing the effect of her tears on Wen Lin.

As expected, Wen Lin felt her heart ache even more. She hugged Ruby fondly. "Come with me. Aunty will bring you to eat some snacks."

Ji Feifei glared at their backs. "Who is your daughter between me and her?! Why would you trust the words of an outsider?"

Before Wen Lin could say a word, Ruby crossed her arms and glanced at her. "Outsider? Ji Feifei, are you trying to make me laugh?"

Once again, Ji Feifei shuddered. What did her words mean? Did she know the truth? When she thought back to how Xiehan had been friendly to her, she panicked.

"I..."

"Feifei, I thought we were friends. How could you call me an outsider? Is that how you really consider me?"

Ji Feifei secretly sighed in relief. Before she could make an excuse, Ruby pulled away from Wen Lin.

She then turned to the latter and smiled, as if trying to hide her grievances. "Aunty, I will move out. I wouldn't want to make Feifei uncomfortable."

"Where will you go?" Wen Lin was worried.

"Anywhere. As long as Feifei is comfortable." She looked aside and wiped a drop of tears, successfully shattering what was left of Wen Lin's heart.

"The audacity!" A deep voice resounded from the staircase as soon as Ruby spoke.

Wen Lin looked up and saw her son walking downstairs, looking like he was about to declare war against the whole world.

"Xiehan..." She was about to speak when her eyes widened in the next second. Xiehan brushed past Ji Feifei and pulled Ruby to his side.

"You..." She was shocked. Hadn't they agreed not to reveal the truth yet?

Xiehan glanced at her wordlessly. Although that was what they had agreed, he knew that Ruby might really move out just to make Wen Lin mad at Ji Feifei. While it would work, he couldn't stand the thought of his parents being under the same roof as an impostor while their real daughter missed them helplessly.

"Ji Feifei, what the hell is wrong with you?" He stared down at her ferociously.

Wen Lin's eyes widened in shock. "Xiehan, you..."

"Ruby will stay in this house for as long as I want. Does anyone have a problem with that?"

Without waiting for them to respond, he added, "Also, she will stay in whatever room she wants. Ruby, go and check out where you want to stay. It doesn't matter if the room is occupied, I will get someone to clean it up and redesign it according to your tastes."

His indirect message was not entirely secret. He meant that even if the room she wanted was Ji Feifei's. He would kick Ji Feifei out of the room and clean it up for her.

He turned on his heel and went back upstairs, but his actions and words had struck a chord in Wen Lin's heart.

As his mother, she was certain that Xiehan was in love with Lanni. It would make no sense for her to think that he liked Ruby. Besides, she could tell that his relationship with Ruby was different from that of lovers. Why then was he so hell set on protecting her?

...

Ji Feifei was still in disbelief when she went back to her room.

She paced around in panic and stalked downstairs, intending to grab something to eat when she saw Ruby on the staircase. She was not on her own. Xiehan was with her too.

She rushed back a few steps to eavesdrop and clearly saw them hugging each other. She was just about to point out their inappropriate behaviour when she overheard their conversation.

"Mother will be suspicious."

He rubbed her head like she was a little girl. "That's the point. We cannot keep it a secret for too long. Otherwise, the impostor will find a way to kick you out of the mansion."

Although that would not change many things and they could still turn the tables, he didn't want his parents to feel guilty for kicking out their biological daughter. It was already hurtful enough that they had been living with a counterfeit and didn't know about it.

"You are right, brother. What should I do now?" She asked.

Hiding behind the corner, Ji Feifei was stumped. She almost fainted in shock when she clearly heard what Ruby had just called Xiehan. Brother? !

They knew that they were siblings! They also knew that she and Ruby had been switched at birth! What was worse, they had been finding ways to get her kicked out!

No wonder Xiehan came up with a charade to squeeze Ruby into the Ji Mansion. No wonder he was so protective of Ruby, no wonder he hated her more than he did in the past.

No! She could not let it happen!

She rushed back into her room with a racing heart.

"Is she gone?" Ruby asked when she could no longer hear footsteps.

"Mmh. She must be going to call for help." He speculated. A while ago, he had decided to meet up with Ruby so they would discuss what to do next. Just when they were about to start talking about it, they realized that Ji Feifei was eavesdropping on them.

"Was it okay to do that?" She asked, referring to how they had deliberately let it slip that they knew their true identities.

"She is going to do something that will be most beneficial to us." He laughed, knowing how stupid Ji Feifei was.

...

Ji Feifei's room.

In a fit of panic, the girl grabbed a secret phone that no one knew about and made a call.

"What should I do? they know the truth! It's for sure this time. I heard Xiehan talking about it with that b*tch!"

"Is there anything you can ever do right?" A curse resounded from the other side, then the man uttered insults at her. When he had finally calmed down, he asked, "Who knows? Do your parents know already?"

Ji Feifei shook her head when she thought about it. "I don't think so. I merely heard them say things like it would be hard to tell their parents the truth and that they needed the old trash and bitch duo to be doubtful and investigate it themselves. Either way, Xiehan deliberately did things that made his mother suspicious. It will not be long until she pins the pieces together too."

the man was fuming in rage. After a few seconds, he said, "Now you can only pull the big guns."

"Pull... What guns?" She trembled when she heard his tone. The last time she had committed crimes for the boss, he jilted her when she was in jail. In fact, he had still used her even while she was still behind bars. Now that she was free, he was not going to ask her to do something that would send her back to prison, was he?

Just as she prepared herself to find excuses to reject the mission, his voice came through. "Kick that girl out. I will give you the cards but it's all up to you how you play it."

"Sir, this..."

"Didn't you say that you wanted to marry Xiehan at all costs? This is your chance." The man laughed heartily.

...

Xiehan's study.

Ruby and Xiehan listened closely as the man spoke. However, the instructions they were waiting for did not happen. Instead, he hung up the call and sent Ji Feifei a text message.

Xiehan was unable to read the content, but he frowned. It was that bizzare language again. He should have expected it. How could the boss of Galaxis leave his tracks behind so carelessly?

In actual fact, it was not easy to hack into Ji Feifei's secret phone as it had been protected by a series of viruses. He had used a lot of effort and had managed to overhear something important. Even so, they had still hit a dead end.

The only way they could translate the message was if Lanni could remember that language, and the probability of that happening was too slim to be reliable.

the most troublesome fact was that Ji Feifei must be preparing to scheme against Ruby. But what could the scheme be?

"The only way to make mother and father hate me is by framing me for a crime that would never be tolerated. What do you think that is? Will she make it seem like I tried to hurt mother and father...or her?"

Xiehan speculated in disgust. "Our parents would hate you much more if you tried to hurt me. However, she wants things to go in her favor so she will probably self-harm to frame you.. Our parents will kick you out, and she will probably threaten to file a lawsuit against you if I do not agree to take her as my wife."

Chapter 438 - I Gave You The Answer

"Now I've seen it all." Ruby could not believe that someone could be so vicious. "What should we do now? If they are not going to meet up, how will we be able to know who the other person is?"

She thought about it and added, "What if we use the hard approach?"

"Hard approach?" He asked as she tapped his phone screen to dial a number.

She nodded. "We have tried to slowly expose her but this might not necessarily give us the desired results at the right time. Why don't we force her to spill the beans?"

He had thought of this too. However, "This method might not work either. It's highly likely that she has long vowed to take the truth to her grave. Even if she hasn't, she might not necessarily know anything helpful."

She frowned but she couldn't refute this possibility. To protect himself, that insane boss of Galaxis might have ensured that no one got to see or meet him. She had learnt from Lanni that everyone at the agency had only spoken to him through a blank screen. Only his son knew his identity, but they would be dreaming if they expected him to help them go against his father.

"Don't worry." Xiehan rubbed her head and made the call.

"Did you get anything?" He asked when Luna answered the call.

They had decided to split their tasks so he hacked Ji Feifei's phone and sent her the codes so she would try to hack the other side.

"Still trying. I'll let you know if I get anything." On the other end, Luna rubbed the back of her neck in distress. It was already hard enough to hack that person's phone, but it was even harder to do so without a trace.

When Xingyu saw her rub her neck, he frowned and brought her a glass of milk. "Drink it and have some rest. You can go on in the morning."

"I'm almost done." Luna took a sip of the milk and resumed what she was doing, her long, slender fingers flying across the keyboard at a speed that Xingyu would have found impossible if he hadn't seen it before.

"It's here!" Luna suddenly exclaimed and tapped the enter key to reveal the information she had found.

However, in the next second, her screen turned black and lit up again to reveal the face of a man.

"You freaking...!" Luna balled her fists to stop herself from uttering vulgarities. Didn't this man know how to choose the right time to hack into her laptop?!

"Why are you so riled up? Are you mad because I interrupted your fun?" Flynn laughed at her enraged countenance. "How rude. Are you investigating my father? I know you are."

Luna so badly wanted to strangle him. "So what if I am? Get lost! I want to resume my work."

"Tsk, are you addicted to making yourself go through unnecessary trouble?" He snickered.

Luna couldn't stand his provocation, and Xiehan wished he could stab the man through the screen for troubling his fiancée. "How is it your business?"

"Of course it's my business. I gave you the answer. I can't believe you're still seeking it. Isn't this a slap to my face?"

"What do you mean?" She was stumped.

"Are you an idiot? The answer is with Lanni." The screen went blank and the man's face disappeared.

Luna stared at it in shock. What in the world?

Next day.

As soon as work was over, Luna rushed over to Lanni's apartment and explained Flynn's bizarre reaction.

"He said the answer is with you."

"Me?" Lanni was flabbergasted. What was Flynn playing at this time?

She was about to voice this out when she suddenly recalled something. "The USB flash drive."

"The what?"

Lanni was yet to respond when her phone rang. She frowned slightly when she saw the caller's identity. It was long past working hours, so why was CEO Qian calling her?

Luna's phone rang too, so Lanni stepped aside to answer her call. "Hello, CEO Qian?"

"I'm sorry Lanni, you don't have to come back to work tomorrow."

"What do you mean?" Lanni was confused.

"You are fired." The man went straight to the point.

"What? Why would I be... Hello?"

The call had been hung up. She glanced at her phone in disbelief as if trying to confirm that she had really been speaking to CEO Qian. Why did he suddenly fire her, and why did he say he was sorry?

She sucked in a breath and went back to the living room, trying to hide her shock so she wouldn't startle Luna.

However, she came back to a pale-faced Luna who looked to be distressed.

"Sis, what happened?" She had a bad feeling about this.

Luna had a bad feeling about her sister's phone call too, so she spilled the beans. "Didn't I tell you that I met a genius whose game just happened to be similar to Demons Vs Gods? He suddenly said to the media that I stole his game from him. He said that we met to negotiate but I claimed to be unsatisfied with the game, only to turn around and produce it on my own. He even gave evidence of our meeting and discussion."

"No way! Not you too!" Lanni's heart picked up its pace.

"Sis, what's going on?" Luna found her reaction odd.

She explained what had suddenly happened with Her CEO. "This is strange. It's not a coincidence."

They exchanged glances and seemed to understand each other's insecurities. Was this related to the man they were investigating? Was he attacking them?

Lanni took her phone and dialled Xiehan's contact number with trembling fingers. "Xiehan, is everything alright on your side?"

"From your call, you must have guessed that something is wrong?" The man sounded exhausted.

"Uh huh." She gritted her teeth, realising that her fears had come true.

Since it would only make her more worried, he didn't hide the truth from her. "About two hours ago, a partner suddenly withdrew their investment from a project that is halfway done and I have to go to the UK urgently. I'll be back soon, my love."

"I understand, honey. Take your time and be careful, okay?" She urged.

"Take care of yourself too." He hung up to resume his preparations.

When the call ended, Lanni thought of someone else and was scared to call her. Would that man attack Li Yuming too?

Before she could register this thought, she saw an incoming call from Flynn.

She was contemplating whether to answer it when it automatically connected and the annoying guy spoke up.

"He is trying to distract you. Let me help you handle this. I cannot handle Feng Ji International and neither can I deal with CEO Qian. But let me help you handle the little boy. Will you trust me?" His message sounded like it was intended for Luna.

The latter moved closer to Lanni's phone and asked, "Will you go against your dad?"

"Aren't I doing that already?" Flynn chuckled. "He is my father alright, but that doesn't make me on his side. I don't like what he is doing either."

"Like we would trust you." Lanni scoffed.

"Well, you better trust me, princess." He was as annoying as ever, but he didn't want to vex them too much so he immediately added, "He used me and now he is trying to use my sister too. Would I be on his side?"

The sisters exchanged shocked glances and widened their eyes. Luna was the first to snap back. "Sister? Is your sister Ji Feifei?"

That was the person that the man was currently trying to use.

However, Flynn chuckled. "Don't make wild guesses. Anyway, whether you trust me or not, I will deal with the little boy."

He hung up.

"Do you trust him?" Lanni asked faintly.

"Do I have a choice?" Luna sighed. "Lanni, why do I feel so anxious?"

Lanni hugged her, even though she felt the same way. "Calm down, Luna. Have some rest and try to relax. You need to take care of yourself. Should I call Xingyu over?"

"No. He must be helping Xiehan out. I don't want Xiehan to end up having to do everything by himself." She pulled away from Lanni's shoulder and tried to think about what to do.

"Right. The USB."

Lanni remembered it and went to her room then took it from her safe. She had kept it after successfully using it to threaten Flynn. Because it was meant for Luna, however, she had not checked it out.

"Luna, what if the content is shocking?" She asked.

"There isn't any shock I haven't received." Luna prepared to receive the USB, but was shocked when she saw it. "Isn't that the flash drive that Flynn gave to me before, the one I got rid of?"

"Xingyu gave it to me." Lanni explained as she uncapped it.

Luna finally understood why Flynn had berated her by saying that he had given her the answer. Indeed, he had given it to her, and she had thrown it away. Was her brain fried?

"Ready?" Lanni asked and inserted the USB flash drive when the other nodded.

Chapter 439 - The Answer

When both Lanni and Luna were ready to face whatever was on the USB flash drive, Lanni inserted it in her laptop and waited with bated breath.

Even though she had prepared herself psychologically and despite having experienced many gruesome and shocking scenes, she still held her sister's hand tightly in nervousness.

Lanni patted the back of the other's hand. "It's okay. It's a good thing." This was the answer they were looking for, after all. She proceeded to select the 'external storage' on her laptop screen and was stumped when an authentication window popped up. They needed a password?

"Are you kidding me? Why would Flynn give us a USB flash drive that was protected with a password and not give us the password?"

It took a second for Luna to recall his words. "Wait. Aside from saying that the answer was with you, he also said that the answer is you. Perhaps the latter statement referred to the password?"

Lanni thought it made sense so she placed her fingers over the keyboard and typed L-a-n-n-i. When it was rejected, she tried L-i-L-a-n-n-i and was stumped when that got rejected too.

"Maybe it's a nickname? He keeps calling you 'princess'. Try that." Luna suggested, earning a glare.

"Do not be silly." Lanni chided, though the latter's word had reminded her of a possible password. She thought about it and swiftly keyed in P-h-o-e-n-i-x.

"Urgh why did we need to go through the trouble? I can hack it." Luna belatedly remembered what she was best at. It was probably the reason why Flynn did not give them the password, because she would not need it.

She had just pulled the laptop to her side when her eyes met a green tick on the screen with the words "Authentication successful" displayed under it.

"Okay. I guess that works too."

The screen was suddenly filled with many thumbnails, it turned out that the flash drive was a collection of videos. From the thumbnails, they could clearly tell that some of these videos were at least a decade old. There were new ones as well, but they chose to click on the first one at the top.

The content of the video was beyond their expectation. Although it was of poor quality and had not been taken from a clear angle, the sisters clearly saw a young woman show up. She looked beautiful and had long hair which she had tied into a ponytail, and they could tell at a glance that it should be Li Yuming.

The content proved them right. The young woman rushed over to a handsome young man, who they guessed was their father, and hugged his arm bashfully. "Hanchen, it's good news!"

"Mmh?" The man turned to look at her.

She had a beautiful smile as she announced, "I'm pregnant. Are you happy?"

"I'm overjoyed!" The man hugged her briefly. What followed was Li Yuming's chatter.

"If it's a girl, I will name her Luna. She will be the cutest girl on earth."

"Mmh. She will be pretty." The man agreed.

She cocked her head curiously, "Hanchen, what would you want to name it if it's a boy?"

"I don't know yet. I'm so happy I can't think straight."

"Never mind. Leave such matters to me."

Watching the video, Luna's lips couldn't help curling upwards. She knew that it was merely a coincidence for her to have been given her mother's favorite name, but that didn't prevent her from feeling her heart melt. It turned out that her mother once loved her.

The next video was also about Li Yuming and Xia Hanchen, and she was rubbing her belly happily as she chirped, "Hanchen, the doctor said we're expecting twins."

"That's good news." The man responded.

"Hanchen, I'm looking forward to seeing them." She hugged his arm.

"Me too." His expression did not change much.

Lanni frowned as she watched. "Is it just me or was their love one-sided? It's as though mother was in love but father wasn't paying attention to her. Otherwise how come she went to the gynecologist on her own?"

Luna did not know what to say about it either. She had always thought that Xia Hanchen was the one who had been head over heels for Li Yuming. But she didn't think too much of it. Perhaps he was just not good at expressing himself?

The next video was a recent one and from the angle, it had been taken in secret just like the former two.

Luna widened her eyes when Li Xiyan showed up, disguised with a wig and makeup. She wouldn't have recognized her if she wasn't so good at it herself.

What happened next was more baffling. The woman looked to her left nervously but in the next second, she was pulled into a man's arms. Xia Hanchen's arms!

Lanni's jaw almost dropped to the floor. Wasn't this woman in hiding? Most importantly, why was their dad hugging her?

"Wait. Isn't this that day we had dinner with Cedric and Xiao Yu?" She exclaimed when she clearly saw their background and the date that the video had been taken.

A flash of pink suddenly crossed her mind. That scarf she had once seen at his villa... Don't tell her it was Li Xiyan's?

"He is seeing Li Xiyan. But he said that he hated her because she ruined his health." Luna was shocked stiff.

"Perhaps he is with her to plot revenge? Maybe he helped her escape from prison or helped her keep the secret and did not uncover her disguise." Lanni tried to find a plausible reason even though she herself didn't believe it.

"The point is, he didn't tell us." Luna recovered from her shock. Thinking that the answer might be in the other videos, she played the next one.

This time, it had been taken in a prison. The quality was the worst and they almost couldn't recognize the subjects, perhaps because the person recording it had to hide far away. Luckily, the voice conversation was clear.

"How long do I need to stay here?"

Lanni's body stiffened. It was Ji Feifei's voice.

"Just a little longer." A deep voice responded, making the two of them exchange shocked gazes. It was their dad!

Why was he speaking to Ji Feifei?

They could forcefully come up with a reason to explain why he was still in contact with Li Xiyan but what about Ji Feifei? And why did he sound like they were close, and like he was responsible for getting her out of prison?

Neither daring to talk nor jump into conclusions, Lanni played the next video, which was much clearer than the rest and looked to be one of the most recent as well. The timestamp was dated a year ago.

In the video, Flynn held a wineglass and stood beside Xia Hanchen who was standing at the mezzanine of an unfamiliar villa.

"Father." Flynn called out.

"No!" Lanni covered her face with both of her hands. Did she hear that right? What did Flynn just call Xia Hanchen?

"What the heck? Did he just call him... father?" Luna was in disbelief too, and she exited the video then replayed it, paying much more attention this time. She even checked if the video was photoshopped but it wasn't. Flynn's lips moved clearly to utter the word they thought they had heard. Flynn's father?!

They thought they would hear the man's denial but his lips curled into a smile they had never seen on his face. It was sinister and looked to be hiding schemes behind it. "Son. Heh, you wouldn't call me that for no reason."

Lanni felt her strength leave her body. Flynn's father... Was Xia Hanchen?!

She concentrated to the max as she saw Flynn move his lips.

"I need to ask you for something."

"I knew it came at a price. What do you want?" Xia Hanchen asked through a frown of disdain.

"Could you spare her?"

Flynn did not mention who he wanted to be spared but the man seemed to understand the hidden message. He immediately frowned.

"No way!"

Lanni didn't watch the rest of the video as her mind was in turmoil. Flynn was her brother? He was obviously half-European so his mother was probably German. Did that mean he was her half brother? No, the point was, wasn't Flynn's father the boss of Galaxis?!

Luna continued watching, hoping that there would be something to counter what she had just seen and heard.

Li Xiyan glared at Xia Hanchen in the next video. "You promised to let me get rid of that b*tch! She harassed me throughout my youth. Don't get me started on how the mere face of her reminds me of your ex-wife."

From her words, she was talking about Luna.

Xia Hanchen grinned amusedly. "My love, relax. I still haven't started complaining about what you did to Lanni."

"She deserved it." The woman pouted.

In response, Xia Hanchen chuckled and grabbed her hand. "I know. Even so, you cannot do anything to her....yet.. I still have a lot of use for her."

Chapter 440 - Pieces Of The Puzzle

When the current video finished playing, the next one automatic played. This time, it was a monologue of Flynn.

He smiled at the camera but unlike the usual grimace that usually joyously laced his lips, this time he looked like he was hiding his sadness behind that handsome smile. "If you got to this video, you must have watched the others. You must have found the answers to many puzzles."

Lanni nodded even though she knew that he would not see her, while Luna stared blankly at the screen. It was unsure whether she could hear a word.

"I don't know how long I'm going to stay alive as I found out things I shouldn't. Just like your second uncle, my days are numbered now. I need to ask you for a favor."

Luna jolted and listened carefully when she heard this. Her lips trembled as she asked, "Just like Second Uncle?"

Lanni suddenly understood. "Mum's brother!"

Now that they recalled it, Li Yuming had once mentioned that Xia Hanchen was behind their maternal uncle's death, because the latter had found out shocking secrets about him. At the time, they had thought she was bluffing and forcibly making up reasons to prevent Lanni from going to save her father from Galaxis.

Thinking up to this point, Lanni burst into laughter. "Wait. Why did I need to save him from Galaxis? He is the boss... meaning that's his territory. How could he have been forcefully kidnapped?"

Luna facepalmed when she realized what was going on. "He tricked us. He made up the whole 'kidnapping' charade to make you work for him." Luna almost couldn't contain her anger. At the time, Lanni had used up all her effort and when she was done, the boss of Galaxis had wanted to make her continue working for him. It was only when Xiehan made a deal with Flynn that they let her off. Who would have thought that the person behind it all was Xia Hanchen himself?

They had missed out a huge part of the video so they rewinded it.

"Once you find out the truth, pretend you know nothing. Until you are strong enough, don't try to counter him. Or else what happened on the last night you were with your Senior Yang might just happen again." Flynn concluded and the screen turned black.

Lanni felt her mind explode when she thought back to his last words. What happened on the last night when she was with Senior Yang? The accident more than a year ago, the one that put her in a coma for six months?!

If this was before, she would have denied it, and found every reason to claim that her father would never have anything to do with it. However, she had clearly heard him from the video. He had agreed with Li Xiyao that she deserved what had happened, and it was just not the right time for her to die because he still needed to use her.

She couldn't believe it. The person they had been looking for was right beside them. All along, they thought of him as the person who cared about them the most when in reality, he hated them so much in secret...

Although she was disheartened, she gently patted her sister who looked like the world had just collapsed on her. "Luna, don't be upset. Betrayals happen."

Although that was what she said, she knew just how much it hurt deep down. No matter who betrayed her, it would never amount to this kind of pain. It was agonizing, numbing and cold enough to send one to the shackles of despair.

Luna sucked in a breath when she thought about everything that had happened. "You had already left his side but I came to find you. I looked for you myself and brought you back close to him... I accidentally helped him out. I'm so sorry, Lanni."

"You didn't know. It was not your fault." Lanni hugged her.

No matter how hurt they were, they had to get up and find a way out of this. Before they could gather their thoughts, Lanni's phone rang and the screen displayed [Dad <3]

This contact name would usually bring a happy smile on Lanni's face. While she was smiling at this moment, her smile was filled with ridicule and self-mockery. Even so, she cleared her throat and pretended that everything was alright.

"Cupcake?" The man called sweetly.

"Mmh?" Lanni bit her tongue to stop herself from hurling a string of insults.

"Did something happen? You sound upset." His fake worried voice infuriated her, but she had to put up the act.

"I lost my job."

Because anyone would be upset after losing their job, he didn't suspect a thing.

He was silent for a moment before he said, "Forget it. It's that agency that doesn't know better. How dare they fire my perfect and talented daughter? How about you come to dad's company?"

If this was before, she would have felt touched and thought that her father cared about her. But after learning the truth, it was not hard to tell that it was part of his scheme to lure her to his side to use her.

"You don't need to worry about it. I'll find another job in a jiffy."

The man sounded disappointed but he quickly changed the topic. "Come home for dinner, okay? I'll cook your favorite braised pork."

Lanni agreed but rolled her eyes when the call ended. Was she blind before? The man didn't even know what her favorite meal was! Braised pork was probably what Li Xiyan liked, since it wasn't Luna's favorite either.

She let out a sigh. "I'll go and have a meal with him, to gather some facts. Shall I drop you off at Xingyu's?"

When she finished speaking, she realized that Luna was getting ready to leave. "Where are you going? Luna, you heard what Flynn said. We are still too weak to take any action. Besides, you are not in the best condition to confront him."

"I'm not going to look for him." She understood her sister's worry.

Lanni remained silent when she thought about a possibility. Was she going to find Li Yuming?

....

Lanni was not wrong. After thinking about it, Luna decided that it would be best to look for Li Yuming as soon as possible.

Li Yuming's villa.

"Madam, the young miss is here." The housekeeper announced to Li Yuming, who was cooking in the kitchen.

She was overjoyed and let go of the tools she was holding then dashed to the living room, but was surprised when she saw Luna. "It's you? What are you doing here?" She had thought that 'the young miss' that the housekeeper had talked about was Lanni.

Luna hadn't thought about what she was going to say. When she saw Li Yuming, the grief she had been holding back burst out in tears. "I'm so sorry..."

"You found out the truth?" Li Yuming guessed. Otherwise, Luna would never wish to be in the same space as her.

The girl nodded as she tried to fight back her tears. "I blamed you for things you did not do and..."

Li Yuming sighed and interrupted her, as she closed in to wipe her tears. "It's not your fault. You had been blinded by that sly fox."

Li Yuming didn't know what to talk about so she asked, "Where is your sister? You girls have to stay by my side."

Luna looked up in shock. "You..you acknowledge me?"

"I'm still mad at you. But you are my daughter, I cannot deny that. If you remain close to that man, what if he hurts you?" Li Yuming shrugged then added, "But don't think too much of it. I'm only worried about my grandchild."

"Mother!" Luna buried her face into Li Yuming's arm, making the latter feel helpless.

"What should I do with you?"

Meanwhile, Lanni was asked the same question as she dined with Xia Hanchen.

"Where is your sister?"

"She went to say hi to mother." She deliberately said to test out his reaction, and when he gripped his fork, she asked, "Is something wrong?"

He frowned as he shook his head like the sly fox he was. "No. I'm just scared. She hates Luna so much after all. What if she were to hurt my daughter and grandchild?"

"She won't." Lanni had no appetite but she had to pretend to eat.

"Lanni, I'm telling you, looks can be deceiving." The man said.

"Uh huh. I agree." Sarcasm rolled off Lanni's tongue, but the man did not realize it.

How stupid she had been! All along, the man had been trying his best to slowly create misunderstandings between her and Li Yuming. How could she not have realized it?

No wonder he wanted her to change her surname. Just like Luna, she would be on bad terms with her mother if she changed her surname to that of the man Li Yuming hated the most.

Now that she thought about it, she couldn't help but realize that before he regained consciousness from coma, Luna and Li Yuming had started getting closer.. However, as soon as he woke up, their relationship worsened in a flash. How manipulative of him!