

“It’s not early anymore. Since you like staying here, you can continue staying here. I do not wish to fight with you. But, on the same note, I do not want to hear anything about my daughter from you again.” Courtney stood up from the sofa. While walking past Anna, she turned her head slightly and indifferently continued,

“If you don’t like the fiancé your mother arranged for you, you should bring your lover home and introduce him to her. If you don’t dare to do that, as your younger sister, I can ask around on your behalf. After all, Dad wishes you to have a good match too. You should not misunderstand the painstaking efforts of our parents.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Anna was panicking and freaking out—so much so that her words were slightly incomprehensible. Looking around at her surroundings, she noticed that the people around Shay were studying her. Hence, the look in her eyes became complicated. “Don’t listen to her. She’s talking nonsense; she’s trying to ruin my reputation! I’m the young lady of the Hunter Family! How could I possibly keep a boy toy?!”

Anna was a woman filled with pride and vanity. That was something Courtney understood very well. It was a surprise that Anna was keeping a boy toy. However, keeping a boy toy was one thing. The courage to mention her boy toy in front of others was another thing altogether.

It was human nature to like gossiping and hunting for interesting tidbits. With such juicy gossip in front of them, everybody’s attention was immediately drawn to it. They began discussing Anna’s private life, and the atmosphere within the room became rather awkward as a result. If Anna had not provoked Courtney first, she would not have been humiliated in public in this manner.

“You!” When Anna saw that nobody was listening to her explanation, she panicked. “Courtney, you shameless slut! How dare you sully my reputation?! I’m going to tear you apart!” As she said that, she grabbed Courtney by the shoulder and lifted her hand.

Courtney had not expected Anna to hit her in front of such a large crowd. Just as she thought of avoiding the attack, she saw the open palm swinging in her direction—it was too late to dodge. Right before that palm struck her, a figure blocked the light coming from the doorway and grabbed Anna’s hand. That person stopped the attack, then an unreserved roar rang out. “Anna Hunter! What do you think you’re doing?!”

Upon seeing the person who just arrived, Anna’s expression changed immediately. “Shay—”

“This is my place! How dare you try to bully Courtney here?! Do you want me to call the police on you?!” Shay’s expression was cold and distant as he rudely slapped her hand away.

“Shay, you’re misunderstanding me. She was the one who slandered me in front of so many people and sullied my reputation! I was so furious that I couldn’t stop myself. But, I originally came here to cheer for you! I even brought you flowers! They just arrived this morning by air. Look!” Anna tried to push the blame onto Courtney.

Courtney sneered but did not try to explain herself. Instead, she simply watched Anna acting out with a frigid gaze. Meanwhile, Shay didn't even bother to glance at the flowers as he icily said, "Courtney is not an unreasonable person. As for you, I don't believe I invited you here. Get out."

What Courtney said previously had already embarrassed Anna rather badly. Combined with Shay's actions of chasing Anna out in front of so many people, Anna felt utterly humiliated at this point. Pursing her lips, she scowled as her embarrassment turned into anger. "Shay, we grew up together. I've always regarded you as family. Ever since you returned to the country and made your debut, I've been sponsoring all your variety shows and dramas. I've always been supporting you unconditionally! How can you treat me in this manner?! Don't you dare forget that if not for the Hunter Family, you would have died in the underground boxing ring back then!"

As soon as Anna said those words, the very air in the room seemed to freeze over. Courtney felt her heart clench as she worriedly glanced at Shay. Shay normally looked bright and lively. However, he currently felt like a huge iceberg—his entire body was radiating with cold air. He took two steps toward Anna.

On the other hand, Anna was starting to panic under his glare. She staggered backward and used the wall to support herself as her knees buckled under her slightly.

Then, he stared at her directly and said, "Anna Hunter, this is my last warning to you. Do not interfere with my personal affairs. Courtney and I are similar; we don't need to rely on the charity of the Hunter Family to have a good life."

"Shay, that wasn't my intention! I—"

"Get lost." His expression was frigid, and his inherently unique youthful voice was stained with a bloodthirsty coldness. Although his voice was not loud, it seemed to carry across the room.

At that moment, Courtney shot a look at Shay's manager, who had long since turned into a statue. He finally came back to his senses and stepped in between Shay and Anna. Directing a polite smile at Anna, he said, "Miss Hunter, this way, please. The concert is about to start. If you bought a ticket, please head to your seat immediately."

Under these circumstances, it was impossible to forcefully stay there. Thus, Anna bit her lip and glared at Courtney in resentment before turning to leave.

Everybody went back to their positions as the crowd dispersed. Those in charge of styling went back to styling; those in charge of makeup went back to putting on the finishing touches of makeup. Working in this industry, they were used to seeing all sorts of disputes take place. Hence, they did not bring up the matter again—it was as if they had unanimously agreed upon it beforehand. More importantly, Courtney saw Shay's manager going around greeting everybody and handing them a small token of 'appreciation', which could also be regarded as hush money.

However, nobody noticed the man in the black baseball cap standing in the corridor next to the safety escape. He held a high-spec camera in his hands and recorded everything that had just taken place.

"You're going on stage in 10 minutes. Shay, get yourself into the game. We'll take our leave first." After receiving a signal, Shay's manager patted Shay on the shoulder to cheer him up before leaving with the

styling team in tow. Afterward, only Courtney was left inside the room to accompany Shay, and the noisy lounge instantly became completely silent.

“Are you still bothered by what happened in the past?” Courtney’s voice rang out in the silent room. The dressing room was not large, so every word carried across clearly. To Shay, it felt like a pair of warm and gentle hands tearing open his wounds and exposing the unbearable past that he was desperately trying to hide. Still, no matter how gentle it was, reopening closed wounds would always be painful.

His eyebrows twitched strongly. His vision went dark as the memories of various life and death situations in the boxing ring flashed before his eyes. Looking at the reflection of the gentle figure standing behind him, he finally gave a wry smile and whispered, “I wish I could say I’m not bothered by it.”

“It’s okay.” Courtney placed both hands on his shoulders and comfortingly continued, “Nobody can truly forget about their past. And, letting go is even more difficult. No matter what you experienced in the past, it’s a part of who you are now. There’s no way to completely separate it from yourself. Everything you experienced made you who you are today. Do you not like the person you are today?”

“I do.” His gaze gradually softened and became gentle. “I like everything as it is right now. If you hadn’t taken me away from the boxing ring back then, I would never have all this. So, everything I have was given by you. And, everything I have... is yours.”

“Did you forget what you said to me when I escaped with you?” She smiled. “I asked you what you wanted, and you said you wanted freedom. The freedom you want does not come with being trapped by my side for the rest of your life. That’s no different from putting you into another cage.”

Shay seemed stunned. It seemed like it had been a long time since he thought back about what he said back then. Thus, he was a little lost and a little disappointed. “Courtney, you know I—”

“The concert is about to begin. You have to go on stage soon.” Courtney interrupted him abruptly. At the same time, she took her hands off his shoulders. “In my opinion, freedom is your faith; nothing else and nobody else is.”