

Chapter 561 - Dramatic Affairs

"Why the hell not?" Lanni did not understand.

"I just don't want to talk about my private matters in the presence of someone else." Yu Guang insisted stubbornly and before Lanni could speak, he added, "This is not up for negotiation."

"Of course it's not." Lanni rolled her eyes. "You want help from the media and my guess is that you will need to have something published. If you don't want to have your matter found out by anyone, you may as well find help from a private investigator instead."

"Is this how you talk to everyone who needs your help?" Yu Guang asked, to which Lanni scoffed.

"Only those who make unreasonable demands." She turned to Lin Jian with a nod to let him know that they should leave.

"Wait. I really need your help. I'll talk." He grabbed her hand so she wouldn't storm off. She pulled her hand out of his and sat back down.

"We are going to record this conversation for convenience purposes. Is that okay with you?" She prompted, but it was also a warning for him not to try anything he shouldn't.

"That's okay." He smiled to hide his reluctance.

"Do you want something to drink?" Lin Jian offered to go and grab it.

It was not a good idea to leave her alone with Yu Guang, so he ran a hand through his hair with a smile. "I'm not certain what they have to offer. Will you check it out?"

"Sure." She stood, knowing that Lin Jian must have something to say to Yu Guang. "Do you guys want anything? I can bring some for you."

"A lemonade is fine." He glanced at Yu Guang who didn't look willing to drink anything.

"I'll order a drink when I feel the need." He looked at her, wondering what she and her so-called boss were up to. When Lanni walked over to the bar to order drinks and food, Yu Guang looked back at Lin Jian. "I need to use the restroom."

"Go ahead and run for the hills." Lin Jian waved him off. He was definitely aware that he wanted to talk to him in private and the bathroom was probably his exit plan. Except, he didn't go in the direction of the bathrooms. Lin Jian thought it was obvious until he realized that the man was headed in Lanni's direction.

"Shit!" He cursed and jolted out of his seat, making a beeline for the duo.

"Lanni, be careful!" He yelled when he was close enough, only to be met with a sight that made his jaw drop. Yu Guang was kissing Lanni. The latter pushed him off her and slapped him ruthlessly.

"I'm sorry." He apologized.

"You knew that she was married." Lin Jian grabbed his collar and punched him in his back, a few seconds before the two were locked in a fighting mess on the floor.

...

A few minutes ago.

Lanni had taken her time deciding what she would order and went to the counter when she was certain. She didn't want to eat yet so she ordered a bottle of distilled water.

"Lanni, are you done?" Yu Guang spoke behind her.

"Why did you follow me here?" She was taken aback. Something felt off. The sudden sensation of his lips on hers just proved that. Fury filled her entire being as well as disgust. She slapped him with enough force to make her palm sting and before she could let him have it for kissing a married woman, he was on the floor, getting a series of blows from Lin Jian.

"Lin Jian, stop!" She ordered, not trying to stop them on her own. "Guards! Somebody!"

The two men were separated by the restaurant's security guards and asked to leave for causing a commotion. That was a relief, because the last thing Lanni wanted was to continue being here.

"Are you okay?" Lin Jian asked as he helped her into the car. Xiehan would kill him!

"I'm fine." She was enraged. She couldn't believe Yu Guang had lied about needing the media's help just so he could get a chance to do that. Now that she thought about it, he didn't seem to have pure intentions from the word go. She should have known that it was about that. She could still remember his infuriating voice as he was shown the door.

"Lanni, I really like you! I may not expressed it in the right way but my feelings for you are true!"

Screw the true feelings, she thought.

"Are you going to let Xiehan know?" Lin Jian asked, wondering how Lanni intended to handle the matter.

"I probably should." Her voice was a mutter and she still felt repulsed. She should not have come. Luckily she had not come on her own, or she might have been unable to shake him off.

She had come with a chauffeur but Lin Jian made sure she got home, ensuring she had entered the mansion before he left.

Xiehan would be home soon, so she took a warm bath and wore a red set of sexy lingerie. It might soothe the blow if she told him what happened after giving him a perfect 'welcome'.

She kept glancing at the bedroom door every few minutes as she waited for his return. He did, after what felt like forever.

"You're home." She shuffled out of bed joyously when the door opened, but the sight of him made her stop in her tracks. He looked upset.

"Honey, is everything alright?" She asked gently.

He ignored her question and shrugged his coat off, making his way to sit on the bed. This was so unlike him. No matter how tired he was, he would never ignore her. Something was probably wrong and it was possible that he didn't even see her because he was deep in thought.

She took his coat and placed it on the rack, then crawled up beside him and tapped his shoulder.
"Xiehan,"

"Do you have anything to tell me?" He asked out of the blue. It took a while for her mind to process it and when it did, she shook her head instinctively.

"About what?"

"Anything that happened? Anything you did?" He tried not to lose his temper before hearing what she had to say about it.

She shut her eyes, dreading the possibility that he had found out what happened in Onyx earlier.

"Well, there are things that happened earlier but you would need to be calm." She started. "Can we talk about it after dinner?"

He looked reluctant but he let her take his hand and lead him downstairs to the dining room. He wasn't quite in the mood to eat and only ate a few bites before putting down his cutlery.

"What happened?" He asked.

Her hands trembled as she broached the subject. "I went shopping with Luna and Xiaoshi earlier today. I bumped into an old schoolmate from B City University."

"Is that the man you kissed?" He demanded.

"What did you say?" Her heart raced wildly as she realized that he had indeed found out the worst part of what happened. "No. I didn't kiss him. It was he who kissed me without my consent and I slapped him for it."

She explained frantically, her heart sinking when she met his frown. "Honey, I would never cheat on you. I promise, I didn't ever meet him before today and..."

She stopped speaking when he slid his phone over the table to her. She raised an eyebrow and glanced at the headline on the screen.

[Famous reporter Li Lanni's extramarital affairs catch up to her.]

She gasped at the headline. "This is ridiculous." She shook her head at the enlarged picture of her and Yu Guang kissing. They looked like they couldn't keep their hands to themselves and no one would doubt their relationship.

She took a deep breath and turned to her husband. "Honey, I can explain."

His expression didn't change so she told her side of the story nonetheless. "Yu Guang asked me to meet him up for dinner and claimed that he needed help from the media. I went there as a reporter and I knew that he was planning something so I had Lin Jian go with me as my boss."

"You knew he was planning something and went to meet up with him either way?" He furrowed his brows.

She grabbed his arm. "I only suspected that he was trying to chase me. I was certain that if that was the case, he wouldn't attempt anything with Lin Jian present and if he really needed help, he would get it from us. I didn't think he wanted to get dirt..." The news on the screen disgusted her more than the forceful kiss from Yu Guang.

The article had dramatically told the story of her relationship with Yu Guang, stating that the two of them had loved each other and had to go separate ways when Lanni's family made her marry Xiehan. However, they had not truly gone separate ways as they secretly met up with each other and had an affair.

All had been going well until the city's infamous playboy, Lin Jian, came into the picture. Apparently, Lin Jian couldn't pass up the opportunity to be with a beauty like Lanni and they had been together right under Xiehan's nose. The article even provided evidence in the form of the flowers Lin Jian had sent her recently, as well as realistic screenshots of her conversations with both men. The highlight of her affairs was the dramatic fight that had erupted when the two paramours supposedly bumped into each other in Onyx and each found out the other's affair with the woman they both loved.

She shook her head in disbelief. "Xiehan, this is fake."

"You have to believe me. This is fake!" Lanni insisted when she saw his blank expression. She knew it was hard to believe especially with the detailed screenshot that was supposed to prove that she had been chatting privately with Yu Guang and Lin Jian. She scrolled through the messages with a scoff. She had never sent such a message. Maybe Luna would have a way to prove that they were made up?

Before she could ask him whether he could check it for credibility, she caught sight of a supposed picture that she had sent Lin Jian.

"Uh..." She zoomed in the picture of the bare chest on the screenshot and showed it to him. "You know these are not mine, right?" She looked up at him hopefully, knowing he would know his wife's body better than anyone.

He didn't even look down at the screen. "I know you have nothing to do with this. You would never cheat on me."

She was relieved and confused at the same time. "But if you believe me, why are you making it sound like you don't? You've been ignoring me."

"I do. It's just outrageous." He took his phone back from her and took her hand. "I'm just thinking about it. Why would such a rumor come up to begin with?"

"I have no idea." She tried to think back into the past and shook her head. "I haven't had this kind of issue before."

This was the biggest problem, because the timing was just too odd.

"Wait. It's not a coincidence that I met Yu Guang, is it?" She spoke up when she remembered that it had all happened in the same day. He met her, then he called her for dinner and set her up by kissing her!

"It's definitely not. He had this planned all along." He confirmed her suspicion. "He has some nerve, putting his lips on my woman." He growled.

So that was why he was angry, she observed. Xiehan was possessive and didn't appreciate other men getting close to her, let alone one kissing her against her will. Yu Guang was going to be toast soon, not that she was worried for him. She was just worried that he might act in anger and destroy the only lead they had. "Honey, don't confront him yet, okay? Let's get all the information we need first. I'm afraid this matter is not so simple."

He hummed in response. His phone rang and when he saw that it was Lin Jian calling, he hung up.

Lanni frowned, puzzled. Why was he mad at Lin Jian?

Apparently, the latter was also shocked, because it wasn't long before he came stumbling in.

"Look what the wind blew in." Xiehan cracked his knuckles as he headed for the door where Lin Jian had just walked in.

"Xiehan, I swear. I would never betray you. No matter how beautiful Lanni is, I take her as my sister-in-law. I would never have that kind of feelings for her." Lin Jian vowed solemnly, almost dropping to his knees to prove his point.

Xiehan's gaze was narrowed at him. "Yet you sent her flowers."

Lin Jian scratched his head, aware that his action had been used as 'evidence' of their cheating. "She was in a terrible mood after what happened to her brother. I was only trying to comfort her platonically by sending her flowers. If you don't believe me, you can check the cards on all the flowers I sent her." He swore, looking at Lanni to help him prove that he didn't have any intentions behind the flowers.

Xiehan's expression darkened. "Do I need to do that?"

The latter raised his hands in surrender. "Of course not. You trust your wife enough not to care what other people say."

Satisfied with the answer, a smile ghosted Xiehan's lips. "It's good that you are here, actually. Come here."

Before Lin Jian could react, he was grabbed by the collar and dragged towards the staircase.

"You can't do that! If you kill me, Ruby would never forgive you!" The man defended himself vehemently.

"Just shut your mouth." Xiehan continued to drag him away, worrying Lanni who had been watching the drama unfold.

"Xiehan?" She called his name worriedly. Would he really kill his friend?

"It's okay." He reassured her. "I don't want this matter to stress you out. Let me handle it, okay?"

"Okay but..." She eyed Lin Jian who looked like he was about to scream for his life. "You will not do anything to Lin Jian, will you? He tried his best to protect me."

"Do you think I'm that unreasonable? Don't worry." He patted Lin Jian's back, giving the man goosebumps. "After all, he did a good job beating that little bastard to a pulp. I can't blame him anymore."

Lanni was in relief hearing that. As long as Xiehan was not angry with Lin Jian, he wouldn't be tempted to do anything he shouldn't. "Okay. I'll be in my studio then."

The two men went to the study upstairs, one dragging the other, and as soon as they entered, Xiehan shut the door.

"Xiehan..." Lin Jian wondered whether his friend was really going to kill him.

"There is something terribly sketchy about that guy. Have you looked into his past?" Xiehan crossed his arms while leaning against the door. Lin Jian let out the breath he had been holding. So they were really here to discuss and nothing else.

He sighed in relief at the fact that he had done some investigation on his way here. "It's tricky. He had actual feelings for Lanni, which he had been harboring since they were schoolmates. He didn't even get married nor did he get close to any woman every since he confessed to Lanni."

He shut his mouth when he noticed his friend's scary expression. How was he supposed to speak when he was being glared at for merely stating that another man had feelings for Lanni?

"What are you saying?" Xiehan prompted him when he stopped speaking.

Resigning to his fate, Lin Jian cleared his throat and continued stating his analysis. "That he probably has high standards for the type of woman he would want to date, but it just so happens that it was misunderstood. If anyone were to guess, they would probably think it's because he is still hung up on Lanni."

Of course the brat was hung up on Lanni, Xiehan thought. He remembered him as one of her ardent admirers who he had thought were capable of competing him for her in the past. After getting together with Lanni, he had not cared to continue looking into the young man since he knew that she solely belonged to him.

"What has he been spending his time doing all these months?" He asked, to which Lin Jian answered,

"He has a startup and has been spending most of his days working on making a name for himself in the business industry. He is an ambitious man."

Xiehan responded with a grunt as he paced the room slowly.

"It's not odd that he didn't get close to women." Lin Jian flopped onto the couch. "Think about it this way, if Lanni were to reject you, would you be able to get close to other women?"

"Lin Jian, are you tired of living?" Xiehan growled.

"No." He raised his hands in surrender. "I'm not implying that Lanni would ever leave you or anything, I know how much you two love each other. All I'm trying is to think about it from his perspective. Don't they say that to catch a thief, you should think like a thief?"

When he saw that Xiehan's anger had calmed down, he asked, "As a man who loves Lanni, what is your reason to not find pleasure in other women? What makes her so unique?"

"She is just...different. I never met anyone like her in my life. All the women I've met dull in comparison." He answered for the sake of understanding the situation better.

"Cheesy but that's the point." Lin Jian rubbed his chin. "Maybe Yu Guang is waiting for a second Lanni."

"He is not getting her in this lifetime." Xiehan scoffed. There was no second Lanni. There was only one Lanni and she was his wife.

The thought of the last word made a chill run down his spine. When he looked down at Lin Jian, the latter looked confused as to why he had that kind of chilling gaze.

"Yu Guang will never be able to be with Lanni... unless she and I are no longer together." He revealed his speculation.

"Now you're thinking." Lin Jian crossed his legs. "I can't believe he would make himself wait for you two to divorce. There is no way he would guarantee that unless he is ready to make sure the two of you divorce."

"That brat!" Xiehan gritted his teeth. He wanted to kill someone!

"And whoever is backing him up." Lin Jian rested his elbows on his thighs. "I would believe him to be an ardent admirer who cannot give up on his love but he appeared out of the blue. I don't think he had ever thought of disrupting her life. He would have done so ages ago. The fact that he thought of making a move now only means... someone is backing him up."

Chapter 563 - Confrontation

When Lin Jian left, Xiehan went to the studio to check on Lanni. She was almost done with her painting and was humming softly as she stroked it with her brush. He had never seen her paint this happily.

When she felt his presence, she turned to him with a smile. "How long have you been standing there?" She asked.

"Long enough to enjoy the view." He teased, and she chuckled.

"Come here. Did you finish discussing with Lin Jian? You didn't kill him, did you?" The last part was a teasing joke, which made him laugh.

"What if I did, mh?" He closed in on her. "Will you help me hide the body?"

"Only if Ruby doesn't kill me before I'm done."

"That will not happen. Well, I refrained from killing him." He responded and took a seat on the couch.

"Can you not make it sound like actual murder was about to happen?" She pinched him playfully.

He grabbed her hand and kissed it, then pulled her over so she would sit on his lap. "Lin Jian and I think someone is behind Yu Guang."

"Do you have a clue who it might be and what they aim to gain from doing this?" She asked, to which he shook his head.

"We are going to investigate. Meanwhile, he promised to suppress the news as much as possible."

"Thank you." She hugged him. While she was not certain whether or not the orchestrator had achieved what they had been aiming for, one thing was certain—that her reputation would be tarnished.

Suppressing the news might erase it but who knew if they would try to put it up again? Besides, there might be people who thought she had really cheated on her husband and if they realized that the news had been suppressed, they might assume it was because Xiehan didn't want anyone to know about his marital troubles. In the end, she would still need to find evidence that the screen shots were fabricated.

"I need to get back to painting. I should finish this soon, because I promised Xiao Yu to give it to her when I'm done." She slid off his lap and sat in front of the easel.

"What are you painting?" He leaned over to take a clearer look. He knew it was a landscape but for some reason, she was doing it upside down.

"This is what the beach looks like at midnight." She pointed at the painting and grabbed the sides to hold it right side up.

"Speaking of beaches, we had planned to visit Australia and kept putting it off." He spoke up, and noticed that her hand froze holding a paintbrush.

"What's wrong? Don't you want to travel the world anymore?" He questioned.

"It's not that I don't want to anymore, I just..." She took a deep breath. "Xiehan, would you believe me if I told you that Aunt Meiling has something against me? I don't know what I did to deserve it but she suddenly hates me."

He went silent and she didn't know whether or not he believed her.

"I was trying to find what reason she could have to hate you. I don't think there is any, especially because she has always liked you." He was puzzled.

"That's before I became pregnant. It all started on the night we announced our pregnancy. If you realized it, she started making strange remarks on the same night and offering me food she knew are not specifically good for expectant women."

He found it odd and frowned. "Even if she is going to make such an implication, she would not be stupid enough to hurt our child in the presence of so many people. Maybe you are over thinking it?"

She shook her head. "I trust my gut. And my gut says she is onto something."

"And I trust you." He responded. "Just in case she really is onto something, don't get close to her, okay? And don't go anywhere on your own. If I'm at work, take at least three bodyguards with you."

"Okay." She was glad that he didn't call her out for causing drama. If she was being honest, she would have loved to keep things neutral but after Ji Meiling gave her baby clothes as a gift earlier, she started wondering if she did it on purpose.

Maybe she was overthinking it but she felt Ji Meiling overheard her and Luna talk about it and only bought her baby clothes because she stated her discomfort towards buying them in advance. Besides, who gifts baby clothes of a specific gender before the gender is revealed? It was as though Ji Meiling was implying that she hoped the baby was a boy.

"Xiehan, do you want a girl or a boy?" She asked out of the blue when she realized it.

He raised an eyebrow at the sudden question. "All I want is a baby. Whether it's a girl or a boy, it doesn't matter as much as the love I have for both of you." He kissed her forehead.

"That's a smooth way of avoiding the question." She rolled her eyes.

He chuckled. "Maybe it is. Well, I don't know whether I prefer a girl or a boy. I weighed the options before but they just kept coming at a draw."

She smiled at his response. Most men wanted little girls they could spoil to the end of the world. She wanted that too, but it would also be great if she had a boy. He would play with Linhou and protect Xiaomu and Yue together.

Her hand ran down her tummy as she wondered why the thought ran in her mind, while the same thought crept her out coming from Ji Meiling.

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Meanwhile, Lin Jian was getting the short end of the stick.

He had asked Ruby out for a movie and had been horribly late thanks to Yu Guang, so he sent her a text to ask if they could still watch it. She didn't respond and he was nearby so he drove to the Ji Mansion to check on her. Had she seen the rumors before they were deleted? If she had, then she might be mad at him thinking he had betrayed her. He needed to explain the truth to her.

As soon as he rang the doorbell, it was opened and he was met with a fierce glare.

"Aunty Lin?" He was startled when he met Wen Lin's furious gaze. "Did something happen? Why do you look so angry? Anger doesn't look good on your beautiful face."

"Is that the cheesy pickup line you used to lure my daughter into your womanizing trap?" A slap assaulted his face and he knew that he was dead.

He stopped messing around, taking the matter as seriously as it was. "Well, Aunty, we need to talk. I know you have seen the rumors about me."

"All I know is that I have realized what a jerk you really are." Wen Lin pushed him into the living room. It was almost as though they had been waiting for him to stumble into the lion's den. When he saw Ruby, Ji Huifen and Ji Meiling sitting and waiting, he knew that he was right.

"It's a good thing that you all are here. I need to explain what really happened." He sat down even though it felt as though the couch was made of fire with all the gazes directed at him. It was almost as though he had committed murder.

"You better have a good explanation as to why you are playing with the hearts of both my daughter and my daughter-in-law." Wen Lin huffed and sat next to her husband.

"I didn't play with either of their hearts. I only love Ruby with all my heart. On the other hand, Lanni and I respect each other as not only boss and employee, but also brother-in-law and sister-in-law. There is nothing aside from this between us."

"Yet you employed her, a girl who has no regard for commitments. She dropped out of school twice for hell knows what reason, has no qualifications in the media industry yet you still offered her a job as chief editor?" Ji Meiling expressed her shock at the facts.

"Well, Lanni did indeed drop out of school." He admitted. "However, we at Lin Media Group don't just focus on academic qualifications. We focus on nurturing talent and she had one. Don't forget that before she came to Lin Media Group, she was already a chief editor."

"For a company where Xiehan pulled strings for her." She rolled her eyes.

"Chief editor nonetheless. And no one ever complained about her performance. No one has ever complained about her in Lin Media Group either. Not to mention, she obtained a diploma from studying online. She has all the qualifications that any agency would find suitable for a chief editor."

Ji Meiling went silent with a huff and he thought it was over.

Ji Huifen asked, "If the two of you have nothing wrong going on, what's with the rumor?"

"Someone orchestrated this to attack Lanni and Xiehan. I have no idea who it is yet but I will sniff them out."

Wen Lin looked convinced and so did Ji Huifen and Ruby, but Ji Meiling looked skeptical. "Who is to say you are not covering something up? It may make sense for one rumor to be a lie but two at the same time?"

Lin Jian furrowed his brows. Ji Meiling was not attacking him.. It was as if the main point was to prove that Lanni was hiding something. What was wrong with her?

Chapter 564 - Evidence

"I promise to get to the bottom of this. Whoever is trying to tarnish my reputation, whether they have a grudge against me or I just happened to be in the way while they targeted someone else, I will make them pay tenfold." He vowed, studying Ji Meiling's expression. The woman didn't flinch, but that didn't prove that she was in the clear.

"I hope you are not the thief claiming to be the victim. If I find out that you are cheating on my daughter, don't blame me for being unfriendly." Ji Huifen warned.

"I will do no such thing." He promised and stood to hold his hand out for Ruby. "Shall we?"

"I don't think you should be able to take her anywhere before you fully prove your innocence." Ji Meiling cut in, to which Wen Lin rolled her eyes.

"This is about them. I have watched Lin Jian grow up and I know that he is being truthful right now. Besides, Ruby trusts him and that's what matters."

"Don't cry about it if he turns out to be a cheating scumbag." retorted the woman, making Wen Lin and Ji Huifen exchange glances. At the same time, Lin Jian was more convinced by his hypothesis. The woman was up to something and it was highly likely that she was involved in the matter.

Ruby placed her hand in Lin Juan's and let him lead her out of the house, not saying a word to him the whole way.

Guessing that she probably didn't trust him, his expression dulled. "I promise, I didn't do anything wrong. I can prove it but I'll need a few days to get sufficient evidence."

She shook her head. "It's not about that. I know how much Lanni and my brother love each other and believe that you didn't do anything this time. But why do you always end up as a target in this kind of matter? Why did it have to be you?"

"Because I've spent some time working in the same building with Lanni as her boss, and it was easier to twist our relationship?" He made a guess, holding the door that he was in the middle of opening when Ruby popped the question.

"No it's not. It's because you have been a womanizer for ages. No one would doubt it if you were accused of being someone's lover. This is why they picked you, instead of any other man."

He remained silent knowing how frustrated she must be, and she continued in disappointment. "To tarnish Lanni's reputation, they could pick anyone. Heck, they could even frame Jiang Xingyu for falling in love with twins. It's highly possible considering how identical they are to each other. But no, they skipped that part and went for a man who isn't even close to her. All because of the number of women you have been with in the past!"

She was not wrong, and the fact that it was true was killing him. He lowered his head apologetically. "If I knew that this would happen because of my dating history, I wouldn't have played around with so many women."

She looked at him and entered the car, her eyes drooping. She hadn't meant to yell at him but she couldn't stop herself when she thought of the kind of messages she had been receiving. Some "very kind" netizens were filling her inbox with encouragement and reasons why she should leave him. She

didn't intend to do so, but it was frustrating to be looked at with pity as everyone thought that her boyfriend was cheating on her.

"Am I beautiful?" She asked out of the blue and he was flabbergasted.

"What?" Her question had caught him off-guard, and she laughed it off.

"Start driving."

He entered the car and didn't touch the steering wheel, deeming it more important to get this out of the way.

"In the past, I wanted to be loyal to one woman. Xiehan, Xingyu and me had been spending a lot of time with Xingyu's father and that was what he had always encouraged us to do."

"Mmh." She hummed to let him know that she was listening, and he continued.

"That was what we all believed. That a man should only fall in love with one woman and treasure her. The two didn't fancy any girls growing up but it was different for me. I fell in love with a girl but she didn't want to be in a serious relationship with me."

" Why is that?" She asked.

"For some reason, she assumed I would be a playboy. That was the reason she gave me. Then I dated another girl. I liked her very much but she broke up with me because she supposedly dreaded that I would get tired of her, replace her with another girl and ditch her, because I looked like a playboy."

" That's an awful assumption." She frowned.

" It is. " He started the car. "It was the wrong move to take but when I learnt that most girls saw me as a potential playboy, I gave them what they were asking for."

She frowned at his reasoning. "If a girl tells you that you look like a playboy, it probably means you are handsome. Either that, or you are too flirtatious."

"I didn't think of that. Maybe I just hoped for more acknowledgement than that." He focused on the road as he continued pouring his heart out. "I was probably being childish but I compared the responses of girls towards me to how they reacted in the presence of Xiehan and Xingyu. Everyone called them golden young men and expressed their curiosity regarding the women who would be able to get into their hearts, which were said to be harder to break into than Fort Knox."

She burst into laughter. "I can't believe that kind of comment got to you."

When she stopped laughing, she placed her hand on hers. "I understand how you feel. It's probably underrated but comparison causes more harm than it's given credit for. I would also constantly compare myself to other students my age. I worked hard but never got the grades I thought I would if I worked as hard as I did."

On the other hand, everyone thought of me as a spoilt daddy's girl who gave zero thought to her grades. In the end, I just gave up."

He gave her a side glance. "We have more in common than we thought."

"Don't grab every chance to flirt." She rolled her eyes, then frowned and shook her head at how insane people were. Why would they assume that just because a boy was friendly to girls, he was flirtatious? She had witnessed it herself, Lin Jian helping girls out when he knew they needed it but in the end, they would think he was hitting on them. They kept forgetting that it was not just girls he helped out but men, children and the elderly too. It was one of the things that drew her to him. He was so kind.

"I don't think your aunt is up to any good." He brought up the subject of Ji Meiling when he was certain that she had moved on from the rumor.

"My goodness! I thought I was overthinking. When I pointed to dad just how many horrible comments she had made about Lanni in the past week, he thought I was letting trivial things get to my head."

"Since very many people think she is plotting something evil, then she certainly is. And we need to stop her." as if he thought he needed to clarify, he added, "I am not going to let anyone create a mess out of my friend's marriage. Not even if it is the aunt who brought him up."

The thought of the culprit being the aunt who brought Xiehan up was even more terrifying. It was almost as if she was jealous of Lanni for being pregnant. He was probably overthinking it, so the next evening when he sent Xiehan a text message to explain what he had found out, he left out his conclusion.

When Xiehan received the text message, he was curled in bed with Lanni. She was bundled up in front of him while he spooned her, and together they read a web novel on his phone.

The text message was displayed on the top of the screen so they both saw it.

"I was starting to believe that she is guilty." Xiehan revealed his thoughts.

"I asked Luna to check out the source of the screenshot, hoping we could trace it back to whoever fabricated it." She responded, then frowned at the thought. "Do you think Aunt Meiling overlooked a very important detail while plotting her moves? She does know that you and Luna are programmers, right?"

"She probably forgot." His lips twitched. His aunt had probably hired top notch programmers herself, because he had only managed to find the source of the pictures that Lanni supposedly sent Lin Jian. It couldn't prove much, and he was waiting for Luna too, knowing that the latter was working on it. He didn't want to face Xingyu's wrath for snatching something that his wife was interested in. The thought made him chuckle. After battling with Luna over who should prove Lanni's innocence, she had forcefully won.

"I'll give Luna a call and ask what she has managed to find." She dialled the number.

"Let me ask you this first. How did Xiehan take the news?" Luna asked as soon as the call connected.

"Uh, he trusts me?" Lanni didn't understand what her sister was getting at.

"Good.. Because I have the surveillance video of when Yu Guang kissed you."

Chapter 565 - Speculation

Lanni sat up. "That's good news!"

"No it isn't. Well, at least not entirely." Said Luna, and Lanni knitted her brows in confusion.

"What do you mean by that?" She asked.

"All of this was orchestrated by Ji Meiling. I have no idea what she intended to do but she met up with Yu Guang a few days ago. According to the video I recovered of them, she gave him a cheque for something. It's a surveillance video that didn't support audio, so I can only speculate. I'm guessing she asked him to find you and have implicating pictures taken with you and him in compromising positions."

Lanni was speechless even though she had started to have a feeling that Ji Meiling could be involved.

" Thanks. I'll just prove my innocence first."

" I'll deal with that woman for you." Luna promised before hanging up.

On the other hand, Lanni gripped her phone tightly in disbelief. How could this be?

"Luna found evidence that Aunt Meiling really did this. What does she have against me?" She didn't understand, especially since the woman had liked her before. Was it all fake? Did she do something to provoke the woman?

"Forget about her. I will handle this." He hugged her.

"Don't just get rid of her without knowing the truth. Maybe she did this for a good reason." She reminded him, because she knew that it would be better for everyone if it could be settled without violence. She was, after all, family.

"I don't care what her reason was. She had no right to attack you but she did so anyway, so she must face the consequences." His brows knitted.

"Well, thank you for looking out for me." She hugged his arm. He was always protecting her, and didn't care whether or not the person who attacked her was important as well. As long as she was safe, nothing else mattered to him. In return, she made a mental promise to be the best wife to him. He deserved it for being a better husband than she could ever deserve.

Ji Meiling continued attacking, oblivious to the fact that she had already been sniffed out and Xiehan, Lanni, Luna and Lin Jian were all keeping an eye on her. When the screenshots were proven to be fake and Luna put up the video of Yu Guang forcefully kissing Lanni, the netizens' reactions morphed from raging at her for being a promiscuous, disrespectful wife to crying out for her justice.

"It is never alright to kiss a woman who doesn't want it. This is abuse!"

"Who the hell is this pervert? He must be arrested!"

"Throw him into the ocean! We don't want young women to be exposed to the dangers of having such men around."

"The point is, Li Lanni is a married woman. Everyone knows this. She was even wearing a ring, in case the scumbag didn't know, but from Lin Jian's reaction, he knew. Why would he still forcefully kiss her?" Someone asked.

"Obviously, because he was paid to tarnish her reputation." Another netizen hinted at the screenshots that had been proven fake, opening a can of worms.

Many speculated that the culprit was Lanni's romantic rival who couldn't accept the fact that Lanni was married to her crush, while others guessed that it must be a business rival of Lin Media Group trying to get their competitors out of the way. Lanni was such a popular figure in the media industry, after all, and most people would be unaccepting of her if she were proven to be promiscuous and unrestrained.

However, the ladies had a different opinion. Lanni gathered together with Luna, Ruby, and Cheng Yu to discuss it.

Ruby was the one who had called them, so she looked at the three who were holding cups of their drinks in hand. "I did not call Xiaoshi because we are about to discuss her mother and this might be awkward for her."

"That makes sense." Remarked Lanni, but Cheng Yu was confused.

"The three of you think Ji Meiling is behind this? But she loves you and Xiehan, right?" Her question was directed at Lanni.

"I don't think she does anymore. And we don't just think...we know she is behind this." Lanni answered, swallowing past a lump in her throat.

"I did not see that coming. Yikes." Cheng Yu's lips curled in disgust. Whatever reason Ji Meiling had, it would not be enough for her to do this to her nephew.

"We already know that she is behind this and Luna discovered evidence. Lin Jian and I found something too," Ruby sipped her coffee. "She has been acting strange. She and my mother have always been at each other's throat. But since the rumors started to erupt, she is unusually closer to mother."

"That sounds to me like someone trying to hide their guilt." Luna crossed her arms.

"Exactly. We thought so too." Ruby turned to Cheng Yu who was near her. "Xiao Yu, can I borrow your tablet?"

"Sure...?" Cheng Yu didn't understand why the latter needed it but she had always carried her tablet around so she gave it to her. Under their watch, Ruby drew squares and wrote in them Lanni's name as well as her own and Xiehan's.

"Alright, Sherlock Ruby Holmes. What are you getting at?" Luna asked when the latter scribbled for an eternity without a word.

"Look." Ruby pointed at the squares with arrows connecting them. "Let's use Linhou as an example. If Linhou had a wife and she cheated on him, how would the three of you react?"

"Use the chance to let the little girl and Linhou know that they should be studying instead of doing things they don't understand." Luna's brows knitted, making the others burst into laughter. She would definitely be strict with her children's dating lives.

"Linhou is an adult in this hypothetical situation." Cheng Yu calmed her down. "I would not want to ever see that girl again. If I do, I will destroy her."

"You will not be able to because she will be destroyed in my hands. I will teach her a lesson she will never forget." Lanni remarked, hating the situation even though it was only hypothetical."

Luna refused to answer the question, having so much hate for the hypothetical girl even though she didn't exist.

Ruby smiled. "What if the same girl were to snatch Xiaomu's boyfriend?"

Luna's eyes flared when she got the point. "Is Ji Meiling trying to make it seem like Lanni broke the hearts of both siblings?"

"Exactly." Ruby deleted the squares since they now understood her. "Aunt is not sure of Lanni's relationship with mother, what with their hatred for each other in the past. She is trying to make use of

the rumors to damage the relationship between them even further. Why she would do that, I cannot tell you."

Cheng Yu rubbed her temples. "Was that so hard to explain that you had to use a hypothesis?"

"For better understanding of how mother is feeling right now." Ruby shrugged.

"My relationship with Lin Jian may not be damaged, and Lanni's innocence has been proven, but that doesn't mean mother is not uncomfortable."

"Just great." Lanni huffed. "Is she trying to make us divorce by force? If she is, she can go to hell."

"We have to stop her." Cheng Yu was enraged.

"That, we do." Luna seconded. "Well, we didn't involve Xiaoshi because we don't want her to be uncomfortable but we might need her. She knows her mother better than all of us."

"Why do we need her? Let's not forget that an offspring will always take after its parents. If they were to side with each other, what would they do to Lanni?" Cheng Yu was against the idea.

"Xiaoshi has never been a bad person to begin with." Lanni pointed out.

"That doesn't mean she can't be one now." Cheng Yu was still uncomfortable.

"Don't worry. We don't have to tell her anything. We just have to use her as the starting point while investigating Ji Meiling. When we get Ji Meiling's darkest secret, she will have the options, to either stay out of Lanni's and Xiehan's lives or have her secret splattered across the Internet."

"That's a good enough solution, I think." Responded Lanni, who didn't want to make family members estranged from each other unless it really had to happen.

"I still think we should send her to hell." Ruby scrunched her face. She would never be able to get along with the woman who almost made her and Lin Jian break up.

"We can send her to Australia instead. She likes it there and she will be away from Lanni and Xiehan. Double win." Cheng Yu countered, and they all agreed to the solution.

When Ji Meiling realized that the trouble she had stirred was no longer useful, she was furious. It didn't take long before a new one came up, accusing Lanni of having murdered someone just so she could ensure that she was the first one to report it. It happened just two days after an article she published related to a psychotic murder topped the search rankings.

She even went so far as to have fake commenters blow up the matter. What she would never have expected, however, was that her fans would see through the move as soon as it was doled out. Lanni had already reminded them that reacting to a fake article would only give it publicity, so they ignored it altogether. In the end, it got drowned in tens of more interesting articles.

Chapter 566 - My Happiness Is You

After reading the forums against Lanni which kept popping up despite being suppressed, Cheng Yu was in a bad mood when she went back to her apartment.

It must be difficult for Lanni to deal with Ji Meiling since she was her husband's aunt and for Luna, because she needed to take care of herself and not get involved in unnecessary trouble. On the other hand, she was an outsider and didn't have to care about anything. Teaching the woman a lesson should be a piece of cake.

She was still in deep thought when she opened the door to her apartment so she jumped when she saw a man on the living room couch.

"Cedric, you scared the crap out of me!" She glared at him. He had not answered her calls all day and had suddenly appeared here to give her a fright.

"I'm sorry. Are you okay?" He stood to check on her. "I sent you a text message to let you know that I would be busy all day but will wait for you here in the evening."

"I must have missed it." She patted her chest. Her stomach growled in hunger.

"Uh.. Have you had dinner?" She asked him.

"I was waiting for you to cook together." He tailed her as she went to the kitchen. She grabbed the ingredients furiously, and he couldn't help but notice that she was in a bad mood.

He grabbed the knife out of her hand lest she cut herself while in a bad mood. "Did something happen?"

"A heartless woman who just won't leave Lanni alone!" She raged. "I don't care what I have to do to make it possible but I want her to leave the country and go as far as she can. Lanni was much happier before she and her husband appeared and started making trouble for her."

"I can help with that." He offered.

"Thank you but no thanks. I will do it myself."

He chuckled and wrapped his arms around her from behind. "You are still so stubborn. Your matter is my matter as well."

She was quick to blush from his movements. "I know. I just don't want to bother you unless it's really necessary."

"Nothing is a trivial matter if it bothers you." He nibbled her ear. His phone rang and interrupted the moment, bumming him.

"Who has such horrible timing?" He complained as he dug for his phone in his pocket. It turned out to be his mother.

"Hello mother?" He frowned, wondering why she was calling out of the blue.

"How have you been? It's been long..." She asked gently.

"Get straight to the point, mother." He demanded, knowing that with their tense relationship in recent months, she wouldn't call him just to catch up.

"Fine. Here's the thing. My friend invited me to have tea with her. I thought it would be great if you came along so I would introduce you to her." She explained eagerly.

Cedric ran a hand down his face in frustration. "How old is this friend?"

"Why are you asking this?" The woman was puzzled but answered him nonetheless. "She is in her late forties."

"So she is not a young woman who you call your friend just to lure me to a meeting. Let me guess. Then this friend is going to bring her daughter or niece along, who is about my age so the two of us can get to know each other?"

"How..." His mother was flustered after being called out.

"What's wrong with getting to know young women your age?"

"I have a girlfriend. In case you didn't get that all the times I told you." He hung up in anger. Cheng Yu was chopping vegetables with newly found frustration, and he held both of her hands after taking the knife from her.

"Hey, I will not go to the blind date. Don't be so angry, okay? It's not good for your health." He coaxed.

"Of course you won't go. But I would prefer it if you did." She blinked.

"Yu, are you so eager to give me away to other women?" He couldn't believe her.

"Of course not. I just..." She sighed. "I don't want you to have a bad relationship with your family because of me. It's already horrible as it is."

He swiped some stray strands of hair away from her forehead, then cupped her face lovingly. "If I go to that blind date, mother will definitely want me to go out with the woman. Then what? Will I have to go on dates with her just to make sure we don't have a stiff relationship? And after several dates, will I also have to kiss her for this? It grosses me out just thinking about it."

She looked down to hide her expression but he knew how she felt without having to see it on her face.

He went on. "Then, with her instructions, I will have to propose to this girl and marry her. After that happens, what about you and me?"

She looked up at him helplessly. "But if they disown you..."

"I will be the happiest man on earth." He pecked her lips. "Forgive me for being a selfish man but if I have to choose between their happiness and mine, I will choose mine. And my happiness is you."

"Cedric," Her heart melted.

"Are you still willing to give me away?"

She threw herself into his arms. "I was never willing. I just wanted to solve a problem. But if caring for one's happiness is a sign of selfishness, then I'm selfish too."

He hugged her tightly, hoping that he would never see her sad again. It would probably happen once in a while but it broke his heart. "Where were we? We were thinking of ways to make the woman who framed Lanni disappear."

"Not literally disappear." She corrected him, horrified that he would murder Ji Meiling.

"Of course, not literally. Let's pay her a visit tomorrow."

The following day, Lanni slapped her forehead when she heard the rumors in the company. An important proposal had gone missing a few days ago, and this morning, it had been discovered that the proposal had been sold to a competitor. Of course, the matter had been blamed on Lanni.

"Ji Meiling, what did I ever do to you?" Lanni muttered under her breath and replayed all her interactions with Ji Meiling in her mind. There didn't seem to be anything she did to piss the woman off, but she probably didn't remember all their interactions.

The board of directors called for an emergency meeting with Lin Jian, and summoned her to the conference room. This was it. They were probably going to try and force her to resign. She clenched her fists at the thought of it. She had worked hard for this and she was not going to let anyone take it away from her.

When she arrived at the conference room, all eyes were on her and they were not happy expressions. They all glared at her as though she had committed murder. She took the empty seat and greeted all of them before placing her elbows on the table.

"You must have guessed why we called you here, Mrs. Ji." A middle-aged woman started.

"Yes. I heard about the stolen proposal."

"Good. Then I guess we don't have to explain much. Submit your resignation in peace and this matter will be forgotten." She ordered.

Lanni shook her head. She had seen this coming but it was still unbelievable. "May I know why I should do that?"

"Because if you don't, you will be fired." Responded an elderly man as if she was wasting their time by pretending to be dumb.

"I did nothing wrong. I don't understand why I have to get fired." She insisted stubbornly, unwilling to cave.

"There is already sufficient evidence. Are you still going to feign innocence?" A middle-aged man surnamed Lu threw a bunch of photographs on the table.

Lanni picked them up and inspected them, laughing out loud when she saw the content. They were all pictures of her handing over a file and then receiving money, but they were photoshopped.

"This is unbelievable. You are going to fire me for this?" She slapped the pictures on the table amid their shocked expressions. "Let's put aside the fact that they are photoshopped. How can you be certain that the file being handed over contains the proposal?"

"Don't try to talk your way out of this!" Roared Mr. Lu, but she didn't shut her mouth.

"It has not been labelled. It could be a private exchange for all I care. Of course it wasn't because this is a photoshopped picture. You can prove this if you have it checked."

That did not convince many of them so she added, "I am not in need of money."

"That doesn't mean you can't do it for greed." Retorted another, and the others nodded.

Lanni glanced at Lin Jian who couldn't say a word because it would only make matters worse. She smiled at him reassuringly and swept her eyes across the marble conference table and asked.. "Let's assume I am greedy or vengeful, or have some other motive. If I were to do such a thing as steal from the company and sell the documents to someone else, do you think I would do it in secret and erase traces of myself, or do the exchange in broad daylight, in public, and wait to be captured on camera?"

Chapter 567 - Make The Old Hag Pay

"She has a point. No matter how you look at it, this is a set up. I don't know of anyone who would plan to do something secretly but end up doing it on the streets in broad daylight, while knowing that surveillance cameras are all over.

On the other hand, if someone wants to set someone else up, they will focus on creating as much irrefutable evidence as possible and will often forget how unreasonable it turns out to be." Lin Jian remarked, earning gazes of ridicule.

"So what if she was set up? She tarnished our company's reputation and must go." Mr. Lu insisted.

Lanni's eyebrows knitted. Had this man been bribed?

"If we are taking reputation so seriously, then I have something to talk about." She pulled up an old article from her phone, which she had seen weeks ago and it just happened to be convenient. "You were once entangled in a scandal that involved a married woman, Mr. Lu. This is a blow to the reputation of Lin Media Group, don't you think?" She hinted meaningfully.

"Don't you pull that crap on me!" He roared.

When he realized that everyone else was giving him glances that called him out for hypocrisy, he conceded. "Fine. She can stay. But only because she is a hard worker."

"Thank you." Lanni took a slight bow and left the conference room. She didn't have too much work lately. It was probably because Lin Jian made her subordinates filter out the unimportant documents before sending only the ones that mattered to her, to make her work easier.

She would reward them later, she thought as she gathered the remaining work to take home with her.

The chauffeur opened the back passenger door as soon as he saw her leaving the building and rushed to help her carry the files even though she didn't think they were heavy.

"Madam, are we going home?" He asked politely when she got in.

"Let's give Aunt Meiling a surprise visit first." She smiled, wondering how the woman would react to her sudden visit. It was still unbelievable how fast one could change, and even worse to think that Xiehan had offered her a place to stay. When she had just arrived with her husband, he had invited her to stay over at his mansion. Luckily, she had found herself an apartment when she decided to stay in the city for a few years.

The thought of it made Lanni's eyebrows knit. Ji Meiling loved Australia so much. At first, she had only wanted to watch over her daughter and leave once Xiaoshi was settled. What changed her mind? Why did she only leave for a month and come back to stay for a few years? It was easy to assume that it had something to do with her husband but Lanni knew it was not that simple. The woman might just have skeletons in her closet which she would be pleased to set free.

They arrived at the apartment complex and Lanni couldn't get in unless Ji Meiling allowed her, so she waited in the lobby. Minutes passed although Ji Meiling was home, but she neither let them in nor denied them entry.

"Madam, maybe we should go back first and come some other time." The chauffeur suggested, worried that she was going to stand for too long.

"Don't worry about me." Lanni was determined to have a good chat with Ji Meiling today, and it didn't matter how long it took to meet her.

Half an hour later, Ji Meiling finally dropped the act and let her in.

"Lanni! I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting. I was taking a nap and didn't know you were here. Did you wait for too long?" She feigned happiness.

Lanni flashed a meaningful smile. "Not at all. Thirty minutes isn't a long time in a pregnant woman's clock."

Ji Meiling frowned and offered her a glass of juice. "I blended this naturally. It's very nutritious."

"Thank you." Lanni didn't make a move to drink it even though she knew that Ji Meiling couldn't dare to do anything to her directly.

"I'll cut the chase, aunt Meiling." She spoke up. "What exactly are you going to gain from breaking Xiehan and me apart?"

The woman stopped in her tracks. "What do you mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean. You are behind everything. The rumors about me and Lin Jian, the document I've been framed for stealing, the murder accusation, what do you gain from all of these?"

"You are so naïve, Lanni." She scoffed. "Do you have a camera on you? Are you intending to get words out of my mouth that will incriminate me?"

"I wouldn't be at my current level if I had to rely on those." She spoke with a hint of warning in her voice. "I am here to warn you. If you want to talk about it and come up with a solution that will save both of us trouble, you are welcome to discuss it with me. But if you are hell set on trying to destroy me, don't blame me for being rude."

"You and what army? Do you think you kids are a match for me?"

Lanni raised an eyebrow at her words. If she wasn't certain before, she now was. She looked at the woman over her shoulder. "You have been warned, Aunty."

She hurried down the stairs and was surprised when she bumped into Cheng Yu who was coming up.

"I don't understand. Is it Halloween or something?" She scrutinized her friend, who was wearing a food delivery uniform and had a box in her hands.

"What are you doing here, Lanni? Wait. I have to go up first."

"No. Come with me." Lanni pulled her all the way out of the building with her.

Cheng Yu was displeased. "Why did you do that? I had to pretend to be a food delivery girl so they would let me in. If I go back now, they will not let me in again!"

"Were you going to find Ji Meiling?" Asked Lanni, as she shoved Cheng Yu into the backseat of the car with her.

"Before you ruined my plan, yes. That old hag has to pay for what she did."

"That was going to end up in chaos no matter how you think about it." Lanni instructed the chauffeur to drive off as she explained. "Think about it. I went to her house to give her a warning just now. If you appeared there too, what would happen? It would put us at a compromising spot. She could easily accuse us of threatening her life and the fact that you snuck in under the guise of delivery would prove that."

"I was so angry that I didn't think about it." Cheng Yu felt wronged. In actual sense, she would never have minded it if she got in trouble as long as she taught that woman a lesson. But she couldn't risk pulling Lanni into trouble with her.

"I'll drop you off at work and..." Lanni rubbed her forehead when she remembered the latter's get up.
"Never mind. Get changed at my place first, then I'll drop you off at work."

"Thank you." Cheng Yu knew that she would be late for her next meeting if she went back to her apartment. She had planned to drop by a clothes store and get something to change into but this was easier.

After dropping Cheng Yu off, Lanni worked from home and only realized how fast time had flown when the front door opened and she heard Xiehan's footsteps. She left what she was doing and bashfully rushed down to welcome him home.

"Hubby, you are home." She smiled.

He changed out of his shoes into indoor flip flops and pinched her cheeks. "And you have done something wrong."

"Something wrong? I didn't do anything. I've been obedient all day." His tone flustered her. She could never get used to his charming voice.

"That's after paying a visit to aunt Meiling. What did I tell you about putting yourself in dangerous situations?"

"Ow!" She winced when he spanked her backside. "It was not dangerous. She would never do anything to me directly. Besides, she suspected that I had a bug on me."

"That doesn't change anything. Who is to say that she wouldn't turn animalistic and try to hurt you no matter the consequences?" He frowned in disapproval.

"Well, I wasn't on my own." Her voice lowered into a squeak when she realized that he was determined to punish her no matter how safe she was.

"Let me handle her, okay? Don't get yourself all worked up." He held her.

There was something odd about how he said it. Nonetheless, she didn't think much of it. She nodded and rested her head in his chest. His heart was racing faster than usual. It made her want to question what had him flustered. But then again, it was often racing when they were this close to each other. It didn't have to mean much.

But why did she have a bad feeling out of the blue?

Chapter 568 - Nightmare

"Lin Jian told me what happened at your workplace." He started as he walked to the kitchen with her tailing after him.

"It's nothing. Don't worry about it." She assured him.

He flicked her forehead at her words. "Are you implying that your reputation is not a big deal? It's a huge deal, okay?"

She chuckled. "It is alright. But how can I stop people from creating these rumors about me? Even if I shut Aunt Meiling up, there will always be an enemy or two waiting for an opportunity to strike me down. It can't be helped."

He patted her head. "Even if there will be others in future, I can still handle the current ones. You don't need to worry about this. Just do as you like, okay?"

"Okay." She rose on her tiptoes to kiss him. As though she had asked for it, he grabbed her by the waist and placed her on the kitchen counter.

"Xiehan, we came here to cook." She subtly reminded him.

"And I'm yet to teach you a lesson for the dangerous move you pulled off." He looked at her teasingly.

"Wait. Don't touch there..."

He let go of her boob that he was groping and let his hand slide down. "Mmh. Then I'll touch you here instead."

Her words were swallowed into his mouth as he kissed her. He wasn't any less shameless than he was in the past, not that she was complaining.

That night, Lanni couldn't get any sleep. She rolled in bed for the umpteenth time and made to slide off, only for her waist to be grabbed from behind.

"Did I wake you up? I'm sorry." She turned to tousle his hair. He had been busy lately and needed enough rest, so she kissed him and let him go back to sleep. Alas, the man pinned her down and she was under him before she could process it.

"Can't sleep?" He teased her.

"I'm not sleepy." She looked up at him like he was a predator.

His response was to slide his hand under her nightdress. "I can make you more tired if you want. If not, how about we talk for a while?"

He got off her and lay on his side, waiting for her to make up her mind.

She blinked a few times trying not to let her eyes close. She was sleepy but just couldn't bring herself to sleep, and it was torturing her. "I just feel uneasy. I'm scared even though I don't know what I'm scared of. If that makes sense."

He pulled her into his arms. "It makes sense. You are probably tired and worried. Just forget about it and sleep, okay?"

She didn't react, and he thought she had fallen asleep until he peeked down and met her drowsy eyes.

"I'll read you a book."

She burst out laughing. "I'm not a little girl who listens to bedtime stories."

"I don't remember ever seeing an age limit to bedtime stories." He slid off the bed and ransacked the small bookshelf in the bedroom, looking for a book she would find boring. Most of the books here were the ones they had moved from the library for ease of access so it was only after checking all the books that he found one about aviation. They must have brought it accidentally because neither of them was interested in aviation but it worked like a charm. She was fast asleep before he could finish reading the foreword. He watched her sleeping face and leaned over to kiss her, before gently nudging her off his arm.

He got off the bed to return the book to its original spot. Her phone rang on the bedside table, prompting him to look at it. He frowned. Who was calling her so late at night? It was already past midnight and definitely not a suitable time to give anyone a call.

"Hello, who is this?" He answered the call nervously.

"Hello, this is HM Hospital. Are you related to Xia Luna?"

His nervousness intensified. "She is my sister-in-law. Is everything alright?"

"She was brought to hospital after a fatal accident. We need a family member to sign a form of consent before we can go through with the operation. Do you have a way to contact her immediate family members?"

"Luna?" Lanni was startled out of her sleep.

"We will be right there." Xiehan hung up the call and cupped her face. She was trembling and had beads of sweat on her forehead. "Did I startle you?"

"Who just called?" Her mind was disoriented. "I just had a nightmare. I dreamt that I had lost Luna." The mere mention of it was enough to make her eyes water.

"Nothing will happen to Luna. She will be okay. Come here." He placed her head on his chest and suddenly didn't know how to tell her what happened. If she had not woken up, he would have told the Jiangs first and let them hurry to the hospital as he slowly explained the situation to her, but he couldn't waste any time now.

"Let's go to the hospital, okay? The doctor just confirmed that Luna will be alright after the surgery."

She had no idea what he was talking about but she nodded and grabbed a jacket which she threw on. They were in the car within five minutes and he floored the accelerator. Luckily, the hospital was not too far away so they arrived in ten minutes.

The first thing Lanni did was rush to her sister once she knew where her ward was. Alas, she was not allowed to go in.

"Are you Miss Xia's sister? Please sign this." A nurse handed over a sheet of paper and a pen, and she glanced at Xiehan in confusion. What was happening?

"Miss, can you please hurry up? The patient's life will be in danger if the operation is delayed any longer." Urged the nurse.

She messily scribbled her signature and if Xiehan didn't hold her, she might have fallen from how dizzy she suddenly was.

"What happened to Luna?" She asked croakily.

"She was attacked by someone." He held her shoulders soothingly. "She will be fine. You have to trust her to get out of this, okay?"

She blinked, letting down the stinging tears from her eyes. "I don't understand. How could anyone attack her so late at night? What was she doing out in the open at this time of the night? Where the hell was Jiang Xingyu when this happened?"

As if on cue, Jiang Xingyu came rushing over with his parents in tow.

"Xiehan! How is my wife? Where is she?" Xingyu asked anxiously, earning a slap from Lanni.

"Sister-in-law?"

"You had one role!" Lanni kicked and punched him aggressively, hurling curses. "You only had one role, to protect my sister. Is this how you protect her? By letting her get attacked?"

"Lanni!" Xiehan pulled her away from Jiang Xingyu, who had been beaten and scratched by her.

"Sister-in-law, you don't understand. Luna has been missing for hours. I've been looking for her and trying to track her location to no avail."

He broke down. This evening, Luna had told him that she wanted to spend the night at Li Yuming's. She had insisted on going on her own because apparently, she had private matters to discuss with her mother.

So he let her go. Half an hour later, the chauffeur had reported that he had dropped her off at her mother's house. He didn't think much of it until it started getting late and he was yet to receive a call from Luna. He tried calling her to no avail, and decided to go over and check on her. There was no such thing as too much caution. He was just going over because he missed her at first. However, an ominous premonition filled his gut. He set the car on autopilot mode and called incessantly until her phone went off. He didn't need any more proof. Luna did not go to Li Yuming's house.

A phone call to Li Yuming confirmed his fear. He knew that she would not lie to him so there was only one possibility: that she was in danger.

...

Lanni yelled at him for his carelessness at any chance he got and he couldn't blame her. He blamed himself too. If only he had been more careful.

He should have insisted on sending her to Li Yuming's and dropped her off on his own. This was happening just because he had trusted his bodyguards and chauffeur more than he should.

Hours passed before Luna was finally wheeled out of the operation room and everyone rushed over to check on her.

"Doctor, how is she?"

The doctor pulled down his surgical mask. "She is out of danger."

Jiang Xingyu heaved a sigh of relief. As long as she was out of danger.

"And the baby? What about the baby?" Asked Xingyu, anxiety bubbling in him yet again. If anything were to happen to the baby, Luna would not want to live anymore.

"The baby is fine. We managed to save both mother and child."

Everyone heaved a collective sigh of relief and let the doctors wheel Luna into the recovery ward.

Lanni crept up beside her and held her hand. "Sis, do you know how scared I was? You can't do that to me again!" She complained.

During all those hours that the operation lasted, all she could think about was her dream, where she had lost Luna forever and was watching her being wheeled into the morgue. Her mind was finally at ease now that she was steady.

She turned and glanced at Xingyu who was behind her. "How did this even happen?"

Chapter 569 - Revenge

"What exactly happened? Did you uncover anything?" She asked Jiang Xingyu. She had calmed down a lot now since Luna was out of danger.

"My bodyguards betrayed us." He seethed in anger at the thought of it.

"Why would that happen?" She didn't understand.

"I don't know. Someone must have bribed them. I'm going to find them one by one and interrogate them. Then I will let them know what happens to people who mess with the Jiang family."

Luna winced as they discussed. They both looked over at her.

"Luna?"

She forced her eyes open and glanced at Lanni who was looking down at her in a mixture of worry and excitement, then at Xingyu and her family.

"Am I in heaven? Are you all angels?" She croaked.

"Can you not talk about such things when in hospital?" Lanni pinched her arm.

"Ow!"

"Be easy on her. She is still a patient." Xingyu took his wife's pinched arm and caressed it. "Baby, how are you? Does it hurt anywhere?"

"Just my heart." She raised a hand to caress his face. "I don't like seeing you looking so sad."

Lanni rolled her eyes. "She is alright. She even has the strength to flirt with her husband. Is this the part where we all leave them alone?"

"Wait." Luna called her over. "I don't mean to startle you, but I think the guys who attacked me thought I was you."

"What?"

"How can that be? Wouldn't they have bought over Xiehan's bodyguards if they were aiming for Lanni?" Xingyu inquired. None of it made sense to him.

"No. I don't think so. They had been following me for a while. I thought they were indeed after me and made sure to take more precaution. However, they tailed us on the way to mother's house and chose the moment to attack. I think they followed the wrong person from the word go."

"That's insane." Lanni didn't want to think about it. "I'm sorry Luna. You suffered so much just for being my twin."

"It's not your fault." She hugged her sister before her body froze. In panic, her hand slid down her stomach to feel her bump.

"Don't worry, the baby's fine." Lanni whispered, knowing what she was suddenly scared of.

"Really? Don't lie to me just because I'm still in the hospital." She demanded, looking over at her husband for any hint of sadness.

"Sister-in-law is right. The doctors said that our baby is a strong cookie. It will be alright as long as you have enough rest and maintain a nutritious diet."

She was relieved. She had been in panic when the henchmen attempted to stab her. Reflexively, she had protected her stomach at all costs. It ended in the knife slicing through her left arm but she didn't care. As long as the baby was alright.

She looked at Lanni when she recalled the horrifying details. "I got it wrong. They were not targeting you. They were targeting your baby."

"What?" It was even more shocking, and she wanted to explode. "Ji Meiling! I will kill her!"

"Lanni, what are you saying?" Asked Li Yuming. She had just rushed over after hearing the news of what had happened to Luna, only to overhear this disturbing conversation. "Why would Ji Meiling target my grandchild? Doesn't she love Xiehan? Since she thinks of Xiehan as her son, then the baby you are carrying is her grandchild. Why would she..."

"I don't know, mom." She shut her eyes. "I wish I knew. She has been targeting me. She didn't tell me why she was doing this when I confronted her."

"Don't worry. I will protect you." Xiehan hugged her shoulders. "Luna, we owe you a lot." He said to his sister-in-law, a shiver running down his spine at the thought of what would have happened if she lost her baby. Luckily, that didn't happen.

Since Luna was alright, Lanni couldn't hold her head up anymore. She fell asleep in Xiehan's arms while still standing, making Li Yuming chuckle. "She can really fall asleep anywhere."

"I'll take her home." He excused himself and placed an arm under her knees to carry her away.

Once they were gone, Xinghe finally remarked on what Luna had mentioned. "Are you really sure that this attack was meant for Lanni?"

"It's a gut feeling. I don't have any enemies but Lanni has one who is hell set on making her have a miscarriage." Luna responded, making Xinghe frown.

"I thought Ji Meiling was a good person but now she has gone and done it." She cracked her knuckles. "I don't care why she did this. I will make her disappear off the earth's surface when I have the chance."

"Mother, you can't do that." Xingyu interrupted.

"I can and I will! She almost killed my daughter-in-law! Do you have any idea what would have happened to Luna if she didn't know self-defense?" Xinghe was convinced that Luna was unable to get away unscathed only because she was pregnant. It must have slowed her down, and it was already a miracle that the baby had remained safe. "I don't care whether or not you want to seek justice for your wife but watch me get revenge on behalf of my daughter-in-law."

"Mother, it's okay." Luna patted her hand to calm her down. "Nothing happened in the end and she didn't mean to attack me. On the other hand, doling out a vengeful move might just make her want to strike back."

She had a point, but Xinghe hated being unable to do anything to that woman. "But it's so unfair to Lanni. All she did was exist. Why do bad things keep happening to her?"

"I will protect my daughter, Xinghe. You don't need to gain enemies because of this." Li Yuming cut in, and Xinghe was not happy about it. The two women still had a stiff relationship between them.

Xingyu cleared his throat to stop them from starting with their usual remarks that made both of them feel awkward.

"Linhou and Xiaomu will be brought over later. Father said they have been looking for their mommy since they woke up."

"Okay but they can't stay for long. The hospital is not a safe place for kids." Li Yuming remarked.

"Of course."

Xingyu had to go for an important meeting that he couldn't postpone so he let his mother and mother-in-law stay to take care of Luna.

It didn't take long before the kids were brought over. The first thing Linhou did was rush towards his mother, only to be stopped halfway.

"Linhou, mommy is feeling unwell. You cannot jump onto her, okay?" Xinghe explained the situation.

The boy was displeased but he nodded and slowly went over to Luna.

"Mommy?" Xiaomu looked at everything curiously and wondered what had happened to her mother. Why was she covered in bandages?

"Mommy got injured. I'll be alright soon." She promised the little girl, who in turn pursed her lips and blew on the bandaged wound on Luna's arm, mimicking what Luna would do when she fell.

"Why are you so sweet? Are you blowing the pain away?"

She nodded, smiling happily after being praised.

"That's my good girl. Today I will not go home with you, go with grandma, okay? I will come home later." She explained, giving her babies a kiss on each of their cheeks.

Linhou blinked sadly since he wanted to stay by his mother's side, while Xiaomu ran over to Li Yuming and held her hand.

Luna had meant for them to go with Xinghe but staying with Li Yuming was a good idea too so she didn't comment on it. However, Xinghe sweetly called the girl over.

"Mumu, let's go home, okay?"

"I can take care of my grandchildren as well." Li Yuming rolled her eyes.

"Of course you can. I just want to do it this time."

"Uh... can the two of you not start again?" Luna had had enough of their tension. They didn't fight or hurl insults at each other but it was as though they were fighting for her affection. At this point, she almost didn't know whether she had two or four kids.

"Mom, since Mumu ran to you first, you can stay with her this time. Linhoh will stay with mother-in-law."

The two women were both satisfied by the arrangement, and she only shook her head. Were they unable to think of this on their own?

...

Meanwhile, Xiehan was going crazy. As soon as they got home, he had ordered his men to capture Ji Meiling and bring her back to his mansion. Lanni strongly disapproved of the idea.

"Are you insane? You can't just kidnap. No matter what your reason is, it's illegal."

"Trying to harm my wife and child and sending my sister-in-law to hospital is also illegal." He fired back and continued doling out instructions on the phone.

"Lock her up in a dark room with no sound going in. Give her food and water but don't let her have any sense of anything aside from taste." He ordered.

"For how long, sir?" Asked the bodyguard on the other end.

"Three days." He frowned when he realized that it would barely be a drop in the bucket compared to what she had done to Lanni. "One week."

"What if someone looks for her?" She asked, worried of what would happen if his family knew that he was holding his aunt hostage.

"No one would ask questions if they think she has traveled out of the country.." He bit out.

Chapter 570 - Suspicion

"You are not going to kill her, are you?" She asked worriedly. It would not matter why he did it. If he killed her, he would be in trouble and the last thing she wanted was for him to be imprisoned.

"Don't worry. I'll just make her drown in despair."

He sounded sly when he said it, rendering her speechless. If this incident didn't happen, she might never know how evil her husband was. Not that she was complaining. Sometimes being too good was the easiest way to attract trouble.

"I called Han Xichen over." He reported.

She didn't understand. "That doesn't sound like a friendly invitation of any sort. Why does he need to come?"

"You were shocked. He needs to ensure that you are fine." He explained, making her laugh.

"I'm not a fragile piece of glass, okay?"

"Actually, you are. Don't worry. Han Xichen studied gynecology in passing and will know immediately if there is any concern. Besides, your psychological well being is very important."

She didn't think it was necessary but knowing that she would never be able to talk him out of it, she agreed. Also, "Did Han Xichen study every field of medicine?"

"Just more fields than an average doctor studies." Even he thought Han Xichen was impressive, not that he was going to stroke the man's ego by admitting it to him.

He rushed over urgently and ran some tests, after which he asked the couple to take a seat.

"Speak." Xiehan ordered impatiently.

"You need to sit down for this."

"Is my baby alright?" Lanni panicked.

"Yes. Your baby is fine. But I need to ask you a question. Have you been sleeping a lot lately?"

She thought back to the random naps she had to take every few hours even when at work. It was a blessing that Lin Jian was an understanding boss who was extra kind to expectant employees. She would have been kicked out for being too lazy if she were in another agency. "I have. I thought it was a result of the hormones but I think it's too much even thinking about it from that perspective."

"That's because it's not supposed to happen." He looked at the couple as he broke the news. "If you have not been taking sleeping pills, then someone has been adding them to your food or drinks."

Her eyes went wide with shock at the same time as her hand flew to her stomach protectively. "Will it affect my baby?"

"If taken in large quantities, yes. Fortunately, we discovered it in time." From their reactions, Lanni had not been willingly taking sleeping pills. He sighed at how heartless someone could be to want to harm an unborn baby. However, he had dealt with psychopaths before. This was nothing in comparison.

"Be careful what you eat. I would also suggest installing surveillance cameras secretly if you don't have them already." He added.

"I want her dead." Xiehan declared as soon as Han Xichen left.

"We don't know if she is the one who added sleeping pills to my food. Even if we both think it's her, we will need evidence before we can sue her." She reminded him.

"Who talked about suing? I literally want her dead." He winced, his heart breaking when he imagined what would happen to his wife and baby if he had not insisted on calling Han Xichen to check on her.

"Think about your father and Shishi. If they found evidence that you are the one who killed her, they would sue you. Xiehan, we have had this conversation already."

She was acting different, he observed. She was right despite this so he nodded.

"You have to promise me. Just torture her but don't kill her." She demanded. He held both of her hands in his and promised her.

It was not hard to trace the matter back to Ji Meiling. There was a hidden surveillance camera in the kitchen that Xiehan had installed without thinking much. It had finally come to use.

He checked the monitor which revealed a maid sprinkling some powder of sorts into a glass of milk. She then placed the glass on a tray along with some of the heart-shaped cookies he had baked for her the day before. No wonder Han Xichen had been able to detect traces of the sleeping pills. She had ingested them not too long ago.

He called the maid over to the living room.

"Master, you called for me." She nervously spoke, taking note of Xiehan's and Lanni's furious expressions."

"How long have you worked for me?" He demanded.

"Five years." She answered with a shaky voice, wondering why she was being asked this out of the blue.

"In these five years, did I ever harass you?" He held in his anger.

"No, master."

"Good. Because then there is no excuse for what you did. Honey, do you want to deal with her?" He asked his wife, who was glaring at the maid like she wanted to kill her.

"I'd rather not. Just deal with her." She waved her hand dismissively.

Hence, Xiehan called a bodyguard over. "Take her away. Make her spill everything."

"Master, I'm sorry!" She dropped to her knees when she realized that feigning innocence would not help her out of this. "Ma'am, please forgive me. I didn't have a choice. My life was at stake."

"Go to hell. You might have a chance if you plead to the devil." Lanni stood to go back upstairs. She had the urge to chop the maid into pieces but she was better off not staining her hands with blood.

Xiehan followed her and found her pacing their room restlessly. He grabbed her and hugged her. "If you want to hit her to vent, I can have them bring her back."

She giggled at his offer. "I don't want to hit her. As soon as she admits to what she did and reveals the person behind it, let's sue Aunt Meiling."

"Okay." His hands rested on her hips.

"Hey, Xiehan, aren't you sad about it? She is your aunt after all and you were so close to her." She probed.

"People change depending on their circumstances. As long as a certain button is pushed, anyone can be a murderer."

She pushed her hands against his chest lightly, pulling him out of his trance. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, yes we should get evidence as soon as possible."

That was definitely not what he meant, she thought. For a moment, he had sounded as though he was convinced that Ji Meiling had a good reason to turn into what she had become, and he knew what that reason was.

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Xiehan had initially intended to let Ji Meiling get a week worth of torture before he could release her and hand her over to the police. However, her whereabouts were discovered within three days. He had booked a return ticket to Australia and told his parents that Ji Meiling had rushed over for an emergency and would be back in a week. It all went well until Xiaoshi started having suspicions. Every time she gave her mother a call, she would hang up and send a message instead, giving random excuses like being busy and unable to talk. It was so unlike her mother that Xiaoshi immediately realized that something was wrong.

In the evening of the third day, she went over to Xiehan's house to ask for his help.

"Shishi, it's good to see you." Lanni welcomed her jovially as she took the little girl in Xiaoshi's arms. In turn, Yue kissed her cheek like clockwork.

"Yue is so cute." She gushed.

"Is my cousin home?" Xiaoshi asked nervously.

"He is, but he is holding a conference call. Would you like to see him for an emergency?" She sat on the couch, a bad feeling rising in the pit of her stomach.

"My mother might have been kidnapped."

"What? But... why would you think so?" Lanni forced herself to calm down when she realized that she sounded anxious. "Did they call you for a ransom?"

"No. But that's the problem. Someone is using her phone to send me messages. I'm certain that they are not from her and I hope he will help me find out who they are from."

"I see. Would you like something to drink?" She offered stiffly. "You can have a snack or a drink while I call him over."

"But the conference call..." Xiaoshi was reluctant to distract him.

"Aunty's safety is more important. I'll go and call him." She went upstairs, her heart lurching to her throat. If Xiaoshi suspected anything, they would be toast. She peeked and saw Xiaoshi and Yue heading for the kitchen, then took the chance to send Xiehan a text message. She was already near the study but her brain was a jumbled mess.

He opened the door just as she got to it.

"Is she suspicious?" He asked.

"No. But she might be soon if we don't handle this carefully." She took a deep breath. "You have to pretend to help her."

He hesitated but nodded. "Okay."

She led the way back downstairs, where Xiaoshi was beside herself with worry.

"Cousin, you have to help me." She pleaded as soon as she saw Xiehan.

"Lanni filled me in on the situation." He maintained his cool.

"Could you help me confirm that she is still in Canberra? It will ease my worry." She requested.

He grabbed his laptop, typed in some codes under their watch before speaking up. "Her phone signal is still in Canberra."

Xiaoshi looked at him in shock . "Are you the one who held her hostage?"