

The moment they came in, Natalie's eyes immediately found Shane, but her heart sank when she saw his brows knitting into a frown.

"Jacqueline, are you okay?" Jackson quickly put down the medical file in his hand and took a few large strides forward to help Jacqueline up.

Jacqueline leaned against him with tears pooling in her eyes. "Jackie, I'm so scared."

"It's okay. You're alright." Jackson patted her back soothingly before questioning, "What the hell happened?"

He pinned Natalie a hard stare.

Before Natalie could answer, Jacqueline bowed her head and said in a small voice, "This isn't Ms. Smith's fault. She only pushed me in the heat of the moment. She didn't mean it. It's my fault."

She was blatantly implying that Natalie had pushed her.

Natalie let out a sardonic laugh and peered at Shane. "Would you believe me if I told you I didn't push her?"

Shane's eyes flickered in response.

He wanted to say he believed that she did not push anyone. After all, based on her personality, she did not seem like someone who would do such a thing.

But when they came in, Jacqueline had indeed fallen to the ground, and Natalie also looked like she had indeed pushed her. Hence, he couldn't say for sure.

Natalie's eyes dimmed when Shane hesitated to answer her question, and a mirthless smile tugged on the corners of her mouth.

It seems like he trusts his childhood sweetheart more than his own wife.

"Since Ms. Smith said she didn't push me, then she didn't. I'm fine with that." Jacqueline waved a hand and plastered a bitter smile on her face. "After all, I was the one who said something I shouldn't have. I brought up Ms. Smith's mother, that's why she got so angry and... Anyway, it's all my fault. Don't blame her, Shane."

She tugged on Shane's sleeve.

Recalling the promise he made to Natalie the other time, Shane shifted his arm away. "What did you say earlier?"

"I only said-"

"Enough! You don't deserve to talk about my mom!" Natalie cut Jacqueline off with a sneer. Then, she turned her frosty gaze to Shane and Jackson. Drawing in a breath, she suggested in a monotonous voice, "Since you both think I pushed her, save your breath on asking pointless questions and just pull up the security footage."

Shane pursed his lips at her impassiveness. "I didn't say I don't believe you."

Discontent flickered in Jacqueline's eyes and her expression stiffened imperceptibly.

What? Does that mean he thinks I fell down on my own?

"But you didn't shoot down her claim either." Natalie pointed at Jacqueline.

Shane mouth twitched slightly, unable to refute her.

Indeed, he never said he didn't believe her, but neither did he think Jacqueline was lying.

However, one of them obviously was.

With that thought in mind, Shane transferred his gaze to Jacqueline, a hint of doubt entering his eyes.

Jacqueline's chest tightened upon noticing this, but her panic did not show on her face. With a pitiful look on her face, she shook her head. "Shane, I..."

"That's enough, Jacqueline." Before Jacqueline could finish her sentence, she was interrupted by Jackson.

He looked at her with a conflicted gaze and said, "We'll take care of this matter. You don't need to say anything else."

Jacqueline's heart skipped a beat when she detected the disappointment in Jackson's

voice.

What does he mean by that?

Does he know something?

Noticing the subtle changes in Jacqueline's eyes, a wry smile formed on Jackson's lips as he figured out what she was thinking.

In the beginning, he was convinced that Natalie was the one who pushed her.

However, when he discerned the unusual changes in Jacqueline's eyes just now and connected it to Natalie's honest nature, he instantly concluded that the latter was innocent, and all of this was, in fact, a show Jacqueline was putting on for them.

At the thought of this, Jackson took a deep breath to gather himself. His baby face returned to normal within barely a second and he chuckled heartily. "Since Jacqueline said you had nothing to do with her falling down, I don't think checking the security footage is necessary. Besides, there aren't any security cameras installed in this ward."

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Shane remained silent.

It was exactly because there weren't any security cameras here that he couldn't identify which of them was lying.

Otherwise, the first thing he would do was retrieve the security footage.

"So are you saying we should just forget about this matter altogether, Dr. Baker?" Natalie narrowed her eyes at Jackson, as though able to see through the depths of his soul.

Jackson looked away guiltily, unable to bring himself to meet her gaze at all. With a forced smile, he answered, "Yeah. Jacqueline merely fell down. It's nothing serious. Let's not make it a big deal and just let it go. What do you think, Shane?"

Shane's eyes turned pensive, but he nodded in agreement in the end.

Since there's really no evidence, we might as well just let it go.

Seeing as Shane concurred to his suggestion, Jackson breathed an inaudible sigh of relief before discreetly casting Jacqueline a warning look.

This small detail did not go unnoticed by Natalie.

She scoffed with disdain as she studied Jackson.

He obviously knows that Jacqueline orchestrated everything that happened earlier.

But because he likes her, he chose to protect her and also tried to downplay this entire incident. Wow, I'm truly amazed.

Jackson felt ashamed when he heard Natalie scoff, but for Jacqueline's sake, he had no choice but to steel himself and go through with this.

"Natalie..."

"Leave!" Natalie pointed at the door. "I don't want to see any of you right now, so kindly leave."

"Ms. Smith, you-"

"Enough!" Jackson grabbed Jacqueline's arm, using force on her for the first time. With a stern expression, he asserted, "Ms. Smith wants us to leave, so enough talking. Let's go!"

With that, he dragged Jacqueline out of the ward.

When Shane stayed behind, Natalie uttered in an icy tone, "What are you still doing here?"

Shane's brows rose toward his hairline.

So she meant me too?

Shane pressed his lips together and retorted unhappily, "I'm your husband."

"So what?" Natalie stared at him indifferently.

You're a husband who doesn't trust his own wife.

Why should I bother entertaining him?

Shane frowned. "I'm different from them."

"What's so different about you? Just like them, you don't believe me and think that I really pushed Jacqueline!" Natalie yelled.

Shane massaged the space between his brows and replied wearily, "I already told you, I

don't think you pushed Jacqueline."

"But you don't doubt what she said either. Doesn't that automatically mean you think I pushed her?" Natalie said pointedly with a short laugh.

Shane sighed softly and lifted his hand to touch her, but she swiftly evaded him. "Don't touch me."

Shane's hand was left hanging midair. Several seconds later, he closed his hand into a fist and drew back. "Yes, I don't doubt what Jacqueline said either. We grew up together, so I know what kind of person she is--"

"People change!" Natalie cut him off mercilessly. "Everyone grows up and learns how to pretend. The current Jacqueline may not be the same Jacqueline you knew back then, but you just haven't realized that yet."

Shane's expression turned grave. "So you're saying, Jacqueline was pretending earlier?"

"That's right." Subsequently, Natalie recounted everything that happened before the two men showed up.

By the time she was done, there was already a deep frown on Shane's face.

A trace of warmth finally returned to Natalie's face when she saw Shane taking her words into account. She inhaled deeply before continuing, "She did it because she wants you to misunderstand me and think that I pushed her. It's all to drive a wedge between us and sabotage our relationship."

Shane clenched his fists tightly, only loosening them after quite some time to reply in a deep voice, "I understand. Since I already said I won't pursue this matter, let's just leave it at that."

Natalie pursed her lips, feeling aggrieved. "So I should just swallow down this injustice?"

Shane tugged her into his arms. "I'm sorry. This is the first and also the last time."

Natalie pushed him away. "Fine. You can leave now. I need to be alone."

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"Alright." Shane knew his decision had upset her. Hence, he left to give her some space.

After closing the door behind him, he spotted Jackson outside, and his face instantly darkened.

"Shane..."

"You know Jacqueline was lying about what happened earlier, right?" fixing an emotionless stare at Jackson, Shane asked in a voice as cold as ice.

This was what Natalie had told him.

She said that Jackson already found out that Jacqueline was lying.

Jackson's expression froze momentarily, then he nodded and sighed in resignation. "Yes. Jacqueline framed Natalie. Natalie didn't push her."

So it's true.

Shane's hands balled into fists and the temperature around him seemed to plummet drastically.

Sensing the anger simmering in his friend, Jackson apologized sincerely, "I'm sorry, Shane. I never thought Jacqueline would do something like this either."

"Then why did you still cover for her?" Shane grabbed his collar and snarled.

Jackson parted his lips and answered calmly, "She's the woman I love. Wouldn't you do the same for Natalie too?"

His comeback rendered Shane speechless.

He slowly released his grip on Jackson and said through gritted teeth, "Make sure this doesn't happen again!"

"Understood." Jackson straightened his wrinkled collar.

Shane drew in a breath to suppress his anger before saying, "Tell Jacqueline that if she pulls something like this again, I won't be as forgiving."

"Why don't you tell her that yourself?" Jackson peered at him.

Shane spun around so that his back was facing Jackson. "No thanks. I don't feel like seeing her now."

Jackson could understand how he felt. After all, the girl he always thought to be kind and innocent turned out to be so manipulative. It would be impossible not to get mad.

"Alright. I'll relay your message to her," Jackson said with a nod.

With that, Jackson took his leave as he had a surgery later on.

Meanwhile, Shane stood by the door and lit a cigarette, smoking in silence.

The next day, Natalie headed to the police station with Shane.

As the suspects in this case, Harrison and Susan were still detained in the interrogation room.

Natalie and Shane were led there by the inspector, who stopped outside the door to announce, "They're inside."

"Thank you." Natalie nodded brusquely, then looked at the man beside her. "Wait for me outside. I'll go in by myself."

Shane nodded slightly in response.

Natalie pushed open the door to the interrogation room and went in.

The two people inside stood up at the same time upon seeing the door being opened.

"It's you?" Susan's expression instantly soured when she saw that it was Natalie.

Harrison also spoke from beside her. "Nat, you're here."

He wasn't all that surprised to see Natalie because he already guessed that she would come for her mother's sake.

Natalie walked toward the table and stopped opposite the two of them. Then, she coldly swept her gaze across them both.

Harrison instinctively avoided her eyes when he noticed the resentment and rage in them.

But Susan forced herself to meet Natalie's gaze and stammered, "W-What do you want? Why are you looking at us like that?"

"Are the two of you responsible for my mom's death?" Natalie's nails dug into her palms as she questioned in a flat voice.

Something flickered in Susan's eyes, but vanished as soon as it came. Then, she curled her lips into a sneer and spat, "Your mom fell down on her own. What does it have to do with us? Stop talking nonsense."

Natalie shifted her gaze to the father.

Harrison's grip on his walking cane tightened, and he finally nodded. "Susan is right. Your mom really fell down on her own."

"I don't buy that! Not for one second!" Natalie slammed both palms on the interrogation table. "Everyone knows that the two of you were on bad terms with my mom. Could it really be a coincidence that she fell down in your house? I'm willing to bet my life that there's more to this than what you're both saying!"

"Sure, go ahead. Think whatever you want." Susan folded her arms over her chest and scoffed. "Even though you refuse to believe it, the truth is right in front of you. Your mom's death has nothing to do with us. It was her own rotten luck. If only she'd paid attention to where she was going, she wouldn't have slipped!"

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"It's true, Nat. Your mom came to see me yesterday to talk about Jared. We got into an argument, and then your mom stormed away. She was walking too fast. That's why she slipped. I called for an ambulance the moment I found out your mom had fallen down, but I never expected..."

Harrison's voice trailed off, and he lowered his head, as though overwrought with grief.

Natalie's entire body was trembling. "Enough with your phony attitude. My mom doesn't need any of that! You're beneath her!"

"Nat..."

"Just stop," Natalie cut him off. Taking a deep breath, she blinked back her tears before continuing, "Since both of you refuse to tell the truth, fine. I'll get to the bottom of it myself. If I find out the two of you have something to do with my mom's death, I'll make sure you rot

in prison for the rest of your lives!"

Having said that, she pierced Susan and Harrison with one last icy glare before walking out of the room because she knew that getting the truth out of them was impossible.

Upon seeing Natalie coming out, Shane pushed off the wall he was leaning against just moments ago and asked, "How did it go?"

Natalie shook her head. "They're staying tight-lipped. I couldn't get anything out of them."

Shane stared at the door to the interrogation room and replied solemnly, "I'm not surprised.

If they're really the culprits, it's completely normal that they're refusing to cooperate to escape legal consequences."

Natalie lowered her gaze to conceal her emotions.

After a moment of silence, she raised her head and walked toward the police station lobby.

Shane wordlessly trailed after her.

At the lobby, Natalie found the inspector running point on this case. "Inspector, may I take a look at the file for this case?"

The file consisted of detailed investigation reports, so she wanted to see if she could find any clues from there.

The inspector was caught in a bind because police were not allowed to let common citizens view their case files.

Noticing this, Shane whipped out his phone and dialed a number.

The call was quickly connected, and Shane greeted the person on the other line in a respectful tone, "Mr. Gunn."

Mr. Gunn?

Natalie tilted her head at him curiously, silently asking who Mr. Gunn was.

Shane signaled with his eyes that he would tell her in a bit. Then, he told Mr. Gunn the reason he was calling was to request permission to view a case file.

"Ah, I see. Sure, sure. I'll get someone to contact the police station right away," Mr. Gunn immediately agreed with a smile in his voice.

"Thank you." Shane nodded gratefully.

Mr. Gunn touched his greying beard and chided, "There's no need for that. Just make sure to bring Jacqueline to visit me some time."

"I will," Shane replied courteously.

Thereafter, they ended the call.

After keeping his phone, Shane answered Natalie's silent question from earlier. "Mr. Gunn is an official in J City. One word from him and you'll be permitted to look at the case file."

"I see." Natalie nodded in understanding. "Thank you, Shane."

"I'm your husband." Shane peered at her with a serious expression. "So there's no need to thank me."

"Okay." Natalie's heart warmed and she curved her lips into the first smile since the previous day.

Right then, the inspector came over with the case file. "I just got off the phone with my superior. He agreed to let the two of you look at the file, but you have to do it here."

"Sure." Natalie nodded and accepted the file from him. With that, she began flipping through it.

Shane sat beside her and looked through the reports together.

After they were done, Natalie shut the file with a snap and bit her lip in frustration. "How's this possible?"

The contents of the case file were more or less the same as what she heard at the morgue the day before.

In other words, the police would close this case with the conclusion that her mother's death was accidental, and she had indeed slipped on her own.

Perceiving the indignance lining Natalie's features, the inspector took off his cap and put it aside. "I can understand how you're feeling, Ms. Smith, but so far, nothing proves that Susan

and Harrison are involved in this case, so I suggest you be mentally prepared.”

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Natalie was well aware of what the inspector meant by that.

In the upcoming days, if they still did not come across any new leads or evidence that proved Harrison and Susan were the ones who murdered her mother, the case would be closed and the two of them released, free of any charges.

No. I can't let this happen!

Natalie balled her fists so hard her nails dug into her skin.

Shane frowned in disapproval upon noticing it. He reached out to pick up one of her hands, then forcefully pried her fingers loose.

Staring at the red nails marks on her palm, Shane let out a barely audible sigh and gently stroked the marks with his thumb. “Doesn't it hurt?”

“No. I just feel so frustrated. I can't seem to find out the truth behind my mom's death.” A tear escaped Natalie's eye and coincidentally fell on his thumb, scorching his skin slightly.

Shane released her hand to brush her tears away.

Right after he was done, Natalie launched herself into his embrace and said in a choked voice, “Shane, my mom's gone. She's gone...”

“I know.” Shane wrapped his arms around her and patted her back softly. “But you still have me and the two kids, and there's also Jared.”

“Jared?” As though recalling something, Natalie pushed away from him and used her sleeve to wipe her tears dry. “You're right. There's also Jared. I almost forgot to inform him.”

With that, she fished out her phone and called her brother.

Jared was sleeping at that moment as it was still nighttime abroad. Upon hearing his phone ring, he fumbled for his phone near the headboard and swiped to answer without even glancing at the caller ID. “Who is this?”

“Jared, it's me.” Natalie sat down with Shane's help, who then took the seat next to her and flipped through the case file again.

Hearing his sister's voice, Jared broke into a gentle and angelic smile. “Oh, Nat. Is everything alright?”

“Jared, I...” Natalie's lips quivered and words failed her.

“Nat?” Jared called out quizzically.

“Jared, Mom is...”

“What's wrong with Mom?” Jared could hear the sorrow in Natalie's voice and instantly became wide awake. Bolting upright into a sitting position, he urged in a frantic voice, “What is it, Nat? Tell me!”

Natalie's hand which was holding the phone trembled. “I will, but you must promise to stay calm, okay?”

Although Jared had undergone a heart bypass surgery previously, his heart would always be at risk. She was afraid that news of their mother's death would be too huge a blow to him.

“I know. Don't worry, Nat. I'll stay calm.” Jared drew in a long breath.

Natalie placed her hand on Shane's arm, trying to borrow some courage from him. Then, she sobbed out, “Mom is... gone!”

Boom!

Jared felt as though he had been struck by lightning. He was paralyzed to the spot, and it took him some time to find his voice. Finally, he rasped out, “What did you say?”

Natalie bit her lip hard and repeated, “Mom is gone!”

Thud!

The phone slipped from Jared's hand onto the bed.

Natalie sprang up from her seat when she heard the noise.

Seeing this, Shane's expression immediately turned grave. “What's wrong?”

Natalie did not respond. Instead, she gripped the phone tightly and yelled anxiously, “Jared? Jared, are you okay? Don't scare me like that! Jared!”

Jared vaguely heard Natalie's panic-stricken voice coming from his phone. Finally, he snapped back to his senses and picked up his phone from the bed. However, his hand trembled so badly it took him several attempts to grab ahold of his phone. Gingerly raising it to his ear, he spoke in a choked voice. "Nat... How did this happen? How can Mom be gone? She was clearly fine when we talked on the phone yesterday!"