

Happiness 368-377

The Promise of Happiness

Chapter 368

With an innocent expression, Lia knelt in front of Natalie without warning.

Meanwhile, passersby at the bar began looking at them and eyed Natalie with disdain.

Natalie cleared her throat awkwardly. "Get up now."

Biting her lips in guilt, Lia replied, "Lionel told me that you saved my life despite what I did to you. If it wasn't for you, the Grim Reaper would've taken me."

Her words stunned Yandel who was standing beside Natalie.

He hated Lia, as he only heard about how she framed Natalie. Thus, he didn't expect her to express her remorse to Natalie. At that moment, it dawned upon him why Natalie, who wasn't particularly merciful, had asked him to help.

Considering how drunk Lia was, Natalie pulled her back up from the ground.

"Yandel, go get a room and ask for a hangover remedy and hot towel," Natalie instructed.

"Yes, Boss."

With great efficiency, Yandel arranged for a VIP room where everything Natalie had requested was prepared.

After laying Lia down on the sofa, she handed her a bowl of the hangover remedy.

"You'll feel a lot better after drinking this," Natalie suggested indifferently.

Even though she didn't hate Lia, it was still too much to expect Natalie not to feel wary.

Receiving the bowl, Lia began to sip gradually.

"Ms. Nichols." Lia didn't dare look Natalie in the eye.

"What is this secret of yours that's so important?" Natalie asked.

"I... I..."

"Considering neither of us died in the end, I figure that your secret is still safe." Natalie ran her fingers across the sofa and casually remarked, "That woman won't let you off easily and is likely to blackmail you into hurting me again. Even if I died one day, do you think that would be the end? As long as she wants something and you are afraid of the secret being exposed, she will always have you by the throat; then, trapped you for as long as she lives."

Lia had obviously thought about it. However, due to the immense fear she felt, she had never delved into it properly.

As a result, Natalie's words jolted her into realizing that the banquet wasn't the end of it. In fact, it was just the beginning.

Subsequently, Lia fell silent.

Giving her some space, Natalie allowed Lia to struggle through her own thoughts.

It took some time before Lia finally divulged her secret with tears welling up in her eyes.

Not long after her mother gave birth to her, she suffered from ovarian cancer and had her ovaries removed.

It wouldn't have been a problem if they were an ordinary family. However, Lia's grandparents, who were gender-biased toward males, wouldn't accept the fact that her mother could no longer bear any children.

Given how close her parents were, her father refused to remarry. Therefore, they adopted Lionel from the orphanage and faked his birth certificate to show that he was a long-lost illegitimate child of his.

Now that the Johnson family had a son, the elders stopped pressuring Lia's parents to break up.

As time went by, Lionel took over as the head of the Johnson family despite having no blood relations with them.

In conclusion, that was the massive secret protected by the Johnson family.

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"On top of that, what else is there?". Natalie pressed on.

Taken aback, Lia stared at Natalie in disbelief.

Even Yandel reacted the same way. Isn't what she said shocking enough? Is there something that's even more explosive?

"Considering that you are the true daughter of the Johnson family, you would stand to benefit greatly if Lionel is exposed as an orphan." Natalie continued, "Consequently, he should be the one that should feel threatened, not you. In fact, if his secret is revealed, the elders of the Johnson family would rally behind you to seize control of the family. So, isn't that good for you?"

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That was the crux of the matter.

Initially, Lia had no intention to divulge that secret, but given Natalie's keen observation, she knew that it was something she couldn't avoid.

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“Yup.” Lia sighed. “I like Lionel... I really don’t care whether or not I will lose my foothold in the Johnson family, but I don’t want Lionel to get affected. He works extremely hard and is a proud man. I can’t let anyone destroy him...”

After Lia finished speaking, Yandel took out a cigarette from his pocket and lit it.

He put the cigarette between his lips and drew a deep breath.

Even if they were not blood-related, as long as a man and a woman were accused of incest, there would be nothing they could do even if they loved each other deeply.

Natalie took a glance at Yandel and was aware that Lia’s situation reminded him of Amelia and himself.

He had raised Amelia himself and treated her better than anyone else. However, they were also accused of incest and were condemned by the rest of the world.

Lia felt like a burden was lifted off her shoulders after saying that

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“I... I’m not afraid that she’ll hurt me. I’m just scared that she’ll hurt Lionel.” Lia sobbed. “Actually, when I first regained consciousness, Lionel had told me that you were the one who saved my life. I wasn’t grateful to you then as I didn’t understand why you did that. I thought I was better off dead... However, I realized that if I had died and Yara threatens Lionel, I wouldn’t be able to help him. As such, I decided that it was better for me to be alive so that she can just threaten me and leave Lionel alone. I’m so sorry... I have been living in regret every day... I’ve been thinking a lot but I’m still unable to come up with a solution...”

Suddenly, Natalie could feel her heart aching for the young lady in front of her and held Lia’s hands tightly.

“There’s nothing wrong with liking someone,” Natalie said softly. “If anyone has to be blamed, it would be Yara.”

“Am I going to continue living like this for the rest of my life?”

“Nope, you won’t,” Natalie replied, her eyes gleaming brightly. “You were shouldering this heavy burden all by yourself previously. Naturally, you’ll be tired. Since you’re willing to trust me with your secret, we will carry this burden together from now on. I won’t give her another chance to hurt you... Just promise me that you won’t make any hasty decisions. I’ll tell you what to do instead. You just have to follow my instructions.”

In fact, Lia was not exactly sure of Natalie’s background.

However, she could feel a surge of warmth in her heart just by looking at Natalie’s clear bright eyes.

It turned out that confiding in someone wasn’t as difficult as she had previously thought!

“Yes, Ms. Nichols. I will!”

“I’m just a little older than you. You can call me Natalie when it’s just the two of us.”

“Sure, Natalie.”

Lia flashed a rare smile. It was a beautiful and gentle smile that extended to her eyes.

A short while later, Lionel arrived at the bar to pick Lia up.

He caught a whiff of alcohol from her and chided with worry, “You shouldn’t be drinking right after you got discharged!”

“Lionel, I’m sorry..” Lia stood in front of Lionel and tugged at the hem of his shirt. “I... I won’t do it again,” she said sweetly.

“Are you already thinking of an ‘again’? I’ll teach you a lesson when we get back,” Lionel said to Lia in a stern manner before turning to Natalie. “Ms. Nichols, I’m really sorry that Lia has bothered you again tonight.”

“It’s no trouble at all,” Natalie replied with a smile.

After that, Lionel helped Lia out of the bar.

Yandel looked at the pair as they walked away and said, “Boss, have you already noticed that something didn’t seem right?”

“Yup.” Natalie did not deny that. “I only got to hear about the Johnson family’s secret in its entirety today. However, during the banquet that night, I’ve already noticed that Lionel and Lia care a lot about each other. After all, it’s very difficult to hide your feelings for someone...”

“So what if they like each other?”

“Yandel, shall we make a bet?”

“What do you want to bet on, Boss?”

“If Lia and Lionel end up together, I hope that you will also give it a shot with Amelia,” Natalie said.

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Lionel wasn’t the only one who went to the bar to get someone.

Shortly after Natalie and Yandel returned to the private room where Yana, Hans and the rest were at, Samuel arrived.

The moment Samuel entered the room, all eyes fell on him.

“I’m here to pick Nat up.”

Natalie turned around when she heard that.

The man was dressed in a black coat.

Even though the design and cutting of the coat were simple, it perfectly accentuated Samuel's well-sculpted features, enhancing his elegance and charisma. It was almost unbelievable that such a good-looking man existed.

Although no one spoke, everyone was well-aware of the relationship between him and Natalie.

Err... Did he just call her Nat?

No one would have believed that the head of the Bowers family had such a tender side to him, if they had not heard it with their own ears.

Indeed, everyone had an Achilles' heel. It was obvious to everyone present that not only was Natalie Samuel's Achilles' heel, Samuel was also head over heels in love with her.

Natalie was already used to the man addressing her that way, but it was the first time he had called her that in public.

A blush of embarrassment spread across her cheeks as she stood up and bade farewell to Hans and his wife, Yandel and Ross.

"I'll take my leave first then."

Everyone smiled as they said goodbye to Natalie.

Once the woman walked out of the private room, she asked, "Why did you suddenly decide to come and pick me up?"

"Just because I miss you," Samuel replied, fixing his deep-set gaze on Natalie. "Actually, I'm constantly missing you. It's just that I have to work and can't keep you by my side all the time. I did think of recruiting you into the company so that I can see you whenever I want to but after second thought, I decided to drop the idea."

"Why?" Natalie asked. "Were you worried that I would reject you?"

"Nope." Samuel smiled gently and continued, "I'm worried that I'll be too distracted at work."

"I'm glad you realized that."

Natalie followed Samuel to his Hummer and got into the car.

Right after she fastened her seat belt, the man leaned over and pulled her into his arms.

"Samuel, you..."

"How much did you drink?" Samuel questioned, narrowing his eyes.

"Samuel, I didn't drink much today," Natalie touched her heart and replied sincerely. "I'm telling the truth!"

"I'll know after I check."

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Check? How's he going to check? Did he really spend money on a breathalyzer just to make sure I don't get drunk?

While Natalie was still deep in thought, Samuel pressed his lips against hers domineeringly.

"Mmph.."

Natalie's lips parted slightly and the man took the chance to force his tongue into her mouth, exploring every inch of it.

As the action was too intense for Natalie, she moved backward instinctively. However, since she was sitting in the passenger seat with her seat belt fastened, she was stuck with nowhere to go. As such, she could only succumb to Samuel's advances.

The woman had once thought that Samuel was a cold and restrained man.

However, after getting to know him better, she realized that it was just a facade that he had put on.

Underneath that aloof and elegant surface, he was simply an insatiable wild beast who was always yearning for her body.

Samuel gradually made his way downward with his lips. After unbuttoning Natalie's blouse, his kiss reached her...

The man was behaving like a dehydrated traveler who had suddenly discovered an oasis in a desert, sucking on her thirstily.

Natalie's body tensed up instantly and she tugged at Samuel's hair. At that moment, she was unable to decide if she should pull him closer or push him away.

In the end, they did not go all the way.

Samuel suddenly stopped his movements and covered the woman's body with his coat.

As he had ripped off her blouse rather forcefully earlier on, Natalie's buttons had popped off to some corner of the car.

"Nat, just three more days... and it'll be my birthday.." Samuel whispered into her ears.

Natalie looked away shyly and did not reply.

Awoo! Does it mean that it's just three more days before... he eats me up

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Natalie had previously assumed that Samuel would be spending his thirtieth birthday together with her and the four little ones.

However, it was only when Samuel took her to the hot spring resort that she realized that he had left the four kids at the Bowers residence.

As such, right after they got out of the car, Natalie couldn't help but ask, "Samuel, is it really just the two of us today?"

"Franklin and Sophia are too clingy. If they were here, your attention would be focused on them," the man replied while holding her chin. "Today is my birthday. I want to have all of you today. Every second of your time is mine," Samuel said in his deep voice.

Natalie chuckled when she heard that.

"What are you laughing about?" Samuel asked, frowning.

"I'm laughing at how childish you sound," Natalie patted his hand and said, "You're already thirty years old. I can't believe you are jealous of four five-year-old kids."

Samuel released his grip on her chin and smiled affectionately.

"Whatever you say. Anyway, you won't be able to escape tonight," he replied.

Natalie's heart did a double somersault at the man's words.

She was at a loss and was biting her lips nervously, pretending that she did not know what he was talking about. Seeing that, the corners of Samuel's lips curled up into a smile. There's no use pretending. I'm definitely not gonna let you off.

He had desired her all this while but tried hard to control himself. Not wanting to scare her, he decided to take it slow.

Even though the memories had faded, his body could still clearly remember the ecstasy and satisfaction it felt from that fateful night six years ago.

The pair walked into the resort hand in hand.

As steam rose from the open-air hot spring, mist enveloped the entire area, creating scenery that looked just like paradise.

After Natalie changed into her bathrobe, she stood on the ground barefooted and felt especially comfortable and relaxed.

Just then, the phone rang.

Before Natalie could pick up the call, Samuel rejected it and switched off her phone.

"Samuel..."

"Didn't I say that every second of your time is mine today?" Samuel said, pulling the woman into his embrace. Gently biting on her earlobes, he continued, "Focus on me today. You're my birthday present."

Although the man was biting very softly, Natalie's earlobes were so sensitive that she could feel her body slowly going limp.

When Samuel reached into her bathrobe effortlessly, a blush crept up the woman's cheeks. She finally understood why he had chosen to spend his birthday at the hot spring resort. Since there were no buttons or zips on the bathrobe, it made the perfect attire for the man to do whatever he wanted.

The atmosphere was gradually charged with the couple's building desire for each other.

One moment later...

Frenzied footsteps were heard running toward them.

Both Natalie and Samuel snapped out of their passionate moment and quickly tidied up their appearances before they heard the loud voices of the little ones.

"Mommy!"

"Mommy!"

"Mommy!"

"Mommy!"

The children had yet to change into their own bathrobes and were already dashing toward Natalie excitedly.

Natalie's face was still flushed when she saw the little ones, and she could not help but feel nervous and slightly guilty.

"Mommy, your ears are so red. Are you cold?" Clayton asked curiously while wrapping his arms around his mother's leg.

"Umm... It's... Yup!" Natalie replied, brushing over the question. After all, she could not possibly tell the kids that it was because Samuel was nibbling on her ears.

"You should wear more clothes then," Xavian said.

"That's right! You shouldn't wear so little just to look good. You look great in anything anyway!" Franklin added.

As the three boys had already said everything Sophia wanted to say, she could only nod and agree while blinking her big eyes. "Yup! I agree with everything they say!"

Natalie was amused by how adorable her children were.

However, Samuel could not even fake a smile. His gaze darkened while he pursed his lips tightly.

The hot spring resort was almost two hundred miles away from the Bowers residence. Even if the little ones knew where their parents were, it was impossible for them to travel there independently. As such, Samuel was sure that someone must have brought them there.

"So tell me, who brought you guys here?" Samuel asked coldly.

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The four little ones exchanged glances with each other.

Knowing very well that Samuel would not be easily fooled, the kids had no choice but to reply in unison, "Uncle Steven brought us here... We threatened him to do that."

Samuel turned away and looked toward the corridor. "Where is he?" he asked in a spooky voice.

Franklin took a deep breath and replied, "Uncle Steven knew that you would definitely skin him alive, so he left immediately after dropping us off at the entrance of the hot spring resort."

"Let's see where he can run to then." Samuel's gaze darkened and a grim expression took over his handsome face.

It took the man a lot of effort to plan his special day, and he was looking forward to spending time with Natalie only.

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However, because of Steven, the couple's quality time together had become a family gathering instead.

Samuel could not help but feel extremely disappointed that his plans were ruined, and a deep crease appeared between his brows.

Shortly after, the resort owner took the four little ones away to change into children's bathrobes.

Natalie shot a glance at Samuel, who was pulling a long face and couldn't help but laugh. "You're so childish!"

"I'm only childish when it comes to matters relating to you anyway," Samuel replied in a low voice. "Laugh all you like. This is who I am."

Natalie froze for a second when she heard that before her smile grew broader.

Seems like men can also be really childish! But he's really cute when he acts this way.

Natalie stood on her tiptoes and pinched both sides of Samuel's cheeks. "I know you're upset but try to control yourself and not scare the kids. They always go to bed before 10 p.m. After that, you still have time to unwrap your present."

That was a code phrase between the couple.

Instantly, Samuel understood what the woman meant and held her hands tightly.

"Nat, you're the one who said that I can 'unwrap my present' later. You can't take that back now."

"Yes, yes," Natalie replied very softly.

When the children returned after changing, they were relieved seeing that Samuel's expression was back to normal.

Jolene was the owner of the hot spring resort. Even though she was already over forty, she did not look like it as she maintained her looks very well. She usually did not receive guests personally but only did so for Samuel.

After bringing a few exquisite dishes into the family's private room, she left.

Among the dishes was a six-inch heart-shaped cake that Samuel had specially instructed the resort to prepare.

The four little ones took their forks and dug into the cake at once, making lots of holes in the pretty cake.

When Franklin noticed that his father had not taken a single bite of it, he took some cake with his fork and put it next to the man's mouth.

"Daddy, you're the birthday boy today. You need to eat some cake..." Franklin said seriously with his mouth stuffed with cake. "Anyway, since you are so rich, you should order a bigger cake next time. This one is too small for all of us to share. If you don't have enough money, I can lend you some from my savings."

"I'm not hungry," Samuel replied with an obstinate expression.

"If that's the case, I'll have your share then."

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Franklin put the fork into his own mouth, finishing the cake.

Samuel was speechless while Natalie was laughing so hard that she had tears in her eyes.

Samuel was wearing a black bathrobe and had his fringe down, covering his eyes. His skin was so smooth that there were hardly any open pores. At that moment, he did not look like a high and mighty CEO but more like an awkward kid who did not get to eat his f

In fact, he blended in very well with the four five-year-old little ones.

Just as Natalie was still happily giggling away, Samuel cast her a warning stare.

Catching his gaze, the woman covered her mouth with her hand to suppress her laughter, but she just couldn't get rid of the smile on her face.

After the kids had their fill of food and drinks, they took out their birthday present for Samuel from their bag.

It was a piece of drawing.

Franklin unveiled the drawing and said, "Daddy, Sophia, Xavian, Clayton and I drew this together. It's the four of us, you and Mommy."

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The man on the left corner of the drawing was most likely Samuel. Next to him were the four little ones- Franklin, Sophia, Xavian, and Clayton, and lastly, on the right, Natalie.

Even though the pencil strokes of those five-year-old children were still blunt and messy, they had put in thoughts and emotions to draw the picture out. It was no wonder why Natalie and Samuel felt warm inside when they saw the drawing.

The term “home” used to be something that was so out of reach for Samuel and Natalie.

Little did they expect what seemed impossible to achieve had now appeared not only on the drawing but even more so before their eyes.

“Happy birthday, Daddy.” Franklin scratched the back of his head and grinned broadly.

“Daddy, happy birthday!” Sophie blinked her sparkling eyes as she sent her well-wishes too.

Before this, Xavian and Clayton had always greeted Samuel as “Mr. Bowers.” But ever since the other time when Samuel had suavely appeared at the office of the Head of Kindergarten and called himself the father of the two boys, they had secretly acknowledged him as their “Daddy” deep in their hearts from then on.

After moments of hesitation, Xavian and Clayton also blurted out one after another, “Daddy, happy birthday.”

Slightly stunned by the scene before him, Samuel broke into a smile. “Franklin, Sophia, Xavian, and Clayton, thank you for the birthday present. I love it so much.”

The four little ones exchanged glances and grinned at each other in satisfaction.

Watching the heartwarming scene before her eyes while resting her right cheek on her hand, Natalie felt warmth in her heart.

She had been urging herself to become stronger in recent years because only that way could she protect the people and things she loved. But deep in her heart, she knew very well all she yearned for was nothing but warmth and simplicity.

Staying beside Samuel, she seemed to have understood the true meaning of security.

After digesting the food they had consumed, Samuel and Natalie went on a hot spring date with their four children.

To be able to get soaked in a hot spring surrounded by warm mist in the freezing winter weather was indeed a pure enjoyment for Natalie from head to toe,

At the same time, Jolene quickly made a call to Yara in another room.

“Ms. Yara, it’s me. Jolene.”

After accompanying Kenneth to the hospital, Yara was on her way to the underground parking lot to retrieve her car. “Ms. Jolene, is anything the matter?”

“Ms. Yara, I have something to say, but I’m not sure if I should bring it up.”

Yara stopped in her tracks upon hearing that and frowned slightly. “I don’t see a need for you to sound me out since you’ve made this call. Go ahead and tell me whatever you wanted to say.”

“Mr. Samuel previously made an appointment to visit the resort today. I thought he’ll be coming with you, but it turns out that...”

“You mean Samuel is at your resort?!” Yara gasped in shock.

“Not only him; he also brought along your children...” Jolene paused slightly before continuing, “Besides, there’s also a woman and her two kids.”

A woman and two kids?

It did not come across Yara’s mind that it would be Natalie since she did not know the latter had two children.

Could it be that Samuel has found someone else again?

“Ms. Jolene, could you please roughly describe the woman’s appearance?”

“That woman is average-looking. She has some freckles on her face. To be honest, her looks are nowhere comparable to yours.”

As soon as Yara heard those descriptions, the identity of the unknown woman became clear to her.

“It’s that woman again?” she unknowingly blurted out of her mouth.

It’s Samuel’s 30th birthday today. He’d rather bring Franklin and Sophia to celebrate his birthday with another woman and not even invite me to join. How can he be so heartless?

Yara felt an immense surge of jealousy and heartache, as though innumerable venomous bugs were gnawing on her heart.

It’s been five years! Are those precious years that I’ve sacrificed for Samuel no match for a woman who has been by his side for only a few months? So much so that I’m unworthy of spending his birthday with him?

“Ms. Jolene, I don’t wish to see Franklin and Sophia call another woman as their mother. I need you to help me with this...”

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Previously, Kenneth had visited the hot spring resort for a short getaway, where Yara also followed along

At that time, Jolene was crestfallen after finding out that her husband was cheating on her. She was constantly distracted from work, and as a result, she messed up the arrangements for Kenneth regarding his stay and meals at the resort.

Because of that, Kenneth had wanted to fire her and get a replacement boss for the hot spring resort. Fortunately, Yara had interceded for her and made Kenneth change his mind on that idea.

Yet, Jolene did not know that was one of Yara’s means to win her over.

Other than the enemies she wanted to get rid of, she wanted to try her best to curry favor with anybody who had some ties with the Bowers family.

And now, it was the exact situation Yara wanted Jolene to repay her debt.

“Ms. Yara, 1”

“Ms. Jolene, you’ve been abandoned by your husband before too. I’m sure you know how I feel right now...” Yara’s tone sounded like she was on the verge of breaking down. “I bore my precious children for nine months, and yet, they’re taking another woman as their mother now!”

Jolene could not help but pity her.

“W-What can I do to help you then?”

“Ms. Jolene, do this... And I’ll take care of the rest..” Afraid that Jolene would be overly cautious at doing her task, Yara purposely mentioned Kenneth. “I’m Old Mr. Bowers’ savior and his chosen granddaughter-in-law. Do you still think that I won’t be able to protect you if anything happens?”

“All right, I got it.”

Upon concluding the call, Jolene immediately began to execute Yara’s order.

Meanwhile, the family of six had finished using the hot spring.

The children’s faces were as red as tomatoes, and their round black eyes were watery and sparkly, making them look much more adorable than their usual selves.

Clayton inched closer to Natalie and whispered into her ears, “Mommy, don’t tell me you have not removed that hyper-realistic mask in front of Daddy yet?”

“Not yet.” Natalie nodded in response.

“I can feel that Daddy treats you and us sincerely,” Xavian chimed in. “Why don’t you remove your mask in front of him tonight?”

Clayton and Xavian were immensely confident of their mother’s looks.

That hyper-realistic mask is super ugly! If Daddy sees Mommy’s real appearance, he’ll surely be mesmerized by it!

“I’ll think about it.” Natalie smiled. “I’ll remove it when I find the right time to do so.”

She did not remove it back then because she did not dare to do it. But as time passed, things became harder as she did not know how to divulge the truth. Now, she was used to living with that face in front of Samuel. Adding on to the fact that the man did not seem to mind, she eventually put the matter at the back of her mind

Seeing Natalie huddled in a corner chatting with Xavian and Clayton, Sophia grew slightly jealous.

“Mommy, what are you all talking about?”

Even though Franklin did not utter a word, he knitted his brows so tightly that anyone could tell he was extremely bothered by it.

As much as that felt like frustration, Natalie still felt an overdose of sweetness.

Aww! Previously Samuel got jealous of the kids for being close with me, but now, even the four kids are jealous of each other because of me!

Franklin and Sophia were not her biological children. Hence, logically speaking, Clayton and Xavian should still come first no matter how much she adored the former two.

But in actual fact, that was a far cry from the truth.

To her, all four children were of equal importance, and she would risk her life voluntarily for any of them if she needed to.

It took Natalie a long while to console the four little ones before a smile began to appear on their faces.

Even though it was Samuel's birthday, he still had to settle some decision-making matters for the company. Upon receiving Billy's call, he rushed back to the room in the resort to get back to work

As for Natalie, she took the four children for a stroll around the resort.

The hot spring resort was spacious inside out and had a whiff of natural wilderness, possibly due to its location in the outer suburbs.

Having been surrounded by Natalie and her brothers, the overjoyed Sophia hummed to the nursery rhymes she had learned in school.

The fast-paced tunes, coupled with Sophia's voice, sounded pleasant to the ears as they reverberated through the place. At the same time, Jolene was hiding amongst the foliage, peeping on the backs of Natalie and the four children. She also had a wooden basket in her hand.

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Upon finishing her song, Sophia cast her sparkly eyes at Natalie and asked, "Mommy, how's my singing?"

"You did a great job," Natalie complimented with a smile.

Sophia's three brothers, all of whom adored her a lot, looked at her with their puppy eyes as they requested for her to sing the songs again.

But perhaps because she had received so much love from her brothers, the meek little girl had learned to throw tantrums too. "I don't want to. I'm thirsty after singing for so long..."

Natalie's lips curled into a smile as she gently caressed Sophia's head.

It's great that this girl has a little temper. Otherwise, her brothers would have to be constantly worried about her if she's soft-tempered and a pushover.

As Natalie was too focused on the children and coupled with the fact that Samuel had arranged to visit this resort, she instinctively lowered her alertness. Therefore, she did not notice that someone was following them behind the bushes and was slowly opening the wooden basket.

Watching the sight of how joyful Natalie and the four children were, Jolene could not help but think of Yara's words.

Ms. Yara has painstakingly bore them for nine months, yet they're not close to her? What's worst is that they even acknowledge a woman who has nothing to do with them as their mother?

Thinking about that reminded her of her failed marriage, and perhaps that made her relate to Yara's situation even better.

Anyone who breaks a family apart is evil.

Jolene initially had some reservations about releasing the venomous snake. Nonetheless, she no longer found it so difficult to execute the plan after she recalled the pain she went through.

As the wooden basket got unlocked, a snake as thick as the size of a baby's arm slithered out.

It was common to spot snakes around the resort due to its location.

Of course, that venomous snake was not something Jolene had found within a short period.

Because it was winter, many bugs and reptiles would gather near the resort to keep warm. A while ago, when she was chasing them away, she happened to see that snake and thus kept it in the wooden basket as she had thought of soaking it in wine later.

She would never have thought that it would be of use now!

Sticking its bright red-colored forked tongue out, the snake glided through the dried leaves and branches on the ground, creating a dull ruffling sound.

As the four children were still young, they naturally could not recognize that sound.

On the other hand, Natalie seemed to have heard the strange noise, and it seemed like it was getting closer and closer toward them.

When Natalie turned around, she found a menacing, venomous snake sliding in the direction of Sophia, who was the shortest in height.

That snake was different from Franklin's pet snake.

Moony was a mild-mannered and nonvenomous snake.

That wild snake had colorful patterns of its body and a pair of long and sharp venomous fangs. The consequences would be disastrous if it were to bite a child.

Without any hesitation, Natalie stood before Sophia and grabbed onto that venomous snake, which was preparing to prance forward for an attack, with her bare hands.

Its poisonous fangs bit onto Natalie's hand deeply. At once, its venom spread into the body through the wound.

In no time, Natalie felt her hand turn numb. She slammed the snake against the tree till it went unconscious before she let go of her grip.

Among the kids, Sophia was the first to come around since she was the only one who saw the entire process of how Natalie had blocked her from the danger. Shocked, tears began rolling down her cheeks uncontrollably.

“Mommy, are you alright?” The little girl was panicking. “Is there anyone who can save my mommy? Please hurry here to save my mommy! Her hand was bitten by a poisonous snake!”

Upon hearing Sophia’s screams, Franklin, Clayton, and Xavian eventually came to their senses.

“Mommy, do you think you can perform acupuncture on yourself?” Xavian asked.

“Not really...” Natalie’s lip, by then, had turned slightly purple. “I’m unable to exert any strength on my hand right now. Besides, I have to use the crystal needle on the right acupoint; otherwise, there won’t be any effect.”

Franklin frowned. “I’ll go find Daddy. I’m sure he’ll have a solution!”

As soon as his words rang out, the boy ran off to look for Samuel while Sophia stayed by Natalie’s side to keep her company.

At the same time, Xavian was already on his phone searching for hospitals or veterinary clinics around the vicinity.

As for Clayton, he used a bifurcated wooden stick to hold the snake in place so that they could

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Jolene covered her mouth tightly with her hands as she could not believe her eyes.

She was the culprit who released the venomous snake.

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It was no doubt she saw the snake sliding toward Sophia. If that woman didn’t catch that snake in time, it would have attacked Ms. Sophia. Even at such a critical moment, that woman could catch the snake with her bare hands. Her decisiveness seems something innate to her. Isn’t she the homewrecker who ruined Mr. Bowers And Ms. Yara’s relationship? But she didn’t hesitate a wee bit when she protected Ms. Sophia just now. It seems like she wasn’t even afraid of the drastic consequences that might happen to herself. But Ms. Yara is Ms. Sophia and Mr. Franklin’s biological mother. The one who could do that without hesitation should’ve been Ms. Yara instead of that woman!

Whatever had just happened was the exact opposite of Jolene’s prediction.

Knowing that she must not stay there any longer, Jolene scuffled away with the wooden basket in her hand.

Concurrently, the wound on Natalie’s hand had begun to turn dark purple.

Seeing that the wound was seeping black-colored blood, beads of tears rolled down Sophia’s face rapidly. “Mommy, it’s all my fault. You’re hurt while trying to save me!”

Like any other five-year-old, Sophia was mature enough to understand the meaning of death.

Even so, she did not dare to mention anything about death as she was afraid she would jinx the situation.

“What s-should I do to m-make you feel b-better?” Sophia choked on her words as she was bawling her eyes out.

Even though Natalie felt so cold that her whole body was shaking, she still tried to bring her trembling hand to pat Sophia’s cheek upon hearing her cries.

“It’s just snake’s venom.” Natalie pulled a weak smile on her face. “Don’t worry. N-Nothing will happen to me...”

A brief moment later, Franklin finally returned with Samuel.

Before his eyes was his woman leaning against the tree trunk, her lips drained of color, and dark colored blood seeping out from a wound at the back of her hand.

Just a moment ago, she looks fine and healthy. How did things become like this in such a short time?

“Daddy, Mommy tried to protect me...” Within a short time, Sophia’s eyes were bulging from the intense crying, “She got bitten by the snake as a result.”

Samuel went up to Natalie and lifted her hand, ready to suck out the poisonous blood from her wound.

But before Samuel’s lips touched her hand, Natalie shook her head vigorously. “Don’t do that.”

“Natalie Nichols.” Samuel frowned, his emotions visibly apparent on his face.

It was the first time Samuel called her so formally after they had acknowledged their feelings for each other. As much as she was dead serious at rejecting Samuel for going ahead with his action, the man was firm about his stand too.

“That won’t do you any good.” Tears began welling up around the rims of Natalie’s eyes. “Y-You... you don’t have to do that for me...”

“As long as it’ll save you, I will do it without hesitation.”

As soon as he said that, Natalie felt Samuel’s grip on her hand tighten.

At the very next second, his warm lips plopped right on her wound, and he began sucking with all his might.

Samuel tried his best to suck the black-colored blood into his mouth before spitting it on the ground.

Of course, Natalie did try to break free from his grip.

But because she was made even weaker due to the snake’s venom, she could not muster any strength.

Thus, her struggle and resistance were not significant to Samuel at all.

“Y-You’re so dumb...”

Natalie felt a tightness in her chest but had nowhere to vent it.

Why is he sacrificing his life to remove the venom? Did he forget that he’s the head of the Bowers family and the father of Franklin and Sophia? So many people respect and look up to him and even hope to get a glimpse of him. Samuel Bowers... how could you risk your life for me?

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Samuel spewed black-colored blood on the ground.

With the black blood staining his lips and his dark eyes exuding tons of chilly aura, his appearance was exceedingly petrifying than Natalie’s.

Only at this point did Jolene finally show up.

She could not help but inhale in a deep breath when she saw the sight that greeted her.

She had witnessed it with her own eyes when Natalie was bitten by the snake. But what she did not expect was how Samuel would swallow his pride to suck out the poisonous blood for a nameless woman.

“I’ll go and get some warm water for you to rinse your mouth,” Jolene anxiously exclaimed.

“There’s no need for that,” Samuel uttered.

“But you—”

“Look for an expert who can remove snake venom immediately,” he grimly commanded. His deadly aura, accompanied by the residual blood left on his lips, made him look just like the god of the underworld

Jolene nodded and hurriedly walked away to make a call.

In truth, she had immediately contacted a hospital nearby the resort after the accident occurred. The doctor was informed to bring some antivenom over.

Of course, she still went ahead to make a call, but this time, to Yara.

Jolene would act on impulse and agree to do the dirty job because Yara had once done her a favor, and besides, she could put herself in the latter’s shoes since she could relate to her situation very well.

Mr. Bowers helped suck out the venom from that woman’s wound, but he didn’t get to rinse his mouth. What if he gets poisoned or ends up with a hidden illness? And if the Bower family finds out that it’s my doing, I’ll be totally screwed by then!

As soon as the call went through, Yara’s voice sounded from the other end of the phone. She seemed to be much more flustered than Jolene.

“Ms. Jolene,” Yara muttered “How is it? Who got bitten? Franklin or Sophia?”

“Ms. Yara, the one who got bitten is the woman who came with Mr. Bowers.”

After a while of silence, Yara asked, “Ms. Jolene, have you called the doctor?”

“Yes, I did. He’s on his way to the resort.” Jolene’s mind was in turmoil and poured all her emotions on Yara since she reckoned they were both on the same boat. “Ms. Yara... w-what should I do?”

“Try all means to stall the doctor..” Yara did not continue with the rest of the sentence. Nonetheless, her meaning was clear; she did not want Natalie to receive any medical care.

“Ms. Yara, that woman is not the only one poisoned. So is Mr. Bowers!”

“What do you mean? How?”

“He sucked out all that poisonous blood, so he’s likely been poisoned too. M-Ms. Yara, you have to help me...”

The news struck Yara like a bolt from the blue.

Someone like Samuel would risk his life for a lowly wretch? How much exactly does he love Natalie that he could make such a decision without thinking about the consequences?

“Ms. Yara... Ms. Yara...”

Jolene called her name a few times before Yara regained her senses.

“I’ll head over right now.” Yara pursed her lips tight before adding, “You mustn’t scare yourself now. I’ll help you no matter what happens. But if you backstab me, I’ll make sure you don’t get to see your children anymore!”

At this point, Jolene could somehow sense that Yara was not as innocent and harmless as how she appeared to be.

But since she had chosen to place her trust in the wrong person from the beginning, there was no other way out for her, and all that she could do was continue following Yara’s orders now.

Even after hanging up the call, Jolene did not feel any better.

She was overwhelmed with guilt and terror.

Moments later, a doctor in a white robe arrived at the hot spring resort.

When the middle-aged male doctor saw Natalie and Samuel’s ashen faces, he was slightly startled.

Didn’t the caller report that there’s only one person who’s bitten? Why are there two victims? Who am I supposed to save first?

Samuel averted his gaze to Natalie, who was lying on the bed. Then he said without a second thought, “Treat her first.”