

"Something like that. When I realized what he had done, it was too late already. That's my old man for you, stubborn to his ideas to a fault and never minding how others might feel about them. I'll have a nice long talk with him after I go back."

I didn't know what I should say to him after that. As it turned out, the one who was pulling the strings behind things had been Zhao Gongming all along.

Drinking in the absurdity of the moment, I hung up the phone and returned to the car with Meng. They took me back to where I left my Porsche in front of the Devil's Eye.

Then I drove through the entire Tong City, but I couldn't find any hotels willing to let me check in for the night. Out of better ideas, I circled back to the hospital.

It was about midnight, and it was quiet all around in the hospital. The only sound that was there was the rhythmic beeps of various instruments, and the occasional footsteps of doctors and nurses making their rounds checking up on the patients and making sure that everything was alright.

I came to Lin Fang's father's ward. He was hospitalized in a ward with an observation windows, making it easier for the doctors and nurses to notice if anything should happen. Looking inside, I saw Lin Fang sitting beside her father's bed, asleep with her head resting on the bed sheets. She had her face turned towards the observation window, and I could see that she had a frown on her face. Even when she slept, she was still overcome with stress.

I reaffirmed my determination, to uproot the Chen's influence from the Tong City entirely, so that Lin Fang wouldn't have to worry about their harassments again, forever.

I opened the door slowly, quietly, and went inside. The air conditioning was cranked up on full blast, and I shivered as soon as I stepped inside. So that I won't disturb her or wake her, I kept my footstep light as I went in.

Taking a spare blanket from the shelves, I quietly walked to her side, and gently laid a blanket over her. As the blanket touched her, Lin Fang's shoulders twitched and she pulled herself further in as if to shy away from the coldness.

Looking at her in such stress even when she slept made my heart ache. I kneeled down beside her, and looked at her sleeping face. Being so close to her, I can smell a faint fragrant scent from her, touching me and hammering at my self control like nothing else. I looked at her, and thought just how unexpected life could be. She was so beautiful, so much that I used to look to her and worship her as my goddess. And now, she became my girlfriend...

Ting...

Suddenly, a sound played briefly on Lin Fang's phone, and its screen brightened up.

I had always made a point to respect others' privacy, but with the main lights turned off, the only lights that remained in the room was a dim night light at the head of

her father's bed, and her now brightly lit screen. It surprised me a little, and my eyes subconsciously drifted in its direction. Someone had sent her a message...

"Zhou: Soon."

Zhou? Who could that be? Chen Yuzhou?

What was he doing sending a message to Lin Fang? Didn't they broke up communications a while ago?

Suddenly, my throat felt dry, and my heart beat in panic. An urge raised within me, telling me to wake Lin Fang up and ask her what that was all about.

But then, it might not be Chen Yuzhou. I might be one of her other friends. Though I couldn't remember anyone else that name might be referring to out of all the other names that I could remember in highschool, which wasn't a lot, but "zhou" wasn't exactly a rare name either. It might be just a coincidence.

I reasoned with myself, telling myself that it wasn't something worth getting worked up for, but I couldn't convince my heart. I felt as if a tiny hook latched onto my heart, pulling it uncomfortably and hanging it high in the air.

I held my breath and focused my eyes onto her phone, and waited for another message to come. My guts within me felt that there must be another message coming.

But nothing came after that message. After a while, her phone screen switched to power saver mode and

dimmed back down slowly. In the dim light, I could feel the muscles on my face tighten and twitch nervously, as I stared unblinking at her phone screen.

If that really was Chen Yuzhou who sent the message, what should I do?

Liu Hu said before, that Chen Yuzhou and Lin Fang had always been on friendly terms. Chu Xiaoxiao also had said that Lin Fang and Chen Yuzhou used to be close together. But why was it that Lin Fang never told me any of these things, not even once?

And another oddity was that, if they had always been friendly towards each other, why had Chen Yuzhou went as far as to hire a professional foreign killer to stage that drug rape? Surely, even if they had broken up, lovers won't suddenly turn enemies overnight just like that right? At least, definitely not to the point of having hired a professional killer just for that.

But if Chen Yuzhou's grudge against Lin Fang was deep and intense enough to resort to that, why was it that I had been the only one he targeted for all this time, while he kept his hands off Lin Fang entirely? Judging from how it looked, he had left Lin Fang's life more or less completely undisturbed. What was he thinking? Where was he going with this? Was this his way of showing that he still had feelings for her?

I couldn't make heads and tails of any of this, and all sorts of possibilities bounced and whirled in my head.

The worst case scenario was that Lin Fang had been

deceiving me all along. As my mind explored that possibility, I felt my hands and feet grew cold. This would be the most painful outcome, but it was a possibility nonetheless. If this was the case, why would she deceive me? What could be in it for her?

In the darkness, the dim night light cast a soft yellow sheen onto her sleeping face, and it almost seemed as if it glowed in the darkness of the room. Suddenly, I was reminded of what happened before during school. Back then, Lin Fang would never even speak a word to me. She even lied and framed me for what I haven't done, and made Chen Yuzhou despise me to the point that he got Liu Hu and a group of other guys to blockade me inside the school toilet and beat the living daylight out of me. Because of that, I was injured, traumatized, hospitalized, and dropped out of school, my life was changed and everything I had was taken away from me.

This Lin Fang before me right now seemed like a completely different person than the Lin Fang I remember, but was she really? Could all of what happened be my wishful thinking? Could it be that she... had always been the same person that she was?

Then I shook my head hard, and kicked myself over in my mind. That was ridiculous. Here I was, a fully grown and mature adult, but a random and innocent little message on someone else's phone was enough to make me doubt and have second thoughts about the woman that I loved the most. This wasn't the type of man I want to be.

As I shook my head, another sound played and her phone screen brightened again. But now, my eyes had been

used to the darkness, and the sudden brightness pierced and blinded my eyes momentarily. I couldn't make what has been written out clearly, but it was another message.

Bang bang bang!

I was waiting for my eyes to adjust to the brightness again so I could read the message on her phone, when loud banging noises suddenly came from the door. The noise made Lin Fang open her eyes.

"Father, it's alright, it's just Xiaoxiao." Lin Fang comforted her father that had woken up in surprise at the sudden noise, and then turned her sleepy eyes to me. "Oh, you came. What happened? You don't look too well."

Stealing a glance at the phone in her hand, I held back what I was going to ask.

No, that couldn't have been Chen Yuzhou. He stooped as low as to threaten her with her father's life, who in their right mind would still be friends with someone like that?

If I were to break the question to her now, it'd only make her even more stressed, or angry, or make her think that I had so little faith in her.

"Nothing, just a little tired." I patted and smoothed her hair, and then stood up to open the door for Chu Xiaoxiao.

When I came in just then, I locked the door behind me so that people won't come in and disturb them, but in retrospect, that seemed to have backfired on me. If I

hadn't done that, Chu Xiaoxiao wouldn't have made all those noises. That girl really has the most excellent timing. If she came just a little later, I would have been able to read that message that just came in on Lin Fang's phone.

I had a feeling that the second message that came in just then would be a lot more informative, for better or worse. If I could just read that, I would be able to tell if it had come from Chen Yuzhou after all.

Feeling annoyed, I opened the door for her to let her in.

She came in, but as soon as she turned one of the lights on and we were able to see her more clearly. Both Lin Fang and I took a sharp breath in.

"What happened!? Who did this to you!?" Lin Fang almost called out.

On one side of Chu Xiaoxiao's face was a huge patch of dark purple, and the corner of her mouth cracked. One of her eyes was even swollen.

If these injuries were to happen to me, I'd just laugh and sleep it off like it was nothing to worry about. But on a refined girl like Chu Xiaoxiao, those injuries made her look as if she had been through hell.

Chu Xiaoxiao pursed her lips awkwardly, and didn't answer Lin Fang.

I pulled a chair and set her down on it, then went out and found a nurse on night patrol and asked her for an ice

pack and something to treat her wounds.

"Thanks." When I came back with the things, Chu Xiaoxiao took the ice pack and put it against her face. Slowly, her eyes reddened.

Looking at her, I didn't even need to ask. It must be Chu Huairen. I never thought that he was the type that would be so heavy handed even to his very own daughter.

"We heard that your father grounded you, how did you get out?"

Chu Xiaoxiao's eyes reddened even more, and I could have sworn that I saw hints of wetness at the corner of her eyes, "In the morning, my father came and dragged me home. Then, he told me to change my testimony. I didn't say yes, and then he... he struck me with his fist. Twice. Then at night, after I was sure that everyone else was asleep, I sneaked out. Zhang Chao, you need to think of something quick. Tomorrow morning, Chen Yuzhou will begin to act. I heard that they're going to file assault charges against you, and that apparently they said that they had all the evidence they needed already."



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