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Ever since Jonah passed on, Alexander became exceptionally busy. In the past, he had time to send Elise to school but nowadays, he couldn't even spare that ten minutes of his time. Just then, it was Danny's turn to send Elise to school again. "Boss, it's nearly time for our final exam. Let's go and study together at the library in the afternoon." Elise, however, stared at the bare trees outside the window and pondered, *I can't believe that winter is almost over.* "Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, right?" Elise mentioned in passing. Just then, Danny quickly looked at the calendar and replied, "Yes, it's the twenty-fourth tomorrow and it'll be Christmas the day after tomorrow. It's been forecasted that it'll snow on Christmas. I wonder whether we'll be able to experience a white Christmas this year?" Meanwhile, Elise retracted her gaze. "I checked the weather forecast and it seems that there will be snow this year. Let's wait and see."

They exited the car and walked side-by-side toward the school. As soon as they arrived at the classroom, they noticed everyone crowded around talking amongst themselves. "Apparently the TV program that Samantha starred in is going to be aired on Mango TV tonight. We must show our support tonight." "Samantha has good acting skills. I've seen the trailer and it piqued my interest, so I'm definitely going to watch the program tonight." Meanwhile, Elise pulled out her chair and took a seat. Just then, Mikayla rushed forward and said, "Samantha's TV program will be aired tonight.

Let's celebrate the occasion with her." Elise hummed in response. "This is the first show she's starred in and she has done a great job. I'll arrange for some flowers to be sent to her later." "Okay! I'm going to get her a present too," Mikayla chimed in. At that moment, she scrutinized Elise carefully before murmuring, "Elise, does Jack have any new events lately?" Just then, Elise lifted her head and stared at Mikayla.

"Don't tell me that you're unaware of your husband's schedule?" Upon hearing that, Mikayla was slightly embarrassed. "H-How would I know his schedule?! Well, I heard that he seems to be quite busy lately." Meanwhile, Elise could kind of sense that there was something wrong behind these words. "Mikayla, what's up with you lately? You seem to care a lot about Jack lately, don't you?" *She's never behaved this way before.* Just then, Mikayla—whose inner thoughts were revealed—hastily tried to cover it up.

"What are you rambling on about? I just wanted to find out his schedule, that's all. It's not as complicated as you think it is." Elise could somehow sense that something was off, but she noticed that Mikayla was reluctant to talk about it so she didn't persist. After all, it was winter right now and spring wasn't too far away, so the season of love was beckoning too. "Let's spend Christmas Eve together tomorrow," Elise suggested.

However, Mikayla immediately rejected her suggestion. "I'm busy tomorrow. I-I have something else on." Elise had intended to ask Mikayla out for some

shopping and to catch a movie. Since the latter had something else on, she could only let it slide. "Alright, then. You should go along with what you have planned. I'll be fine celebrating by myself." Upon hearing that, Mikayla stuck her tongue out and had a slightly guilty expression on her face.

Well, I can't possibly tell Elise that I have a date with Jack, can I? ... Christmas Eve this year was exceptionally cold. One could see the snowy white scene outside upon pushing open the window. Elise put on a thick down jacket before going down the stairs. After Jonah's passing, she had hardly seen Alexander. Unexpectedly though, today, he was eating breakfast at the dining table. Stunned, Elise went forward and made the move to greet him.

"Good morning!" He merely grunted in response before adding, "I'll send you to school later." She didn't say anything further, only pulled out a chair to take a seat. Just then, she scrutinized his face as she ate breakfast. "Is there something on my face? Why are you staring at me like that?" Alexander said while lifting his head, his eyes meeting hers. Meanwhile, Elise was slightly embarrassed and she quickly shifted her gaze. "It's nothing.

I just haven't seen you in so long and I noticed that you seemed to have lost some weight." Alexander was indeed too busy over this period of time. Since Jonah passed away, there had been some issues at the company and some of their old employees started to become quite restless and raring to make a move. It had taken him quite some effort to handle the company matters and finally, after sorting out everything, he could now gradually relax after being in a tense situation for such a long time. "How is school lately?" Elise nodded and replied, "It's alright.

I'm about to sit for my final exam so I'm busy with revision." "You're in your final year so it's quite normal to be more stressed out, but I have faith in your abilities. I'm sure that you'll be fine." In response, Elise pursed her lips and smiled. After finishing her breakfast, she placed down her cutlery and announced, "I'm full. I'll wait for you outside." As she said that, she got up and immediately headed toward the door to walk outside.

Shortly after that, Alexander came out too. Both of them got into the car but neither of them said a word. As soon as the car came to a stop in front of the school entrance, Elise unbuckled her seat belt and murmured, "I'll head to school now." Suddenly, Alexander called out her name and mentioned, "Do you have time tonight? Let's have dinner together." Elise blinked her eyes repeatedly and hesitated for a few seconds before finally replying, "Sure."

"I'll pick you up in the afternoon." She then nodded and got out of the car. Meanwhile, the atmosphere in school was full of cheer and festivity. As soon as she entered the classroom, many of her classmates rushed forward and handed her apples that were wrapped prettily. "Here you go, Elise. Happy Christmas Eve!" Elise received the apples with an abashed look on her face. "Thank you!" she replied. Unexpectedly, each of her classmates started to give her apples one after the other soon after that. In no time, her drawer was filled to the brim.

"Wow! Boss, you really are popular! That's a lot of apples that you've received." Danny said with an envious tone. He then looked down at his drawer and there

were merely around five apples inside. Just then, Elise was slightly surprised too. "The act of eating an apple on Christmas Eve symbolizes peace and serenity, so you should eat as much as you can." He grunted in response and shortly after that, he took out a nicely wrapped box from somewhere and handed it to her.

"Happy Christmas Eve, Boss." Meanwhile, Elise was quite surprised that he had prepared an apple for her too and she swiftly took it from him. "Thanks!" Danny smiled and replied, "It's part of my job as your underling but then again, I hope you haven't forgotten about your promise from before, Boss." Just then, Elise was clearly quite confused but Danny continued, "It's nearly time for our final exam and we really need to find some time for the game."

Oh—that's what he meant! Without his reminder, Elise had nearly forgotten about that. There had been so many things that happened recently and she was quite flummoxed by everything. "Sure. You need to work harder, then." "Don't worry, Boss. I'm quite confident that I'll be able to achieve one of the top three positions in class," Danny vowed. Elise was also quite encouraged by his motivated spirit and she became much more focused in class.

Before class ended, she received a text message from Alexander and once she clicked into it, she saw that he merely stated, 'I'll wait for you at the school entrance.' As soon as Elise saw that sentence, she shuddered and in the end, she decided to skip her last period of self-study and sneaked out of the room.

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As soon as Elise walked out of the school gates, she noticed the familiar-looking car parked in front and walked toward it immediately. Then, she tapped on the car window, which was then gradually wound down. Alexander was slightly surprised as he asked, "Have your classes ended?" Without batting an eyelid, Elise nodded right away. "Where are we headed?" she asked. However, there was an air of mystery to Alexander as he murmured, "You'll see soon enough." And so, he drove the car and brought her to a vintage-looking restaurant. Furthermore, the waiter was dressed in a traditional costume. The both of them then headed directly upstairs to the private room. "The atmosphere here is quite pleasant," Elise said sincerely. Soon after that, Alexander pulled out a chair for her as he offered, "Have a seat."

Both of them sat facing each other and shortly after, the waiter came in with two apples for them. "It's Christmas Eve tonight. This is for you and I hope that you will enjoy your night." Meanwhile, Alexander raised an eyebrow.

"Christmas Eve?" Elise explained, "It's just a simple occasion. We don't need to make a big fuss about it." Alexander didn't realize that today was Christmas Eve so he didn't prepare a present for her. However, after further consideration, he turned to her and said, "I've been too busy with work lately and I haven't had much time to go out." Elise, too, was quite considerate. "You must be quite tired from all the work-related matters that you need to deal with." He lifted his head

and shot a look at her, but his face remained impassive and he mentioned calmly without any emotion, "Actually, I asked you out today because I wanted to talk to you about something."

Humming in response, Elise took the teacup on the table and poured some water into it before handing it to him. "Why did you want to see me?" Alexander looked at the teacup in her hand and reached out for it. Then, he took a sip of water and hummed softly. Meanwhile, Elise mentioned once again, "What is it?! Can you just tell me?" At that moment, Alexander lifted his head and their eyes met. They gazed at each other for a moment before he finally replied slowly, "Let's get married."

Although he merely mentioned those few simple words, Elise was significantly shocked. Just then, the water in the cup spilled all over the table due to her trembling hand. "W-What did you just say?" Alexander noted her surprise, so he decided to explain. "I want to fulfill my promise to Grandpa, so will you marry me?" Elise's heart thudded frantically but she quickly came to her senses soon enough. "Are you doing this just to fulfill Grandpa's late wish?"

Alexander nodded in response. *I can't use any other excuse other than this, can I?* Upon hearing that, Elise looked slightly dejected but she randomly replied, "I just turned eighteen and I'm not past the legal age to get married." "It's alright," Alexander replied. "We can get engaged first and then hold the marriage ceremony a few years later." "But..." Elise was about to say something else but Alexander interjected right away, "No buts. If you disagree, then just say so outright.

I won't force you." Elise pursed her lips but before she could get a word across, he continued, "Grandpa's doted on me the most since I was a kid and he has the highest expectations from me. This is his only wish, so I would like to fulfill it and live with no regrets." His words made Elise recall the memories she had with Jonah. *Grandpa had always been so kind to me, so I really shouldn't disappoint him.* "Alright, that's fine with me. We can get engaged first."

Alexander hummed in agreement, but there was no hint of excitement on his face and he seemed like he was discussing something irrelevant. "I'll arrange for someone to get started on the engagement preparation. What sort of ceremony would you prefer?" The sudden mention of an engagement ceremony caught Elise by surprise. Meanwhile, Alexander was quite calm. "It's alright. You can let me know about the details once you've given some thought to it."

Just then, Elise had a surreal sensation and she pinched her thighs hard. *Ouch! That hurts, which means this is real!* Soon after that, she lifted her head and stared at Alexander, who was sitting right in front of her. She blinked while she considered the situation. *Is it a good idea to get engaged?! This has happened way too suddenly, though!* After the two of them finished their meal, Alexander footed the bill and they made their way out of the door. Just then, they were about to walk out of the door when they saw Jack and Mikayla walk in together.

The four of them looked at each other and Mikayla was quite startled by the scene. "Elise? W-Why are you here?" Elise glanced at the duo in front of her and her first instinct was that there was something unusual going on with the pair,

but she didn't reveal anything despite being aware. In the end, she merely replied, "I came over for a meal." "Enjoy your meal! We'll be on our way now." Elise waved at them as she said that and followed Alexander out of the restaurant. After turning a corner, Alexander couldn't help raising his eyebrows. "Are they dating each other?"

Elise raised both of her palms into the air to signal that she had no idea as well. However, Mikayla and Jack looked quite compatible together. It would be great if the pair actually got together. "It doesn't matter. Let's head home." Just then, Alexander agreed. "Let Cameron know if you have any suggestions regarding the engagement ceremony and he'll sort everything out." Elise realized that Alexander didn't care too much about the engagement upon hearing his words and she couldn't help but feel slightly upset. However, she was also well aware that he would never mention a word about getting engaged if it wasn't for Jonah. As soon as the Griffith siblings got the news that Alexander planned to get engaged with Elise, Danny was the one who felt the most shocked.

"Alex, are you pulling a prank on us? Are you actually going to get engaged with my boss?! That means she'll go from being my boss to being my sister-in-law!" Meanwhile, Jack, who was standing by the side, was also quite surprised. "Alex, marriage is quite a sacred thing. Although this is Grandpa's last wish, there's really no need to force yourself into anything. After all, Elise's looks..." Jack gave out a slight, intentional cough as he tried to mask his awkwardness while he brought up that topic. "Whatever it is, she came from the countryside, after all.

Even if we overlook her appearance, you're still worthy of someone much better than her." Brendan was usually the least outspoken sibling among them but right now, he chimed in as well, "Alex, I know that in our family, it's not a big deal even if we marry someone of unequal family status, but you should at least be in love with each other. If you don't love her, then you really shouldn't waste her time." "That's true! Alex, I think there's no need to enter into a marriage.

After all, everyone knows that a loveless marriage is basically like being in a lifeless tomb—" However, before Danny could finish his sentence, Alexander slowly replied, "I've made up my mind. I don't care about what you guys have to say but I've decided to marry Elise. Brendan, I'll need you and your team's help to sort out our attire. Also, there's no need for you guys to comment about anything else because I know what I'm doing."

All three of them obediently kept their comments to themselves as soon as they heard him say that he knew what he was doing. They were fully aware that Alexander had always been quite opinionated since young. As such, they stopped sharing their opinions with him, but they couldn't help feeling worried about his and Elise's marriage. After all, how long could a marriage devoid of love last?

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It was Christmas the next day. Elise woke up, only to find that the outdoors was blanketed in snow. She released a warm breath of air and noticed that there was

some white fog that appeared in front of her eyes. *It's actually quite cold.* She then dressed in a heavy down jacket and she wrapped herself up warmly before going downstairs. She saw that the servants had already moved the Christmas tree out of storage and placed it in the most prominent spot in the hall. "Miss Elise, you're up!" Elise looked at the Christmas tree in front of her and she happily exclaimed, "This tree's quite pretty. Where did you find this?" "This was bought by Young Master Danny last Christmas. At that time, Mr. Griffith..." The servant suddenly turned silent upon the mention of Jonah and merely said, "Ever since Mr. Griffith passed away, the whole place has been so somber, so I wanted to take this opportunity to decorate the house and add some sparkle to the place." "Let me help you, then," Elise offered. However, the servants hurriedly rejected, "There's no need for that, Miss Elise. We can handle these things ourselves."

However, Elise didn't heed their rejection and she reached out for the decorations to start decorating the tree. Just then, Brendan brought his team back home and he walked in to see such a scene. Unexplainably, he felt a warm, fuzzy feeling within him. However, he still harbored a slight grudge against Elise as he grumbled deep down, *She's a country bumpkin, so how can she be a worthy match for Alexander?!* "Elise, Alex sent me over to get your measurements for the engagement gown," Brendan said in a flat voice, sounding as if he was completing a task that he was quite unwilling to do.

Just then, Elise paused in her movement and she replied thereafter, "Hold on. I'll be there shortly." The servants were seemingly confused about what was going on but being servants, they would never question their masters' matters. "Miss Elise, I'll take over from here." Elise handed over the decorations in her hand and then she walked toward the direction of Brendan. Meanwhile, Brendan scrutinized Elise from head to toe and signaled for his female assistant to take her measurements. As soon as the female assistant saw Elise's rather hideous face, the former started to scheme deep down.

Apparently, this is the woman who's about to get engaged to the head of the Griffith Family. She's so ugly, though. What's wrong with Alexander?! Why did he pick such an ugly-looking woman?! "Raise your hands," the assistant coldly instructed. Then, she half-heartedly picked up a measuring tape and started to take Elise's measurements. However, the assistant's expression became increasingly bitter as she proceeded. She looked at the figures she had jotted down on her notebook and her eyes dimmed.

I can't believe this woman has such a great figure. But it doesn't mean anything, though! Her awesome figure doesn't quite compensate for her ugly looks anyway! "Mr. Griffith, I've taken all of her measurements," The female assistant then turned to Brendan. Meanwhile, Brendan merely grunted and kept his notebook aside before asking, "Do you have any style preferences? You can let me know and I'll include that in my design."

"I'm fine with everything. You can have free reign. Once you've come up with the design, just let me have a look at it." The female assistant was quite scornful upon hearing Elise's words and the former instantly said without paying heed to the current setting she was in, "Our boss is very talented and his designs are exceptional. There have been so many young ladies from reputable families in

town who have worn our designs, and none of them have presented any complaints!" The assistant's words had an underlying meaning and Brendan immediately reprimanded her, "Claire, you should head back to the office first.

You're not needed here." "But Mr. Griffith!" Claire was evidently quite displeased, but Brendan was a no-nonsense person so she had no choice but to adhere to his words. Subsequently, she shut up and left with the equipment kit. "Don't mind her. I'll bring over the design once everything is ready. Let me know if you have any ideas." Elise nodded in response. "I'm fine. Thanks for your hard work." "Well, since there's nothing else important, I'll head back now." Brendan turned around and left with his belongings upon saying that. Meanwhile, Elise retracted her gaze but suddenly, she seemed to recall something and she swiftly turned around to go upstairs.

She went back to her room and opened the luggage she had brought with her. There was a sketchbook inside and on the first page of it was a design of an outfit for a groom. She had casually sketched that a year ago but she was quite pleased with the style. *It would be great to be able to wear this gown*, Elise thought to herself but she subsequently shut the sketch book. *I'll definitely wear a wedding gown of my own design during my wedding.*

Well, it's just an engagement ceremony this time, so it's alright to make do with whatever is available. In the evening, Alexander reached home after a long day at work. As soon as he walked into the foyer, he suddenly stopped in his tracks and he felt a warm, fuzzy feeling swell within him as he checked out the newly put out decorations in the living room. There was a strong festive feeling in the air. Just then, Elise walked out of the kitchen with some food she had just prepared.

Noticing Alexander had just arrived back from work, she quickly greeted him, "Hey, you're back! Wash your hands and we can have dinner soon." There was a slight smile on her face and she seemed to be like a wife waiting for her husband to get back home from work. The thought of this evoked a warm, homey feeling within Alexander. However, he hastily hid his emotions in order not to lose his composure. Then, he handed over his work bag to a servant and said, "Do you need any help?"

Elise looked at the crockeries placed neatly on the table and replied, "It's fine. Everything's ready." He took a seat at the head of the table and as he looked at the delectable dishes in front of him, he felt his empty tummy rumble and he couldn't wait to tuck in. "Jack said that he's scheduled to record a special Christmas program tonight, so he won't be back for dinner. Danny also mentioned that he won't be back for dinner, so it looks like it's just the two of us at home tonight." Elise held a serving spoon and served him a helping of food as she spoke.

"Try this—this was all prepared by Stella and they're very delicious." Elise held a fork and spoon in her hand and served some food onto his plate. Meanwhile, Alexander placed the food into his mouth quite naturally. "It tastes great." "Stella mentioned that you love this. Looks like she knows you very well." Just then, Alexander lifted his head to look at her and he casually commented, "Are you about to have your term break soon?"

Elise blinked her eyes in response. "It's almost the New Year, so we have a couple of days of holiday." "Do you want to go for a trip?" Alexander asked. Shocked, Elise shot a quick look at him. "What are you..." "I heard that there's been some snowfall in Switzerland recently. Why don't we go skiing?"

Suddenly, Elise felt her heart race. *Is this an invitation from Alexander?* "I... Let me consider it," she replied while shifting her gaze. However, Alexander didn't give her a chance to reject. "I'll get Cameron to make arrangements and we can depart shortly." "But..." Elise was about to say something, but he raised his brows and looked at her quizzically. "Do you have an issue with that?"

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"Alright, but there's something I have to tell you first," Elise said. Upon hearing that, Alexander put down his tableware and looked at her seriously. "Go on." "I want our engagement to be simple," she quickly mumbled. "A meal with our families will be enough." "Is this what you want?" After Elise nodded her head, he continued, "Since it's what you want, that's settled, then. Is there anyone in the family that you want to invite other than your grandfather and grandmother?" "No, it's just them. I'll invite the others to our wedding." "Okay, that settles it, then. We'll do it after the New Year." When they finally came to an agreement, Elise secretly breathed a sigh of relief. Every girl more or less hoped for a perfect wedding once in their life, but since Jonah passed away not long ago, it wouldn't be appropriate for them to have a grand ceremony, so they decided to keep it simple. After their meal, she went back to her room and sat in front of the window alone. As she gazed outside the window thinking about something, someone knocked on the door. "Who is it?" The moment she said that, Alexander opened the door and entered. "Why are you here?" she asked. When she saw the exquisite box in his hands, she walked over to him. "Here you go. It's for you." Upon seeing that, Elise felt rather confused. "And this is?" "Your Christmas present." She received the box in disbelief and as soon as she opened it, she was shocked. "This..." She wanted to say something, but words just couldn't come out of her mouth for some reason. "It's the blood jade that we found from the mine before. I asked the company's designers to turn it into a bracelet. It looks quite good." Elise knew all of this and at the same time, she knew that it was very valuable. All this time, she thought that Alexander would use the blood jade for commercial purposes, so she never expected him to turn it into an accessory, never mind give it to her as a gift. "Why are you giving this to me?" "Because it suits you. Keep it." After that, he turned around and left. Looking at his back, she uttered, "Thank you!" As soon as he left, the room returned to normal again. As Elise stared at the blood jade bracelet, she couldn't help but reveal a delighted smile. *Has he... fallen in love with me too?* The moment the idea came up in her mind, she quickly shook her head and her eyes darkened. *He is probably doing all this for Grandpa. After all, if it weren't for his last wish, Alexander wouldn't have agreed to get engaged with me, never mind giving me such a gift.* Deep down, Elise knew clearly that all of this was because of Jonah. The next day, Elise went back to school, but her mind was obviously miles away. Even though she was holding a pen with her head down, she wasn't writing anything. In the end, Mikayla quickly went over to her and patted her shoulder. "Elise, what are you thinking about? You seem to be lost in your own thoughts." Elise came back

around and realized that she hadn't written a word in her book. "It's nothing," she mumbled. However, Mikayla wasn't having any of it, so she whispered to her, "I heard that you are engaged with the heir of the Griffith Family, Alexander. Is that true?" As soon as she mentioned the engagement, Elise instinctively raised her eyes and stared at her solemnly. "How did you know?" Looking at her reaction, Mikayla giggled. *It seems like Jack was telling the truth.* "Congratulations! Elise, you are so lucky to have found a good husband like Alexander." "Jack is also a nice guy too! You've been calling him your husband for so long now. Don't you think it's time that you accept him as your real husband?" Elise uttered calmly. Mikayla's face immediately blushed as she began to stutter, "W-What are you talking about? I-It's not what you think it is." However, Elise wasn't planning on letting her go that easily, so she countered, "Yes, I'm sure that there is more to it." "That's not true. We aren't together yet." Mikayla continued to act dumb. "Oh—in other words, the two of you thought about it before, right?" Mikayla wasn't sure about it herself since they only went out on dates several times and the two of them only had a few meals together. Other than that, there wasn't any progression in their relationship. "Elise, do you think Jack would like a girl like me?" Mikayla asked confusedly, her brows furrowed. At the moment, Elise felt that Mikayla was like one of those love-struck girls who was oblivious to everything around them. "If you aren't sure whether he likes you or not, that can only mean one thing—he doesn't like you." "But he is quite nice to me. It's just that we never got to that point yet," Mikayla quickly replied. She could feel that Jack was fond of her, but she didn't wish to rush their relationship. "Look at yourself—it's obvious that you know what you want." Elise could finally see the problem between the two of them, but Mikayla was still oblivious about it. *The problem is that Mikayla is always the one calling the shots in their relationship.* "Then, is there any way to know about his feelings?" After giving it some thought, Elise answered, "Why don't we ask Jack to go skiing with us in Switzerland? Maybe you'll learn something new afterward." Mikayla, on the other hand, was surprised by her reply. "Switzerland?! That sounds quite nice, but will he come?" Elise also didn't know whether he would come, but she felt that he probably would if Alexander asked him to. *Looks like I need to ask Alexander for a favor, but it'll be all worth it for my best friend's happiness.* Unexpectedly, after Elise told Alexander about it that day, he immediately agreed without any hesitation. Therefore, they were set to travel to Switzerland. After midnight on New Year's Day, the new year began rather quietly. Early in the morning on the first day of the year, Alexander, Elise and Jack rushed to the airport. Seeing that there were only the three of them, Jack was displeased. "Alexander, why did you ask me to come along? I don't want to be your third wheel!" Alexander remained silent while Elise put on a mysterious expression. "Calm down. We prepared a surprise for you later on." However, Jack wasn't interested in the surprise at all, because he was dragged along to go skiing with them after finally getting a break from work. Not only that, he now had to watch the two of them being affectionate with one another as a singleton. Even so, after secretly glancing at them, Jack breathed a sigh of relief because it seemed like their relationship hadn't reached that point yet. When they arrived at the airport, the trio received their boarding passes and entered the waiting lounge. However, the moment they came in, they could see Mikayla waving at them from not far away. "Over here, Elise!" Meanwhile, Elise said to Jack with a smile, "There you go! What do you think about your surprise?"

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Jack was confused at first but after staring at Mikayla, he finally understood what was happening. *Elise is trying to match both of us together, right? She really doesn't know what she is doing. Mikayla and I are just friends.* "Elise, you guys are finally here," Mikayla said before turning toward Jack. "You're here as well." However, he only gave her a simple reply without saying anything while putting on an indifferent expression. His reaction immediately left Mikayla confused because this wasn't how he would usually react when they were alone together. Then, the four of them boarded the plane and arrived at Switzerland a dozen or so hours later. At the moment, it was nighttime in Switzerland, so they quickly rushed to the hotel. Elise and Mikayla were staying in one room, while Alexander and Jack stayed together in another. Due to tiredness, the two girls immediately fell asleep the moment they lay down on their beds. Meanwhile, Alexander and Jack seemed to still have some energy left so after arriving at the hotel, they took a bath before going downstairs to have a drink.

Jack was still surprised that Alexander would suddenly bring Elise along on a skiing trip, so he couldn't help but ask, "Alexander, do you really like Elise?" Listening to his words, Alexander remained emotionless, making it difficult for others to read his mind. Instead, he took a huge gulp of his wine glass to conceal his true emotions. However, Jack read his actions as him being distressed, so he patted his shoulder and said, "Alexander, I understand that you are doing all this because of Grandpa's last wish.

Actually, you don't need to force yourself. Grandpa has passed away and I believe that he wants all of us to live a happy life. If he knows how reluctant you are to be together with Elise, he definitely won't force you to do so." With a faint smile, Alexander murmured, "I didn't get engaged with her because of Grandpa." Jack thought he had heard him wrongly at first, but Alexander's words afterward immediately caused his eyes to widen.

"I did it because... I found out that I seem to like her." Listening to his words, Jack couldn't help but pinch himself. "Alex, are you joking?" "Do I look like I'm joking?" Jack quickly nodded his head. He was still in shock after Alexander personally admitted to him that he liked Elise, which was why the former immediately thought that Alexander was joking with him. "Are you sure? She looks so..." As an admirer of good-looks, Jack kept on bringing up her appearance because he believed that no one would care how beautiful you were inside if there was nothing appealing on the outside.

"What is it about her that you like?" Alexander himself couldn't answer his question, as he believed that there shouldn't be a reason for a person to fall in love. *If something like love can be explained rationally, does that even count as true love?* "I don't know. Maybe it's temporary or maybe I really like her. However, before I figure out my true feelings for her, I hope that you can keep this a secret for me." Jack was still processing what he just heard but seeing Alexander's serious expression, he felt that perhaps he wasn't joking this time. "It's getting late. You should go to sleep.

We are going out together tomorrow, so please don't look so sulky as you were today." Quickly, Jack refuted, "I wasn't. I'm just getting used to the place." "You better be. Mikayla is a nice girl. If you like her, you should act fast." Listening to him, Jack was frightened as he kept on refuting, "Alexander, there's really

nothing going on between the two of us. I only see her as my friend." "Even so, everyone starts out as friends." Upon hearing that, Jack was rendered speechless. He felt that there was nothing he could do to convince Alexander, so he kept quiet and ignored him.

After returning to their room, Jack took a shower before falling asleep on the bed while Alexander remained awake. He was obviously tired, but he just couldn't fall asleep. Therefore, he stood alone outside the window, gazing at the strange city in front of him. As the confusion inside his heart seemed to be fading away, he realized that some things just required him to find the answer himself. ... The next day, Elise woke up during the afternoon due to the jet lag she experienced the day before. When she woke up, Mikayla was already gone.

After stretching her body, she took a look at the note on the table and found out that Mikayla had gone out for lunch. After cleaning herself up and changing her clothes, she decided to leave the room. However, the moment she opened the door, the door on the opposite side also opened at the same time, and it was as if she had had a telepathic conversation with Alexander in the other room. As the two of them stared at each other, he took the initiative to invite her for lunch. "Do you want to go down to eat together?" She nodded her head, so they closed their doors and went down in the same elevator.

The restaurants in Switzerland were mostly based on western cuisines. After reading through the menu, Elise ordered her favorite steak and foie gras. Listening to her fluent French, Alexander couldn't help but praise, "Your French is quite good. You even have their local accent. Have you stayed abroad before?" "I went on a student exchange programme for a year," she replied. *That is possibly the happiest time in my life. Thinking about it right now fills me with beautiful memories.*

"I see." He didn't ask her any more questions. After they ordered their food, the waiter took the menu and left. "I heard that you went to England to pursue your MBA, right?" she asked, to which he answered, "I completed my undergraduate and postgraduate degree in Cambridge University within 3 years."

"I didn't know that you are a scholar." "You are not bad yourself too. It's not like anyone could win first place in the city's Math Olympiad." He quickly followed up her words. At that moment, the waiter came over with their steaks. "Enjoy your meal!" Just as Elise was about to pick up her tableware after thanking the waiter, Alexander acted first and helped her cut the steak before handing it back to her. "Try it—the taste should be authentic here."

Looking at the neatly cut steak in front of her, Elise felt a strange feeling surging inside her heart. "I didn't know that you are this good at cutting steak. You should teach me in the future." The moment her words came out, she could hear the mumbling voices of two foreigners sitting next to them. Even though their voices were soft, she could still hear their every word clearly. "Why does that handsome man have the appetite to eat with such an ugly girl?"

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"What are you worrying about? It doesn't seem like he minds." "Ha! I'm just feeling bad for the guy. After all, it's a pity for a handsome guy like him to be paired with a girl like her. He is exactly my type. I'll be happy if I can date him myself." With a wine glass in hand, the girl with the blonde hair couldn't help but walk over to Alexander and Elise.

"Sir, can I buy you a drink?" It was true that Western women were more enthusiastic and bold. Experiencing it upfront, Elise was displeased but just as she was about to speak, Alexander opened his mouth and said, "I'm sorry, but my fiancée won't allow that."

"What? She's your fiancée?" the woman repeated in disbelief. It was only then that she walked away reluctantly after glancing at Elise. "Alexander, don't you mind how I look?" Elise asked carefully. She knew that the first thing a man saw was always a woman's appearance. Even so, she was still hoping that she would get a different answer from him. "Does it matter? To me, looks and status are all unimportant to being my wife. I don't focus on these."

"But if you and I get together, there will be many people talking behind us." *An example would be the two foreigners just now.* He could tell that she was not confident with herself, so he patted her head and said, "Why do you have to care about the opinions of others? We should live for ourselves and not for others." Immediately, his answer made her heart flutter. She never thought that one day she would get such comments from a man despite her ugly looks.

And so, she thanked him from the bottom of her heart. "Thank you, Alexander." Although she had always been carefree about her image, a girl would still be vulnerable to criticisms that were directed to her looks. "Quickly eat your food before it gets cold." And so, she lowered her eyes and began to hesitate deep down. *Should I tell him the truth that this face of mine is just a disguise? Will he be able to accept it?* "Alexander, can I ask you something?"

She paused for a second and continued, "If one day you found out that someone you trusted deceived you, what would you do?" Just as the sentence came out of her mouth, she could feel the atmosphere turn icy. As she lifted her gaze to meet Alexander's eyes, she felt the coldness exuding from him. "There are two things I will never accept—one is betrayal and the other is deception," Alexander replied with a light tone as if it was something trivial but deep down, Elise knew that these were his boundaries. "I was just asking. Don't take it too seriously."

She tried to change the topic, but Alexander was still staring at her as he commented, "As long as you don't do something unacceptable, our marriage will last long." She was so startled that it felt as though there was something stuck in her throat. Therefore, she turned away and started coughing vigorously, but Alexander was quick to respond by giving her a cup of water. "Are you okay?" "I-I'm fine." She shook her head as she had lost all her courage to tell him the truth. Now, all she could do was to take it one step at a time. After the meal, they walked out of the restaurant.

At the same time, Mikayla and Jack also came back. "Elise, you such a deep sleeper! It was already noon but I still couldn't wake you up, so I went and got you some local delicacies. Would you like to have a taste once we're back?" Mikayla asked as she quickly locked arms with Elise. Looking at the takeaway containers, Elise felt a bit embarrassed as she mumbled, "We already ate." Mikayla was clearly surprised but she still replied, "It's okay. You can eat them later when you are hungry." Then, the four of them took the elevator upstairs.

When Elise and Mikayla returned to their room, the former sat alone in front of the windows in a daze thinking about something, so Mikayla came over and waved her hand in front of her. "What are you thinking about?" Elise lifted her eyes and looked at her. "Mikayla, are you able to accept being deceived?" "It depends on where the lie is coming from. I can accept it if it's a white lie but if it's a blatant lie, I don't think I can.

I might even cut ties with the one who lied to me," Mikayla answered after giving it a serious thought. Elise found it hard to accept that almost everyone couldn't accept being lied to. However, she didn't have a choice back then because she didn't want to be engaged to one of the young masters of the Griffith Family, so she disguised herself. She never expected herself to fall in love with one in the end. "Elise, are you okay?" Upon hearing that, Elise snapped out of it and said hurriedly, "I'm fine. I was just thinking about tomorrow's skiing plan."

As soon as she mentioned it, Mikayla became worried. "Elise, I don't know how to ski. What should I do? It seems like I can only look at all of you skiing tomorrow." "Don't worry. We'll hire a trainer to teach you tomorrow. It's quite easy. You'll be able to learn it." "Really?" Mikayla questioned, feeling still unsure. "But I'm a slow learner. I always fail to learn anything."

"Don't worry. It'll be alright." Seeing Elise's confidence in her, Mikayla felt as though she was actually capable of learning it. Yet, she really overestimated herself in the end. Even after being guided by the trainer several times, she still couldn't figure it out.

Several times falling down later, she finally gave up. "You guys can continue skiing. I can't do this anymore." Dressed in a ski suit, Elise looked at her and said, "Let's try a few more times. I will hold you." However, Mikayla declined her offer without hesitation. "No, I really can't figure it out. I'll wait for you guys at the lounge." Seeing her situation, Jack also joined her. "I won't go skiing either. The two of you can go without us."

With Jack by Mikayla's side, Elise continued skiing with Alexander. The Swiss Alps were enormous and many people from all over the world gathered here for holiday. Elise only knew the basics of skiing, so her skill was not refined. Thankfully, she had Alexander following her by her side as the two of them skied at the same pace with their poles. "Honestly, I think the two of them are quite a match," Mikayla said while looking at the two of them skiing.

Listening to her, Jack couldn't help but add, "Hopefully they both feel the same thing and it's not just a fling." Mikayla felt as if his words meant something more, but she didn't ask him much. Knowing that she didn't have any talent in skiing,

she had a sudden idea when she saw people gathering at the ski site to have a snowball fight. "Why don't we have a snowball fight?"

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Jack thought that the idea was incredibly childish. "You go ahead. I think I will pass." *Well, if you say so. It's impossible to do it alone, though...* Mikayla could only proceed with the snowball fight, but just as she was frustrated, she was approached by a few foreigners. "Hey lovely, are you alone?" Immediately, she looked at them warily and planned to leave, but she was stopped by one of the girls. "Join us! It's more fun than playing alone." When she met their friendly gazes, she changed her mind and agreed to join them because she would be bored, anyway.

Meanwhile, Elise and Alexander skied their way through the peak. Elise stood at the apex and gazed down at the magical and breathtaking winter scenery. "How I wish I could stay here for a few more days!" Elise sighed from the bottom of her heart. Seeing that she was in a good mood, Alexander quickly added, "If you like, we could stay a few more days here." She beamed at him, but right then, she felt a slight tremor from the ground underneath her, and her expression changed to one of shock. "Why is the ground moving?" He felt it as well, but before he could utter a word, he saw the snow on the mountains opposite them sliding down. "Oh crap! It's an avalanche!"

A shiver went down her spine, and her mind was filled with the scene of the aftermath. She could feel the snow underneath her feet loosening as she lost her balance and started plunging forward. Frantically, he reached out to grab her. Around them, the mountains were shifting, and the ground was shaking. The terrifying movement of nature was intertwined with shrill screams from panicked skiers. He hugged her tight in his arms to protect her, and they both rolled down the slope from the peak. A long time later, she finally regained her consciousness and moved her stiff arms.

Then, she found out that the lower half of her body was buried in snow. She recalled what happened before her blackout, and she was caught by fear. "Alexander! Alexander!" She called out to him over and over again, but there was no answer except for her empty echoes in the mountains. That moment was filled with intense fear. She got up from the ground and staggered forward. However, after the avalanche, the environment went through a drastic change, with no human being seen around. She plowed forward aimlessly while yelling, "Anyone there?!"

No matter how many times she shouted, no one replied to her. Dragging her exhausted body along, she went on until she found the rest area they had passed by when they first arrived. At that time, the members of the rescue team noticed her. "Hey, look! There's a lady over there!" Without wasting a single second, she reached out for help. "Help me! I have a friend with me, but he's probably buried under the snow. You have to help find him! You must!" The rescue team staff quickly comforted her, saying, "Now, don't worry."

We will try our best." As they spoke, they settled her down before splitting into two teams and making their way up the snowy mountains for the search. Her heart leaped up to her throat as she wallowed in regret. *Why did I even say yes to skiing in the first place?* Staring at the landscape of endless snow, she felt her eyes welling up with tears. *God, please let Alexander return safe and sound. Please...* A few days passed, and Elise was still staying guard at the foot of the mountains.

During the long and soul-crushing wait, she witnessed the rescue team pulling out victims from the snowy grounds, and more than half of those people did not show vital signs. Even after a few days, they did not find Alexander, Mikayla, or Jack. With all the anxiety building up, Elise was significantly weaker, and despite being advised to leave the scene by the concerned rescuers, she insisted on waiting. She waited until Danny's call came in. "Boss, the company is in chaos now.

Everyone heard the news about Alexander, and there's no one to lead the company now." Her heart sank after she heard the news. Jonah's reminder once again popped up in her mind, so she tried her best to stay strong. "How's the situation in the office right now? Tell me all the details." Promptly, Danny explained, "A few shareholders are starting to make a fuss. They even plan to call for a new shareholders' meeting to elect a new company president." "Those rebels!" "Boss, is there no news of Alexander till now? I'm afraid that—" Elise quickly cut him off.

"He'll be fine. He must still be alive." She did not know if she was trying to console Danny or herself. When she looked up at the vast snowy mountain in front of her, she had a feeling that Alexander must be alive somewhere. *Perhaps he's still waiting for me to save him!* She lost her composure after the possibility crossed her mind. "Danny, if there are issues at the company, or if there's anything you need, just look for Jamie Keller.

He will help to hold the fort for the time being." Danny knew that Elise and Jamie had a close relationship from the way she entrusted the latter to handle the situation. Just when he was about to ask something else, she already hung up on him. Staring at the swaths of white, she felt that she could not afford to wait anymore. *I have to find him!* She meticulously refreshed the memories from the day of the avalanche.

Before she fainted, she could sense the warmth of his body against her. *Could it be that he was right beside me all the time? Could I have overlooked him?* Her eyes lighting up, she ran over to the rescue team. "Please, please, he's still trapped in there. Can you help me?" The rescuers sighed helplessly at her obstinance. "We're sorry, ma'am. We have been searching the mountain for a few days. If there had been a sign of life, our tools would have picked that up. Plus, the 72-hour golden period has passed. There's a high chance that your friend has passed on."

Their direct words triggered her. "No, that's impossible! He could not have died. Stop spewing nonsense!" Knowing that she was in denial, they merely comforted her. "Ma'am, we have searched the mountains a few times. It is impossible for us to get up there again—there is a risk of another avalanche coming. We can't take the risk to save a victim who is likely gone." Her heart sank to the bottom.

Despite knowing their rationale, she still felt indignant, for she had a feeling that he must still be alive.

Suddenly, an idea came into her mind. She recalled that Cynthia once told her about an elite self-defense force in Switzerland. Without a second thought, she gave her aunt a call. Once Cynthia learned about the purpose of Elise's call, she quickly arranged for a trip to the snowy mountains in Switzerland. When she arrived with the team, she was greeted by a pale and feeble Elise, a sight that pained her heart.

"Ellie, how have you been living for the past few days?" Elise went up and clutched her hands tightly. "Aunt Cynthia, he must still be alive somewhere. Please save him!" From the desperate look on Elise's face, Cynthia assumed that the missing victim must be someone important to her niece.

Hence, for now, she could only try her best to reassure the poor girl. "Don't worry, Ellie. I will save your friend as long as there's a shred of hope."

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That was how Elise brought the elite self-defense force up into the snowy mountains. As much as the rescue team wanted to stop them, they could not do anything because Elise and her men insisted on going. Based solely on her memories, she found her way up the mountains until she reached the spot where she first woke up. "It's here, Aunt Cynthia! He shouldn't be too far away from me." Cynthia quickly surveyed the area around them.

"Quick, take a look to see if there's anyone around here." The self-defense force went to work right after she gave out the orders. After a round of search, they did not find anything. Elise looked extremely dejected when she learned about it. "How is that possible?" Burying her head in her arms, she slumped into the snow. *Alexander, where on earth are you?* Hugging her knees, she sat there as tears glided down her cheeks in silence. Out of desperation, she punched her fists on the ground, but after hitting the ground two times, she felt the snow shifting and giving way underneath her.

Cynthia exclaimed in fear, "Is it a second avalanche?" Everyone exchanged looks, but they did not sense any movements on the ground. "What is going on?" Cynthia was curious as Elise grew hopeful. Suddenly, Elise started digging in the snow with her hands. When Cynthia saw that, she called the others to help. The group started digging through the thick layers of snow. Not long after, they created a gigantic hole and surprisingly discovered a huge tree underneath it that provided shelter space.

There, they found a few motionless people, one of them being Alexander. Feeling overjoyed, she ran up to him. "Alexander! Alexander, wake up!" No matter how many times she yelled, he did not give any response, which sent her into a panic spiral. She placed her finger under his nose, and once she detected his feeble breathing, she let out a sigh of relief. "Aunt Cynthia, save him first!"

Save him!" The self-defense force came up and lifted Alexander out of the tree cave. Luckily, the other victims in the cave were all alive, so Cynthia had them brought out along with Alexander.

All the while, Elise followed Alexander closely until he was admitted to the ER of a private hospital in Switzerland. In the corridor, she sat tensely on the bench, staring intently at the doors of the ER. "Ellie, it'll be fine. Don't worry." Cynthia hurried over to comfort her. Like grasping onto the last straw, Elise grabbed Cynthia's wrist tightly. "Aunt Cynthia, he'll be alright, right? He'll be alright." After a slight sigh, Cynthia uttered, "Sweetie, don't worry.

He's a good man, so he will be safe. You should get something to eat to take care of your health. If not, you might collapse by the time he wakes up." "No! I want to wait until he's awake and fine." Knowing that Elise was as stubborn as a mule, Cynthia didn't bother to change her mind, only silently praying for Alexander's safety. As time passed by, and soon it had been a day. After eight hours of operation, the light of the ER room was finally switched off, causing Elise to flinch and shoot up.

At the same time, the doors flung open, and the surgeon emerged. She went up to him and asked in French, "Doctor, how's my friend doing? Is he out of danger?" The doctor took a look at her and pursed his lips. "The patient has not suffered any external injuries. He's only in a coma from asphyxia. After the emergency operation, he is now breathing normally. As for when he is going to wake up... We cannot say for sure.

It could be as fast as a few days; it could take months or years." *Gasp!* Her heart sank to the bottom as though her soul had left her body. The doctor could only try his best to console her. "He's in good shape, so I guess he'd wake up soon. Don't worry too much." Cynthia was supporting Elise and frowned at the doctor's words. "Ellie, don't worry. I will get the best doctor to save him." "Aunt Cynthia, you must save him." Cynthia nodded solemnly at her niece.

"Now, quit worrying and get some food." Elise wanted to refuse, but she was attacked by a wave of nausea due to low blood sugar. Cynthia ignored Elise's opinion and asked for some soup. After drinking the soup, Elise finally recovered, but she was consumed by another sudden thought. "Aunt Cynthia, Jack and Mikayla are in the mountains too." "Calm down. I have sent my men to search for them. We'll hear about your friends soon. Just stop overthinking." Elise was immersed in guilt. "If I had not insisted that Mikayla join us, she wouldn't have gotten into this accident!

It's all my fault!" It pained Cynthia to see Elise blaming herself—it was a scene that gave her *deja vu*. "Ellie, this is not your fault. You didn't want this to happen. Since the accident has happened, the only thing we could do is to try our best to find them and to pray for their safety." "Aunt Cynthia..." Elise hugged her aunt tightly. Cynthia patted her on the back. "Sweetie, do you want to visit Alexander? He's transferred to a normal ward." Lying in the hospital bed in the ward, Alexander—unlike his usual self—was pale and motionless.

Elise visited him alone, and the closer she went to him, the harder it was to contain the pain in her chest. Unable to hold her tears back any longer, she

started sobbing uncontrollably. “Alexander, please wake up soon. Okay?” Scenes from them tumbling in the avalanche replayed in her mind. She recalled that he had been shielding her during the fall. “Alexander, you’re a fool, you know? Why would you bother protecting me?”

Stop lying there and wake up! You promised me an engagement. We haven’t held our engagement party. You can’t take back your words!” She leaned against the bed and whispered lots of words to him, but he still gave no response. Finally, she took a deep breath and decided that she would wait until the day he woke up. Then, she drifted to sleep beside him. When she woke up the next day, the room was filled with the warmth of sunshine from the windows.

Cynthia happened to enter the room as she announced, “Ellie, we have news of Jack! He’s rescued by the rescue team and is now resting at the temporary shelter. He’s been looking for you all the time. That’s why I could get in touch with him very soon.” Elise hurriedly asked, “What about Mikayla? Where is she now?”

To that, Cynthia shook her head apologetically. “Jack told me that he wasn’t with Mikayla when the avalanche happened. But don’t you worry. I have sent some men to search for her. As long as she’s alive, we will definitely find her.” The news depressed Elise. They showed up to ski in a group of four, but only three of them were accounted for. *Mikayla, where are you?*

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Elise stayed in the hospital to take care of Alexander. The next day, Jack dropped by for a visit. The sight of him was unforgettable for Elise—she had never seen him more disconsolate than this. “How’s Alexander?”

Jack’s hoarse voice cut through the silence, significantly sounding less energetic than his usual self. “He’s fine. As long as he wakes up, there shouldn’t be any serious issue. I’m just worried because it has been days, but his condition isn’t improving.”

Jack went up to the patient bed and stared at the almost lifeless Alexander. “Alexander, since we were kids, you’ve always been a role model to us. Now, you need to wake up quickly as well.” He reached out to clutch Alexander’s hand so tightly that it almost looked as if he was channeling energy into his brother. “About Mikayla... Is there still no news about her?” Elise meekly asked the question. After Mikayla’s name was mentioned, Jack’s already tired eyes appeared a tad dimmer.

If only I had agreed to go for the snowball fight with her, the outcome might have been different. After the avalanche, Jack searched through the area but could not locate her. “She’ll be fine.” Even though he told Elise that Mikayla would be fine,

he didn't know for sure. *She'll be fine. She will...* "Just take good care of Alexander. I will search for Mikayla to the best of my ability. If I can't find her, I won't return." Next, he let go of Alexander's hand and turned to leave. Elise's heart sank to the bottom. *Mikayla, come back to us soon! We're all waiting for you.*

That night, she was looking after Alexander at the bedside as usual. He had been in a coma for days, but his eyes suddenly fluttered. Moving his stiff arms, he slowly inched around to sit up. The next second, his arm accidentally came in touch with the girl by the bedside. In the darkness, he could still recognize Elise. The sight of her warmed his heart. He pulled the blanket over to cover her. To his surprise, Elise jumped in her dream and mumbled, "Alexander... Alexander, don't leave me!"

After she was awake, she sat up and looked across the empty room. Soon, she seemed to have felt the gaze of someone else in the darkness. "A-Are you awake?" Out of nowhere, she was yanked into his embrace with great force. He was clumsy, but he savored the moment like the world would end the instant and she would disappear along with it. *It's her...* "Alexander, I'm scared to death because of you." Her voice cracked, and he tightened his hug around her.

His magnetic voice rang in her ears. "Don't worry. I'm always here for you." The familiarity of his voice brought tears to her eyes. No one knew the extent of the heartache and stress she had suffered in the past few days. "Are you feeling fine? Should I call the doctor? You've just woken up. Don't move around. If you need anything, just let me know." While speaking, she let go of his hand. "I'm turning on the lights. Wait for me here."

She rose up only to be struck by a thought. Reflexively, she reached out to touch her face. In the past few days, she had been so busy looking after him that she did not have the time to put on her disguise. If she turned on the lights, he would see her real face. *I can't let him see my face.* She came to a decision right away. "I need to use the washroom. I'll turn on the lights after that." As she explained, she deftly sneaked into the washroom and locked the door from the inside. Staring at her reflection in the mirror, she gasped for air to calm herself down and frantically took out her foundation cushion to powder her face.

He was taken aback by her odd behavior but did not pursue it further. Instead, he switched on the lights by himself, and the room was brightly lit. His pupils struggled to adjust to the influx of brightness, and he closed his eyes from the irritation. When his vision adjusted, he got out of bed. "Elise, are you done?" Elise scrambled to get ready and shouted, "Give me a minute! Wait for me." In a few moves, she quickly put on her ugly disguise with makeup.

When she was satisfied with her appearance, she opened the door and strolled out. "I'm done," she said to him. Seeing the face he missed dearly, he opened his arms to her. After a little hesitation, she walked to him and gave him a hug. "It's great that you woke up," she told him earnestly, and his lips curled up into a dazzling smile. "It's great to hug you again." After he woke up from the coma, doctors performed a multitude of tests on him, and she was there for him the whole time.

"This is good. His body is in great shape, and his recovery is going well. He will be under observation for two more days before we discharge him." The doctor's comment soothed her worried heart. "Just stay here for another two days, and we can go home." Alexander looked at her and nodded in obedience without any questions or comments. At the same time, he received a call from home, so he picked it up. "Oh, Alexander, you're finally awake!"

Alexander lifted a brow and asked, "Is everything okay in the company?" Danny was straightforward. "Well, things were not going well at first, but thankfully, Boss told me to look for Jamie. The situation has stabilized for now. We're only waiting for your return." Alexander shot a puzzled look in her direction after hearing about Jamie. *It sounds like she's close to Jamie.* "Alexander, are you listening?" Danny's voice pulled him back to the conversation, and he said, "You've gone through a lot. I'll be back in a few days' time." "It's not a problem if Jamie's around. He has great business acumen, and he acts aggressively.

Even if you want to take a longer break, the company will turn out fine," Danny praised Jamie to the heavens, to which Alexander replied with a grunt as a sign of acknowledgment. After he ended the call, Elise followed up, "How's the situation back home? If you need to deal with company matters, we could fly home earlier." "It's fine. The company is in good hands," he answered and followed up with a question. "Are you close to Jamie?" Elise felt her heart skip a beat and quickly clarified, "Yes, I guess you can say so." She had thought that he'd pester her with more questions, but he changed the topic.

"Any news about Mikayla?" The light in Elise's eyes went out as she shook her head. "Nothing yet." Although Cynthia joined the search, Mikayla had, in fact, been missing after such a long time. It was difficult to keep the news under wraps any longer, so Elise had informed Mikayla's parents in the most cautious manner possible.

Mikayla's parents were on their way to Switzerland and were expected to arrive in the next two days. "It's okay. Don't worry. Mikayla is a lucky girl. She'll be safe." Elise had no choice but to pray fervently for her friend's safety in her heart. The next day, Mikayla's parents arrived with a heavy heart, but they did not point their fingers at anyone.

The couple cooperatively worked with the rescue team to look for their daughter. Not long after, Cynthia rushed to Elise with a grave expression. "Ellie, I have some unfortunate news for you. I hope you're mentally prepared."

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Elise had already formed a guess from the look on Cynthia's face. She gripped her sleeve tightly and mumbled, "So, you have news about Mikayla?" Cynthia gazed at her and nodded. Without warning, Elise's legs gave away, and she stumbled. Neither were her tears controllable, as she could clearly feel tears gliding down her cheeks. "That's... That's impossible! Nothing's going to happen to her! How could she have..." Cynthia tried her best to calm her down. "We are not a

hundred percent sure right now. It's just that... the rescue team has found a body with descriptions that resemble her."

The shocking news shattered Elise's world, and she refused to accept the reality. Jack showed up out of the blue and grabbed Cynthia's arm, descending into madness as he barked at her, "Is that true? Where is she now? Tell me! Where is she?" Jack's reckless reaction put a frown on Cynthia's forehead. She knew the guy, but she had not expected him to act in such a rash manner. Based on his anxious reaction, she had a vague idea of his relationship with Mikayla. Therefore, she decided to forgive his rudeness and shared all the details with him.

"The body is placed at the rescue station. No one has come forward to claim it." She barely finished speaking when Jack dashed out of the hospital. Elise followed suit with tears brimming in her eyes. When Mikayla's parents got the news, they almost fainted from crying. Finally, the group rushed to the temporary mortuary at the rescue station. Elise was shaking from head to toe when she laid eyes on the white cloth that was draped over the body.

"Mikayla..." Elise couldn't help but mumble her friend's name, and tears kept falling down her face. Meanwhile, Mikayla's parents were out of breath from crying, and the atmosphere sank to the lowest point. In an attempt to keep Elise calm, Alexander stood firmly and held her hand in silence. She stumbled forward and flipped the cloth open to reveal a body that was almost unidentifiable. However, because the size of the victim was similar to Mikayla's frame, she once again plunged into sadness.

The people around didn't seem too positive either. Yet, Jack was the only one who reacted differently. Looking like a lifeless walking corpse when he arrived, he suddenly perked up after seeing the body, and his eyes shone. "That's not Mikayla!" Without a doubt, his curt declaration changed the air around them. Meanwhile, Elise watched on through her misty eyes as Jack explained with all seriousness, "That is not her! She wore a different outfit on that day.

She's also wearing a fishbone necklace, which is not seen anywhere on this body!" Elise's gaze traveled over to the body and confirmed that there was no fishbone necklace, which rendered her speechless. "W-What is going on?" Again, Jack declared with confidence, "You got the wrong person! This body is not Mikayla's! Trust me!" Then, he turned around to leave. The rest of the group was utterly confused by Jack's words.

Soon, Mikayla's parents regained their composure. Staring at the body, they seemed to prefer Jack's narrative, even if it was only for emotional relief. "That's not Mikayla. It's not her," Mrs. Jameson muttered repeatedly, but her husband remained rational. "Since we can't identify her, the best way forward is to send the body for a postmortem exam." So, Mr. Jameson contacted a local lab for a postmortem exam. The results were out in less than 24 hours and delivered to them.

Everyone held their breath as he took out the document. When they saw that the body did not even have a 1% match with Mikayla's DNA, they let out a collective sigh of relief. "I knew it! It was not Mikayla. It's definitely not her..." Mrs. Jameson burst into tears agitatedly. Since the body was not Mikayla, there was

hope that she could still be alive. Elise's heart slowly calmed down as well. *Mikayla, you must still be alive. Am I right?*

"Found her! They found her!" Jack's joyful screams cut through the pensive atmosphere. Elise was the first to get a grip of herself and hurried over to him. "Did they find Mikayla?" Jack nodded in happiness. "The embassy sent me the news. They said that Mikayla had contacted them. She was there to get her ID and passport reissued, probably for the flight home." The sudden news swept Elise off her feet. "Is that true? Where is she now?"

Jack added, "She went to the embassy two days ago. I guess she's already back to Cittadel now. Once we're back, we will definitely get a hold of her!" "But if she's safe, why did she not contact us?" She vocalized her question, and silence descended. That was indeed a mystery, for it did not align with Mikayla's usual behavior. "But the embassy clearly told me that the ID information was correct. It was Mikayla." In the face of Jack's confirmation, Elise also believed that the embassy visitor was Mikayla.

"Let's head home then," Alexander chimed in, and she agreed with him. Mikayla's parents were overjoyed to learn that their daughter had taken the flight home. They proceeded to book the closest flight available and went home with Elise and the others. After a ten-hour-long flight, the plane landed at Athesea's airport. The group exited the arrivals and immediately rushed to Mikayla's home. However, they were shocked to find the house empty—Mikayla did not come home. Looking disappointed, Jack mumbled, "How is this possible? What is going on?"

Elise comforted him, saying, "Don't worry. If it's really Mikayla, she will come home sooner or later." "But where is she now?" His words prompted everyone to fall into deep thoughts. Elise and Alexander left Mikayla's place and went home together. In the car, she couldn't help but ask, "What do you think? Since she's already back in Cittadel, why is she not coming home?" Before this, Alexander had observed the way Elise worried about Mikayla's disappearance.

He could tell how important Mikayla was to her, and he silently gave her moral support along the way. "Don't worry. Who knows? Maybe she is under some difficult circumstances." Elise looked confused but could not come up with a plausible explanation. "Alright now. Stop overthinking. At least we have proof that she's well and alive. The other mysteries will be unraveled once she gets home. You shouldn't lose your hair over it."

Staring out of the window moodily, Elise once again prayed that Mikayla could come home soon. When they reached home, she immediately got ready to attend school due to the time difference. She had spent a lot of time in Switzerland following the accident and took leaves of absence for it.

Since she delivered satisfactory results in her previous exams, the teachers did not comment on her absence. "The final exam is tomorrow. Use your time wisely for revision." The homeroom teacher was speaking to the class, but her eyes were clearly on Elise. "If you have any questions, feel free to drop by my office for clarification."

