

Stealing Your Heart Chapter 281

“Ren Ai Hospital,” Shen Peichuan said.

Su Zhan had just exited the hospital, and he stopped abruptly to turn around and look at the name of the hospital. The front door of the hospital was adorned with neon lights that showed “Ren Ai Hospital” in big red letters. Wait, he’s in the same hospital as Grandma? He wondered.

His lips twitched. “Where exactly are you?”

“The operation theater.” Shen Peichuan said, a little confused. “What’s wrong?”

Su Zhan merely said, “I’m coming up,” then hung up.

He walked back into the hospital and followed the directory to the surgical wing. Shen Peichuan was sitting on the bench in the hallway with a couple of his bodyguards, and Su Zhan strode over to him. “What’s happening now?” He asked.

Shen Peichuan looked up at him and moved to give him some space on the bench. “Sit down first.”

Su Zhan plopped himself down on the bench.

“The doctor said that he would have died if the wound was any closer to his heart. He’s still in there, by the way,” Shen Peichuan said.

“He should have just died!” Su Zhan spat.

Shen Peichuan gave him a look. "If he had died, then Jinghao would become a murderer. Xinyan is the only one who is level-headed here."

"It's not like we can't make things right," Su Zhan said, contemplating the methods he could use to kill He Ruize.

Why did money always come before power?

That's because money makes everything attainable.

With money comes power naturally.

They could cover things up with the help of Zong Jinghao's uncle.

Shen Peichuan figured that Su Zhan was too furious to listen to him, so he stayed silent to let Su Zhan calm down. He had underestimated Su Zhan's anger.

The corridors of the surgical wing were very quiet at this hour, while the air was thick with tension.

"How long is it going to take?" Su Zhan asked, slightly annoyed.

Shen Peichuan stared at him for a moment before saying, "Why don't you go back first?"

Knowing Su Zhan, he would probably beat He Ruize to a pulp regardless of He Ruize's condition.

"I'm not going back," Su Zhan said, determined.

Shen Peichuan couldn't help but frown. Since when was this person so stubborn?

“Shen Peichuan, that jerk slapped my grandmother! How do you expect me to calm down?” Su Zhan asked with a glare.

He was vexed.

He Ruize was a real bastard for setting his hands on an elderly person.

“It’s scary when a psychologist becomes a psycho himself,” Shen Peichuan said.

At that moment, the light on the door of the surgery room turned off, and the door slid open. The doctor came out first, followed by He Ruize on a gurney.

The doctor removed his mask. “The surgery went well, but he has to rest and recuperate properly afterwards since this is a pretty serious injury. His lifespan might be shortened too...”

“He should have just died!” Su Zhan yelled, cutting off the doctor mid-sentence.

The doctor felt annoyed about getting rudely interrupted.

He frowned. “Why send him here if you don’t want him to live?”

The doctor was satisfied with the outcome of the surgery, so Su Zhan’s words were no doubt a wet blanket.

Looking at how awkward things were getting, Shen Peichuan stood up to save the day. He took out his ID and said, “I’m from B City, and we’re in the pursuit of this suspect who escaped here. I shot him when we were chasing him. He’s a human trafficker, and the crimes he committed didn’t sit well with my colleague here. I’m sorry if he’s being rude.”

The moment the doctor heard that he had just saved a human trafficker, his joy from saving the patient disappeared without a trace.

“He really should have just died,” he snarled.

Shen Peichuan managed to slap the title of ‘human trafficker’ onto He Ruize.

“Send him to the ward first,” Shen Peichuan said, waving his hand. His bodyguards immediately got to work.

Knowing Shen Peichuan’s identity, the doctors were very understanding and cooperative with him.

Su Zhan walked over to the doctor and placed his arm onto the doctor’s shoulder. “Is there anything we should take note of?”

“He should be fine as long as he doesn’t move too much,” the doctor said. He had lost all respect for He Ruize after finding out that he was a criminal.

“Doctor,” Su Zhan whispered. “If I slap him a couple of times, will he die?”

The doctor was taken aback by this, but he coughed lightly to hide it. “Um...as long as you don’t take out his tubes, a few cuts and scrapes shouldn’t be life-threatening.”

“Alright,” Su Zhan said, patting the doctor’s shoulder. “Thanks.”

Su Zhan turned around to go to the ward, and the doctor shivered as he watched Su Zhan disappear down the hallway. He could almost imagine what Su Zhan would do in the ward.

He walked away quickly before he got dragged into any drama.

Back in the ward, a nurse was monitoring He Ruize’s condition.

Su Zhan stood by the side and asked, “When will he wake up?”

“In about three hours,” the nurse said, finishing off her checklist. “The patient just had surgery, so try not to move him for now. If anything happens, just call the doctor.”

“Understood,” Su Zhan said before Shen Peichuan could.

The nurse gave him a look and turned around to leave with the checklist in her hand.

The door to the ward slid shut, and Su Zhan walked to the bed to glare at the person lying on it. His clenched his fists so hard his knuckles cracked.

Shen Peichuan had a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. “Don’t do anything rash,” he said, running over to pull Su Zhan away.

“I’m not going to act on impulse. Besides, the doctor already said that a few scratches won’t kill him,” Su Zhan said, attempting to push Shen Peichuan away. Shen Peichuan held on to his neck. “I’m angry too! I want to stab him right now, but can’t you see that he’s still unconscious. What’s the point of hitting him if he can’t even feel it?” Shen Peichuan said desperately.

Su Zhan blinked. “You can’t feel pain when you pass out?”

Shen Peichuan stared at him incredulously. “How are you going to feel pain when you’re out cold?”

“But I can’t just let him go like that,” Su Zhan said, his chest heaving.

“When he gets better, I’ll let you beat him up for all you want. In fact, I’ll get you a knife personally even if you want to stab him. How about that?” Shen Peichuan reassured him.

Su Zhan looked at Shen Peichuan and finally understood what he meant. He grinned and said, “You’re just scared that he’s going to die?”

Shen Peichuan didn't know what to say.

"He shouldn't die now, but things might change in the future," Shen Peichuan said patiently. "You see, He Ruize had already been charged with previous offenses, and this would only mean an additional charge of escaping from prison. When we get him back into jail, you can do whatever you want with him as long as I'm there."

Su Zhan was convinced by that.

"Look, getting slapped is a really humiliating experience, so why don't you wait for him to wake up before you insult him?" Shen Peichuan said.

Su Zhan looked at the unconscious He Ruize. Indeed, no matter how much he berated or assaulted He Ruize, he wouldn't know a thing. There was nothing to gain.

"Fine. I'll wait till he wakes up for your sake," Su Zhan said, admitting defeat. "Let go of me."

Shen Peichuan patted his shoulder. "I'll make sure you get revenge for Grandma."

He slapped his chest to show his sincerity.

Su Zhan bumped shoulders with Shen Peichuan. "I'm leaving."

"Okay."

After Su Zhan left, Shen Peichuan walked over to the bedside and glared at the unconscious person lying on it. If that guy had woken up, Shen Peichuan would have beaten him up anyway, even if Su Zhan wasn't there.

He gave Lin Xinyan a call to tell her that Su Zhan's grandmother was fine, and to tell her about He Ruize.

Back at the hotel.

Lin Xinyan had just given her two kids a bath and dressed them in their pajamas. Lin Ruixi began to jump on the bed, and Lin Xichen joined in out of the blue, probably due to the joy he felt from finally solving his Rubik's cube. Instead of calling his sister childish, he decided to have fun with her for once.

Lin Xinyan couldn't help but smile at the sight of her kids having fun.

Just as she was about to put her towel away, her phone rang.

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She walked over and noticed that the call was from Shen Peichuan, and her smile turned stiff. She tossed a glance at her son and said, "Don't jump around too much, you'll sweat. You won't feel fresh anymore."

"Alright," Lin Xichen said, panting.

Zong Jinghao began to act strange after coming back.

Lin Xinyan wasn't sure what happened to him. When she was bathing the kids, Guan Jing called him, presumably to talk about work matters. He sat down in front of his computer after the call and hadn't gotten up since.

She answered the call and immediately said, "Gimme a second."

"Alright," Shen Peichuan said.

Lin Xinyan put down her towel in the bathroom and glanced at the scene behind her. The two kids were still hopping around on the bed while Zong Jinghao was still absorbed in his work. His slender fingers rapped on the keyboard, and he was completely oblivious to her going out.

Lin Xinyan held on tight to her phone and exited the room before closing the door behind her.

The moment the door closed, Zong Jinghao's hands froze.

He glanced at the closed door as a thousand thoughts ran through his mind.

Lin Xinyan walked to the end of the corridor, looking down upon the underwhelming city skyline, peppered with neon lights. She didn't know what to expect from Shen Peichuan.

However, she still had to face it, be it sooner or later.

She lowered her gaze. "Tell me."

"Su Zhan's grandmother is fine. You don't have to worry as Su Zhan isn't an unreasonable person, so he won't blame you for anything. They saved He Ruize's life too, so you don't have to worry about him as well."

Lin Xinyan heaved a huge sigh of relief. Thank goodness both the old lady and He Ruize were fine.

Even if He Ruize was a criminal, they shouldn't take it upon themselves to dispose of him.

"I'm quite curious," Shen Peichuan suddenly said.

"Of what?" Lin Xinyan asked.

"Was Jinghao actually looking to kill him? I know how his shooting skills were back when we trained together, and he only quit because of his family matters. If Jinghao had wanted to kill He Ruize, he wouldn't have missed by two centimeters, but if he hadn't, he wouldn't have aimed so close to his heart."

Lin Xinyan couldn't give him an answer.

"If there's nothing else, I'll hang up then," Shen Peichuan said.

Lin Xinyan hummed lightly.

She grasped her phone tightly and stood before the window, pondering over Shen Peichuan's words. She knew what he meant to say. If Zong Jinghao had wanted He Ruize dead, he could have killed him in one shot.

What was he thinking?

She couldn't think of a reason and she had no clue.

She wanted to believe that she knew him well, yet she doubted it very often.

Suddenly, she heard footsteps coming from behind her, and she whirled around to see Zong Jinghao standing at the other end of the corridor. The suit he had been wearing was creased from sitting down for too long, but it only enhanced his manliness.

Lin Xinyan had a strange sense of heaviness in her heart.

"Who was that?" He asked calmly, as though he was talking to a stranger.

Lin Xinyan furrowed her eyebrows. "Shen Peichuan. He told me that Su Zhan's grandmother was fine, and so was He Ruize."

He hummed and turned around.

"Zong Jinghao."

Lin Xinyan called out to him, stopping him in his tracks.

He stopped, but he didn't turn around. He just waited for her to speak.

Lin Xinyan held her hands together tightly. "I heard from Shen Peichuan that you're really good with a gun and that you could have killed He Ruize in one shot. So why..."

“It was a mistake. I did want him to die,” he explained coolly.

He was indeed a genius at shooting, but when he saw He Ruize choking Lin Xinyan, he panicked and couldn't shoot straight.

Lin Xinyan watched as he walked closer to her. “Why aren't you happy? Did I do something wrong?”

Zong Jinghao's gaze was downcast with his long eyelashes concealing his emotions. “No,” he said after a long stretch of silence.

“Then why...”

“I'm just mad with myself.”

Before Lin Xinyan could say another word, he cut her off.

Lin Xinyan walked over and wrapped her arms around his waist, looking up at his face. “Why do you love torturing yourself so much?”

His eyelashes twitched and he gave a self-deprecating laugh. “I've never felt so defeated before.”

Lin Xinyan's heart ached. She could feel his disappointment.

Her arms tightened around her waist, her whole face buried in his chest. Zong Jinghao was making her anxious, yet she didn't know how to comfort him, and why he was acting like that.

“Did I make you feel that?” She asked, slightly panicked.

Zong Jinghao pursed his lips tightly.

He took He Ruize's words about Lin Xinyan getting back with him solely for the kids' sake very personally since he was sure that their reunion was due to other factors.

He had been avoiding those for ages.

When he heard someone else mentioning it, he couldn't help but feel unhappy about it.

He had never felt so beaten in his life.

Every time Lin Xinyan warmed up to him, he couldn't help but wonder if she was just doing it for the kids' sake.

Lin Xinyan was not used to him being like this at all. She was used to him being clingy and intimate, so this cold and distant side of him had frightened her.

"What's wrong? Can you tell me?" She asked, hooking onto his neck. She could see her distress self in his eyes.

"Do you think a person would do things against their wishes for their kids' sake?"

Lin Xinyan froze at his words, before recovering quickly.

"So you're taking his words personally?"

He remained silent, presumably agreeing with her.

"I don't think so," Lin Xinyan said, determined.

"I don't want to admit to it too, but I kinda like you," she said truthfully. She didn't want to lie to him, and neither did she want to lie to herself. "I can't tell you how much I love you exactly, but just know that I'm used to being around you like a married couple."

Zong Jinghao's eyes glinted. "Really?"

"Yeah, totally," Lin Xinyan said, pretending to be sarcastic. She let go of him and made a move to leave.

Zong Jinghao grabbed her wrist and pinned her onto the wall in one fell swoop. With one hand on the wall, he said, "No. What you said has been said, and you shall not lie."

"Why are you stopping me now?" Lin Xinyan said, trying to be as arrogant as she could.

"Hm..." He drawled, looking strangely flirtatious. "You're my wife after all," he said with a grin.

After that, he pressed a kiss onto her lips.

Lin Xinyan froze.

His lips traveled from her lips to her neck, before stopping at her collarbone, where he lingered for a long time, nipping it with his teeth without hurting her. "It's fine if you don't love me. I'll make you love me somehow," he muttered.

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What a conceited brat! Lin Xinyan thought.

However, she couldn't deny the fact that he was very attractive that way.

At that moment, the bodyguards at the lift lobby had finished their shift, and the sound of feet shuffling mixed in with voices permeated the air. "It's so much warmer inside..."

Suddenly, the voices stopped.

The person who had been talking stopped as he saw Zong Jinghao standing in the corridor...

He forgot to finish his sentence.

The other three wondered what made him trail off like that, and poked their heads out to the corridor. However...

Lin Xinyan could feel someone's eyes on her, and she pushed Zong Jinghao away.

"Hm?"

"Did you hear someone talking?" She asked quietly.

Zong Jinghao turned around.

"..."

They hadn't expected Zong Jinghao to turn around so quickly, and they didn't know how to react. They stood rooted to the ground as they were contemplating on how to explain themselves.

Lin Xinyan's face turned red-hot in a second. She looked down and tugged at Zong Jinghao's clothes.

That was so embarrassing!

Zong Jinghao looked down at her scarlet cheeks, and proceeded to pull her into his embrace. "Turn around," he ordered the audience.

He knew that Lin Xinyan got embarrassed easily.

The last thing she wanted to see would probably be those people.

The four men were surprisingly in sync as they whirled around.

Lin Xinyan walked into the bedroom with her head down, shoving Zong Jinghao away once they got out of the bodyguards' view.

"It's all your fault."

Doing it in the corridor and all...

Zong Jinghao bent down to look at her red face. How could she still be embarrassed about it?

She was strangely adorable, as though she was a young girl experiencing love for the first time.

A smile lingered on his lips as he pinched her cheeks. "I told them to turn around, so no one saw it."

“They did!” Lin Xinyan insisted, glaring at him.

He pulled her into his embrace. “So what?”

“Get off me,” Lin Xinyan said, pushing him away.

That only made Zong Jinghao’s embrace even tighter. “I love it when you blush,” he teased.

How could he be so annoying?

“Daddy, Mommy! What are you doing?” The two kids that had been jumping around on the bed stopped playing suddenly and looked towards them at the same time.

Lin Ruixi covered her eyes with her hands, peeking through the gaps between her fingers. “Daddy and Mommy are going to kiss-kiss...”

“There is nothing to see here!” Lin Xichen said, covering his own eyes with one hand and his sister’s eyes with his other hand. “Go on. We won’t peek.”

Lin Xinyan and Zong Jinghao made eye contact for a second, before turning their gaze to the kids on the bed. They didn’t know whether they should laugh or cry.

Since when did Mommy and Daddy get along so well? Lin Xichen thought.

However, he figured that they could live as one happy family if what he just saw was real.

“Mommy, can you give us another baby brother or sister?” Lin Xichen asked, still covering his face.

Lin Xinyan was speechless.

On the other hand, Zong Jinghao's face was creased with happiness. He was rather happy with what his son just said.

After all, Lin Xichen was his son, bonded by blood and all.

"Did you hear that?" Zong Jinghao said, hooking his arms around her waist.

Lin Xinyan's face turned red yet again. "You're taking the kids' words seriously?" She hissed.

"Why not?" Zong Jinghao said.

Lin Xinyan didn't know what to say.

"That's enough," Lin Xinyan said, breaking out from his embrace. "You're going to be a bad influence for the kids."

She walked over to the bed and took Lin Xichen's hand. "Kids shouldn't be talking like that."

"I didn't say anything wrong," Lin Xichen insisted quietly, slinging his hands around her neck. "I just wanted you and Daddy to have another kid so that you won't leave each other."

So that's why he wanted another sibling... "You kids shouldn't be thinking too much as well," Lin Xinyan said, ruffling his hair.

"Can we sleep together tonight?" Lin Xichen said, pulling her onto the bed.

"I haven't bathed yet..."

"It's fine. I don't think you're dirty anyway."

Lin Xinyan remained silent.

“Daddy, why don’t you come along too?” Lin Ruixi asked, launching herself high using the mattress as a trampoline. Zong Jinghao caught her in mid-air to stop her from falling off the bed. “Be careful.”

The little girl was in a good mood, and she hugged her father tightly. “I won’t fall off. Come and sleep with us, Daddy.”

Zong Jinghao glanced at Lin Xinyan discreetly and smiled.

The bed in the hotel room was rather wide, but it was barely enough room for four people. However, Lin Xinyan and Zong Jinghao didn’t want to spoil the kids’ excitement, so they relented.

The two of them took one side of the bed each with the kids nestled between them.

The soft orange light gave the room a warm, fuzzy feeling.

The two kids were in too good of a mood to sleep, and they begged Lin Xinyan to tell them a story.

Lin Ruixi buried herself into Zong Jinghao’s chest. “Daddy, I want to hear the story about Sleeping Beauty.”

Lin Xichen didn’t know what to say.

His sister was still as childish as ever.

However, he decided to go along with it, since it had been a long time since they last cuddled together like this.

Zong Jinghao pursed his lips.

Seeing his hesitation, Lin Ruixi asked, “Daddy, do you know the story?”

Zong Jinghao began to panic. He had no idea how the story went, since no one ever told him about it as a boy. The few times he'd heard it, he'd dismissed them as childish fairytales.

“Um...”

Lin Xinyan decided to help him out. “How about Mommy tell you the story, Rui?”

Lin Ruixi blinked and pouted. “Daddy is so dumb, he doesn't even know Sleeping Beauty...”

Zong Jinghao was speechless.

Did he just get roasted by his daughter?

Lin Xinyan ruffled her daughter's hair, not knowing what to say.

“Mommy, you can tell me the story,” Lin Ruixi said, glancing at her father. “Daddy, I want you to listen as well. I want you to tell me the story next time.”

Zong Jinghao nodded obediently. “Sure.”

Lin Xinyan paused for a second and started, “Once upon a time, there was a castle. On a rainy day, the whole castle shook with the cries of a newborn baby...the queen had given birth to a little princess. That was the king's first daughter, and as he loved his queen a lot, he loved his little princess as well.”

When the princess turned one, the king invited many guests, human and angel alike, but he did not invite a certain evil witch.

The angels began to cast their spells on the princess. The first one gave her beauty.

The second one gave her intelligence.

The third one gave her courage.

Just as the fourth angel was about to give her blessing to the princess, the whole castle was engulfed in a chilling gale, and the evil witch appeared in black clothes and carrying a walking stick.

She walked into the castle with hatred burning in her heart. The king had not invited her to the princess's birthday feast, and for revenge, she placed a curse on the princess that would kill her if she ever pricked her finger on a spindle...

Before Lin Xinyan could finish her story, Lin Ruixi had already fallen asleep.

Lin Xinyan stroked her daughter's face, yet Lin Ruixi did not stir at all. Lin Xinyan grinned at how cute her daughter was.

Just as she was about to pull her hand back, Zong Jinghao's hand came to rest over it. She looked up and made eye contact with him.

"Just do whatever you want. Pretend that I don't exist," Lin Xichen said, pulling his blanket over his body and closing his eyes, as though he had fallen asleep.

Zong Jinghao was speechless.

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They decided to return to B City the next day, since both Su Zhan's grandmother and He Ruize were fine.

The trip had been smooth and free of incidents.

The new year was coming soon, and they don't have much time left to prepare for it.

Shen Peichuan volunteered to share a ride with He Ruize, and they trailed behind the group. Su Zhan and Qin Ya took the same car as Su Zhan's grandmother, while Zong Jinghao and his family took the RV.

The scenery outside was rather underwhelming. There was no liveliness of spring, no warmth of summer, nor the calmness of autumn; all that was left was the chilling wind.

Everyone remained silent throughout. They travelled half the distance in just half a day, which was much faster than when they came.

They got off their vehicles at the rest stop to eat.

The year was ending, and the rest stop was crowded with all sorts of people and vehicles.

Lin Ruixi needed the bathroom and Lin Xinyan took her there, while Zong Jinghao took Lin Xichen to the restaurant with Su Zhan, Qin Ya and Su Zhan's grandmother trailing behind them.

He Ruize had woken up, and someone had to watch him at all times so that he wouldn't attempt to kill himself or run away.

Shen Peichuan assigned some bodyguards to watch over He Ruize so that he could take a toilet break and go into the restaurant. Su Zhan's grandmother looked healthy, most probably due to happiness from seeing Su Zhan and Qin Ya as a couple.

Now that Su Zhan had gotten married, her last worry had been vanquished.

"Grandma, you're getting younger," Shen Peichuan said, sitting down.

"You're so good at making me happy," the old lady chided, though she wore a smile on her face.

"I'm just telling the truth," Shen Peichuan said, earning a hearty laugh from the old lady.

The food at the rest stop was rather lackluster. Shen Peichuan stuffed a mouthful of food into his mouth and said, "Let's just eat this to keep us going. We can have a feast when we get back to B City."

Su Zhan stood up. "I'm going to get something. Qin Ya, can you take care of Grandma for me?"

Qin Ya nodded.

"Uncle Su Zhan, I saw a stall that sells jackfruit just now. Can you buy some on your way back," Lin Xichen asked.

Su Zhan turned around to look at him. "You like it?"

Lin Xichen shook his head. "My sister likes it, but she doesn't really care what you give her, as long as it's yummy."

Su Zhan nodded and walked out of the restaurant. He stole a glance at Shen Peichuan talking to Lin Xichen, and his lips seemed to form the words, “You really love your sister, don’t you?”

Shen Peichuan didn’t notice his gaze. He sighed in relief and pulled the hat of his coat over his head and walked over to the car where He Ruize was kept in.

He glanced around to make sure that no one was looking at him, before he opened the car door. There were two bodyguards tasked with watching over He Ruize by Shen Peichuan inside.

One of them turned to him and greeted him. “Mr. Su.”

Su Zhan glanced at He Ruize and laughed. “Y’all should go and eat. I’ll stay here to watch over him.”

“But Captain Shen said that he’s coming to help us out...”

“He told me to come. Are you guys doubting me?” Su Zhan asked, visibly unhappy.

The bodyguard waved his hands in denial. “No...”

“Then get out!” Su Zhan bellowed.

The two bodyguards got off the car as Su Zhan slipped into it. “Eat faster,” he told them.

“Sure.”

After they left, Su Zhan closed the door and sat down, studying the restrained He Ruize from head to toe. He gave an evil laugh and warmed up his joints. “We meet again.”

He Ruize glared at him, yet he couldn't move at all. His limbs had been bound together and a gag was even placed in his mouth, as they didn't want to leave any chances for him to escape or commit suicide. Shen Peichuan told him that if he wanted to die, the only place to do that would be in B City, and only after he got his sentence.

It's not like he would have an easy way out if he didn't die anyway.

"Why can't you move?" Su Zhan asked teasingly.

He Ruize knew that he was completely not in control of himself. He was like a piece of meat on a cutting board meant for others to toy on him.

He decided to close his eyes in the end so that he didn't need to look at Su Zhan.

"Huh," Su Zhan scoffed, taking out his phone and opening the camera app. "Why don't you let me take a couple of nudes and make it into a poster? Maybe I can put them in front of the He family's office doors and villa...won't that be exciting?"

He Ruize's eyes opened immediately and he glared at Su Zhan. If he could move, he would have gone all out in a fight with Su Zhan. If he died and his family gets dragged into this mess, then it would just be another crime of his.

"Haha," Su Zhan laughed and looked down upon him. "You're scared? Did you not see this coming when you threatened me the other day? Hm?"

He Ruize's hands balled into fists and his eyes twitched. One could tell at a glance that he was going to explode from anger.

Su Zhan pinched his cheeks and gave them a few light slaps. "Tsk. Why is your face as rough as a dog's ass?"

He Ruize's face scrunched together into an ugly scowl.

Su Zhan felt satisfied seeing him like this. He bent down even further. “So you beat up my grandma?”

Piak!

The glass window of the car shook, and He Ruize’s face swelled up. A drop of blood hung at the corner of his lips.

Su Zhan shook the numbness out of his hand. “Man, it hurt so much to slap you! You don’t deserve to have dignity after all.”

He Ruize’s body began to tremble with anger.

“Doesn’t it feel amazing to be someone else’s ragdoll?” Su Zhan said while pinching his swollen cheek.

He Ruize hissed in pain.

Thump! Thump!

Someone knocked on the window of the car.

He turned around but he couldn’t see who it was. The window of the car had a black film over it that blocked out light completely.

He wound down the window and saw Shen Peichuan standing there, leaning against the car. “I think he’s had enough. Why don’t you go and eat?”

Shen Peichuan knew what Su Zhan wanted to do the moment he said that he was going shopping. However, he didn’t try to stop him.

If he didn’t let off some steam, he would brood over it forever.

Su Zhan pushed the door open and coughed to hide his embarrassment. “You’re done?”

Shen Peichuan pouted. “Yeah. I came to check in case you accidentally beat him to death. I would have a hard time reporting to my higher-ups if you did.”

He would have to face the consequences if he didn’t bring He Ruize back, since chasing after He Ruize was his excuse to be absent for such a long period of time.

Su Zhan huffed. “He won’t die,” he said, before shuffling back to the restaurant. He bought a whole jackfruit from a nearby fruit stall before he went in.

Lin Xichen’s mouth fell open the moment he saw the jackfruit Su Zhan was holding. Didn’t he ask for just one box of it? Why did he buy a whole jackfruit?

How were they going to cut it open?

Su Zhan smiled. “It’s fresher like this.”

Lin Xichen blinked. “You’re going to cut it open?”

The fruit was delicious, though there was a huge seed in the middle that got in the way. However, the biggest challenge was cutting the skin of the fruit.

Su Zhan managed to take out his anger on He Ruize, leaving him in a good mood.

“Yeah, I’ll do it. By the way, where’s your dad?” Su Zhan asked as he left the jackfruit onto the floor and pulled a chair for himself.

“He went to look for my mommy.”

Lin Xinyan had taken Lin Ruixi to the bathroom and had yet to return. Zong Jinghao decided to go look for them.

Considering the crowd at the rest stop, they might have to queue for a while.

Zong Jinghao had been frowning ever since they got off the car. He was not used to being in a crowded place. As he stood at the other side of the road waiting, Lin Xinyan emerged from the bathroom with her daughter.

Lin Ruixi saw Zong Jinghao and let go of Lin Xinyan's hand immediately. "Daddy!"

She started running but ended up crashing into a woman eating instant noodles by the side of the road. The noodles she was holding flew out of her hand and splashed onto her coat.

It was a white woolen coat, and the bright red soup formed a huge stain immediately. The woman's face darkened immediately. "Are you blind or something?"

Lin Xinyan ran over to apologize.

Lin Ruixi began to regret her actions. "I'm sorry..."

Piak!

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Before Lin Ruixi could even finish her apology, the woman's hand hit her squarely on her face. Lin Ruixi had never been slapped in her life, and her eyes widened immediately. Tears threatened to spill from her eyes.

Lin Xinyan froze. The last thing she had expected was for the woman to hit her daughter. She pulled Lin Ruixi into her embrace and glared at the woman. "How could you slap a child?!"

"Why did she run around in the first place? You're such a bad parent too. Look at my clothes! It's new! Give me the thousand I spent on it now!" The woman yelled at her. Her red lips, thick foundation, and her ugly snarl made her look like an unruly shrew.

"I didn't mean to..." Lin Ruixi cried.

"That's it?" The woman said arrogantly.

"How much do you want?" A low voice growled.

The man strode over with a scary frown.

He was about to go over when Lin Ruixi ran into the woman, yet a passing car got in his way. In just those few seconds, the woman had slapped his daughter.

The woman turned around at the sound of his voice.

Zong Jinghao was wearing a handmade suit under his unbuttoned coat which fluttered behind him, enhancing his domineering aura.

The woman shivered instinctively, the prior arrogance nowhere to be found. “This girl ran into me.”

“I didn’t mean it,” Lin Ruixi repeated, sniffing.

Lin Xinyan hugged her daughter tight. She had never laid a finger on her own daughter, yet some stranger decided to give her a harsh slap out of nowhere.

“How much does your clothes cost?” Zong Jinghao asked, taking out his wallet from his pocket. He didn’t have enough cash, so he signed a cheque instead. “Is a hundred thousand enough?”

He looked up.

The woman swallowed. A hundred thousand? Is he kidding her?

“I want cash!” The woman insisted, forcing herself to stay calm.

He didn’t have that much cash on him at the moment, so he gave Su Zhan a call. “I don’t care what method you use, but get me a hundred thousand in cash right now.”

Su Zhan didn’t know how to react. A hundred thousand in cash? What’s going on?

“Why do you need so much money all of a sudden...”

“Get it here in ten minutes!”

Zong Jinghao hung up after that. A crowd had formed around them by then.

Quiet chattering filled the air.

“That costs a thousand at the most,” someone whispered. “My bestie has the same coat and she’s asking for a hundred thousand?”

“I know right! She’s just a little kid, and it’s not like she did it on purpose. Why is she being so unreasonable?”

“Didn’t y’all see it? She hit the kid!” Someone who was there earlier said.

“She hit a child?”

“Look at that poor kid. Her face is red!”

“How could she? She’s such a cute child!”

The woman began to panic when she realized that she had messed with the wrong people. The man standing before her seemed to be a handful.

“Fine. I don’t need your compensation.”

Zong Jinghao didn’t even bother looking up. “You don’t get to say if this is over..”

Fear crept up the woman’s throat, though she put on a brave front. “I’m not asking for you to compensate me anymore. Why can’t you just let me go?”

“What in the world is going on?” Su Zhan said, appearing at the scene with a bag in one hand and Lin Xichen in the other, two bodyguards push the crowd aside so they could get the front. He walked up to Zong Jinghao and asked, “Why do you need so much cash?”

Su Zhan gave himself a pat on the back for coming up with a plan.

There were no banks near the rest stop, so he only had one place to go for cash. The gas station.

Just as he had guessed, there was an ATM at the gas station. He took out a hundred thousand in cash from the ATM.

Zong Jinghao gestured at the woman with his chin. "Give it to her."

Su Zhan turned around to look at the woman, taking in the soup stain on her clothes and the overturned bowl of instant noodles at her feet, and he instantly understood the situation. However, the coat she was wearing looked nowhere close to something that would cost a hundred thousand.

"How much did you spend on this?"

Before the woman could talk, someone from the crowd answered for her. "A thousand at the most My bestie had the exact same coat."

"Why do you want a hundred thousand for something that costs a thousand..."

"Give it to her!" Zong Jinghao yelled, cutting Su Zhan off. His dark pupils grew even darker.

Su Zhan noticed that something was off. He handed the money over to the woman.

She didn't dare to take it. "I...I..."

She was at a loss for words.

"My daughter ruined your clothes, so as her father, I have to compensate you," Zong Jinghao said, grabbing the money from Su Zhan's hand and tossing it onto the floor at the woman's feet. "Though, how am I going to deal with the fact that you hit my daughter?"

"What?"

Su Zhan and Lin Xichen were both shocked to hear that this woman had hit Lin Ruixi.

Lin Xichen began to tremble with anger. Did she just hit his little sister?

Su Zhan was furious too. How could she hit a child?

“I-I didn’t mean to...” The woman said, her voice trembling.

“You’re not getting off so easily!” Su Zhan yelled before Zong Jinghao could say anything.

“I don’t need the money, you don’t need to pay me for the damages...”

“Yes, we have to pay you for the damages, but you’ll have to explain why you hit my sister! She’s been a nuisance to me in the past, but I’ve never laid a finger on her even once! She had been my Mommy’s biggest treasure ever since she was born! If you’re not going to give us a good explanation today, I won’t let go of it forever! My daddy had said that we shouldn’t let ourselves get bullied just like how we shouldn’t bully others with our status and power!”

Lin Xichen was only five years old, yet his words were imbued with logic and reason. He looked like a mini version of Zong Jinghao beside his father.

However, all Zong Jinghao heard was Lin Xichen calling him ‘Daddy’.

Although Lin Xichen had accepted him as his father, he had never called him “Daddy”.

His heart ached for a second when he heard that.

“I said that it’s fine! Why are y’all bullying me?” The woman said, staggering backward and bracing for the worst.

She started regretting her action.

Why did she lash out like that?

However, she was truly angry since she had just bought the coat to wear for the new year; and it was ruined by this child.

“What do you by saying that we are bullying you? You started it!” Lin Xichen retorted. He would not let her turn the tables.

“That’s right! I’m sure someone here has seen the whole incident.” Su Zhan said as he scanned the crowd.

“I did,” a woman in the crowd said, stepping out. “I saw the little girl running after I came out from the bathroom, and she ran into the woman by accident. She apologized on the spot, yet the woman slapped her without any explanation.”

“She must be a really horrible person to have slapped a child like that.”

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The crowd started to condemn the woman.

She was obviously in the wrong for slapping a child.

The woman felt so ashamed and the redness on her face spread to her neck, and she wished that the ground would just open up and swallow her. Then, she turned around to leave.

Su Zhan was quick to block her.

“You’re trying to escape now?” He asked with a serious expression.

“I said that you don’t need to compensate me anymore! What more do you want?” The woman bellowed, annoyed by all the jeering from the crowd.

“We must compensate you for your losses, and so you must pay us back for slapping this kid too!” Su Zhan said, raising his chin.

The woman’s heart was beating like crazy. She had not seen all these coming, and she had no other options but to call her husband for backup.

“L-let me make a call,” she stammered, pulling out her phone from her pocket to call her husband.

He picked up very quickly. He started growling before she could say anything, “Did you fall into a ditch or something? Why aren’t you back?”

“I-I’m near the bathroom,” the woman stuttered.

“So why aren’t you back?” The man repeated, clearly annoyed.

“I got blocked by someone,” the woman said, still trembling.

“What?!” The man yelled as his temper flared up thinking that someone was flirting with his wife. He alighted his car and stormed to the bathroom area. “Who dares to block my wife?”

“My dear...” The woman whispered gratefully, as though she had found herself a straw to grasp onto.

The man walked over and craned his neck. “Who’s flirting with my wife?”

“Who would even want to flirt with her with such look?” someone in the crowd said.

The man immediately flew into a rage as he was embarrassed by the fact that someone had just called his wife ugly.

“Who said that! Come out now!” The man yelled, gesturing wildly at the crowd.

“Mister, calm down. That person didn’t mean to say that your wife was ugly on the surface. They probably meant that she had an ugly heart,” a woman standing at the front of the crowd said.

That made it sound even worse. Being called ugly on the surface was one thing, but being ugly at heart meant that the person had no morals or was evil...either way, it didn’t mean anything good.

The man jabbed a finger in the woman’s direction. “Say that again?”

“Your wife has poor manners,” the woman explained.

The man was about to beat her up, but his wife pulled him back. "Don't make a scene," she whispered.

He was about to scold her when he noticed her soiled clothes. "Didn't you spend a thousand on this? Why is it so dirty?"

"My daughter did it," Zong Jinghao said coldly as he fixated his domineering gaze onto the man.

The man froze in shock.

"His daughter made me spill my noodles all over myself, and I slapped her out of anger."

The man couldn't hear what his wife said over the static in his brain.

It took a while before he finally recovered and said arrogantly, "Your daughter ruined my wife's clothes, so you gotta pay up."

"The compensation's right here," Su Zhan said, kicking the bag of money on the ground. The piercing red of the bank notes peeked through the opening, and the man looked down in utter surprise. That was a lot of money...

Something smelt fishy.

Even so, no one would reject free money.

He pushed his wife. "How much are you expecting? They gave you the money, so just take it!"

The woman didn't dare.

“My daughter ruined your wife’s clothes, so here’s our compensation for you. On the other hand, your wife hit my daughter, so how are we going to deal with that?” Zong Jinghao asked with a deep frown.

The man looked from his wife to the money on the floor, and then to the crowd around them, not knowing how to respond.

The woman tugged at him. “What are we going to do?”

The man gave the woman a look before slapping her squarely on the face. She was caught off guard, and she slipped on the spilt noodles before crashing onto the floor. She gave him an incredulous look while holding her face.

“Did you just hit me?”

The man bared his teeth. “Are you blind? Look at how well they’re dressed! I can’t bother with you anymore. Deal with this yourself.”

The crowd went silent in shock. This was one strange man.

Although his wife was in the wrong, all he cared about was losing his face.

Su Zhan smacked his lips. “Well, I guess birds of the same feather really flock together.”

The man had no sense of responsibility or a sliver of courage, whereas the woman was vain and evil.

Otherwise, she wouldn’t have slapped a child.

“But...” The woman tugged at the man’s pants, she was hoping that her husband would help her out.

“You made a mistake, you deal with it yourself,” the man said. Then, he kicked her aside unceremoniously and weaved his way out of the crowd while yelling, “What are you looking at?!” to the crowd.

The man was the woman’s last hope so she began to panic after he left.

“That’s karma for sure. It pays to be nice, after all,” someone said, pointing to the woman.

The woman knew that there’s no longer any point in asking for her husband’s help. Her dignity was in shreds, and she was convinced that men were useless.

The woman wiped her face and decided to get it over and done with. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have hit your daughter.”

Zong Jinghao refused to look at her, obviously unsatisfied with her apology.

He had never even thought about hitting his own daughter, yet this woman did it.. He was not going to let her go so easily.

“What do you want?” The woman asked pitifully. With noodles all over her clothes and her makeup smudged to oblivion, she looked like an abandoned stray dog sprawled helplessly across the ground.

“Which hand did she use to hit my daughter? Chop it off!” Zong Jinghao bellowed. Lin Xinyan flinched at the sound of that.

The woman’s eyes grow wide and she trembled even more. She dragged herself over and tugged at Zong Jinghao’s pants. “Please, let me go! I’m sorry!”

He hated getting touched like that.

“What are you waiting for?” He asked the bodyguards standing beside him.

The bodyguards rushed up to her and pinned her down with her hands behind her back.

The mascara and foundation that the woman was wearing were not waterproof, and they dissolved into her tears that rolled down her face. It made her look hideous.

The woman couldn't care less about how she looked at the moment as she could only beg for her life. "I'm sorry! I'll never do this again! Please let me go!"

"Humility is a good virtue" Su Zhan said coolly.

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Acting rashly could send one tumbling down into the abyss.

The woman was acting as if she was the best in the world just because she wore something that cost a thousand.

She had gotten herself into some serious trouble by that one action.

Zong Jinghao made no move to change his orders.

The woman was terrified. How was she going to live without her hand?

No, I can't lose my hand!

Even so, she could not fight against the people standing before her.

Fear might have flipped a switch in her, and she broke free of her restraints all of a sudden, all before the bodyguards could react.

She barreled herself towards Lin Xinyan.

Zong Jinghao thought that she was going to hurt Lin Xinyan, and he kicked her away. The woman skidded sideways and crashed into a tree in the garden nearby, making it shake on impact.

Zong Jinghao's eyes were red with anger. "What were y'all doing? You can't even hold a woman down!"

The woman pressed a hand to her chest and coughed a few times. "I was not going to hurt her," she rasped.

She looked up at Lin Xinyan. “I just thought that I could ask you for some mercy, since you’re a woman like me.”

Lin Xinyan’s face remained cold, not because she was heartless, but rather because the woman’s actions were beyond her threshold.

As a mother, she felt guilty for not being able to protect her child from harm, yet she couldn’t forgive the perpetrator so easily.

She was not a saint but an ordinary human and a mother.

“My daughter is only five, and I have never even scolded her, let alone hit her. Who gave you the right to hit her?” Lin Xinyan asked, her eyes reddened. “You probably don’t deserve to lose your hand because of this, but you have to be punished.”

The woman’s jaw dropped, and she was at a loss for words.

Lin Xinyan hugged Lin Ruixi close to shield her from the violent scene that was about to take place. “I’ll get on the car first,” she said.

Zong Jinghao nodded.

“Wait.

Lin Ruixi looked up at Lin Xinyan suddenly. “Mommy, didn’t you teach me to forgive and forget?”

Lin Xinyan lowered her head. That’s right, she taught her daughter that.

One shouldn’t be unreasonable, and one should forgive and forget once the situation is resolved.

Yet, she failed to do so.

As a mother, she felt furious and guilty the moment she saw her child getting hit by some stranger.

Lin Ruixi turned to look at the woman, who was still sprawled on the floor. “Do you know what you did wrong?”

The woman’s eyes had lost their shine, and she scoffed at herself. “One mistake is all it takes to understand the people around you.”

Her husband had been the sweetest man on earth before, yet he abandoned her and even told her that she was an embarrassment to him. She was left to fend herself.

Lin Ruixi sighed as she pitied the woman. “Mommy,” she said before turning to her father. “Daddy, let her go. My face doesn’t hurt anymore.”

Zong Jinghao pulled his daughter into his embrace. Her soft skin was still tinged with red, and the slap mark was still visible. He reached out to stroke her cheek but ended up wiping his fingers across her forehead as he was scared that he would hurt her. His daughter had a kind heart.

Even so, the world had its ugly side.

“You sure?” He asked his daughter gently.

Lin Ruixi nodded. “Yeah. Mommy said that you should forgive as much as possible so that you can be happy.”

Zong Jinghao raised his eyebrows. “What else did she teach you?”

“That we shouldn’t go looking for trouble, and if others try to mess with us, we fight back with twice the power!” Lin Xichen cut in.

Lin Ruixi looked at her brother. “Mommy only told you that, not me.”

Lin Xinyan took different approaches in educating her two kids. For Lin Ruixi, she did as much as she could to protect her from harm, and strived to shape her into a smart, compassionate and observant young lady.

As for her son, she taught him to be strong, determined, and fearless. She wanted him to become a reliable man when he grew up.

As a result, the things she told the two kids differed greatly as well.

“What does ‘an eye for an eye’ mean?” Lin Ruixi asked, blinking.

“It means that I will beat you up if you hit me first,” Lin Xichen said without much thought.

“But it’s not like you hit me back whenever I hit you,” the little girl said innocently.

Lin Xichen resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Was his sister stupid or something?

“You’re my sister, so it doesn’t count! Mommy said that we share the same blood since we’re twins, so I will never hit you no matter what happens. Mommy gave birth to both of us, so you’re forever my little sister.”

Lin Ruixi cocked her head to the side and pondered over it for a long while before saying, “Does that mean that if I slap her back, we’ll be even?”

Lin Xichen put his arms across his chest and held his chin as he considered his sister’s words. “Hmm...it should be two slaps, since she made the first move. We have to make her remember it somehow.”

“Two slaps then!” Lin Ruixi said, looking at Zong Jinghao. “You can ask Uncle Su to slap her twice, and we’ll be even. If you chopped her hand off, how is she going to eat?”

Zong Jinghao looked at his daughter's clear, innocent eyes, and was at a loss for words.

Lin Ruixi took her father's hesitation as doubt, and she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Daddy, just let her go..."

Finally, Zong Jinghao gave in to his daughter's pleas, not out of mercy, but rather his reluctance to let his daughter down.

However, Zong Jinghao asked the bodyguards to do it instead of Su Zhan, since their training made them much stronger than Su Zhan.

"Let's go," Zong Jinghao picked up Lin Ruixi, while Lin Xinyan took Lin Xichen's hand, leading them away from the scene. Su Zhan walked in front of them to lead the way.

One of the bodyguards held the woman down while the other administered her punishment.

They heard a loud 'piak' behind them as the bodyguard slapped the woman's face.

They could tell that the bodyguard had used quite a bit of strength.

Lin Ruixi lifted her head out of curiosity, but Zong Jinghao immediately pressed her head back down, blocking her view.

She poked her head out and blinked at her father. "Daddy."

"Hm?" Zong Jinghao hummed, looking down.

The little girl smiled. "Did you get angry because I got slapped?"

Zong Jinghao raised his eyebrows. "Why do you ask?"

“I can tell that you care from how angry you got and I am happy about it,” she answered. The look of fear on her face had disappeared.

Lin Ruixi blinked and repeated, “I’m really happy.”

Her Daddy loved her, and so did her Mommy and big brother. She felt like the luckiest girl in the world.

The slap didn’t even make a dent in her world.

She had the protection of all her love ones.

Zong Jinghao’s voice grew raspy. “Oh, you little dummy. Of course I love you dearly.”

The little girl broke into a huge grin, her smile was just like her mother.

Zong Jinghao loved it, but when his gaze settled on the red slap mark on her face, the smile he had disappeared into thin air.

He hid in a corner of the car with his daughter refusing to talk to anyone.

Lin Xichen rolled the jackfruit Su Zhan bought over to his sister. “Do you want some, Rui?”

She shook her head, much to his surprise. “No.”

Lin Xichen struggled to come to terms with the fact that his greedy little sister had refused an offer of food.

That was really strange.

Lin Ruixi snuggled closer to Zong Jinghao, as though she was trying to comfort him.

Lin Xinyan knew that Zong Jinghao was just brooding over the events of just now, and she couldn't help but blame herself for it.

The car slowly backed out of the rest stop and entered the highway.

Lin Xinyan's phone rang all of a sudden.

She pulled her phone out from her pocket.

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The screen showed an incoming call from Cheng Yuxiu.

She stepped back instinctively. She noticed that Zong Jinghao was holding Lin Ruixi, engrossed in caressing the latter's hair. She pulled down the curtain and received the incoming call.

"It's me." Cheng Yuxiu identified herself as the caller.

Lin Xinyan acknowledged softly.

He knew that Cheng Yuxiu would not call him unless there was something urgent.

"Wen Qing dropped by our house today. He asked me about tea silk which, he said, is now available in Baicheng."

Lin Xinyan frowned, wondering why Wen Qing was so well-informed.

She suddenly clenched a fist tightly. Could he have discovered that it was a particular piece of tea silk which I had given Qin Ya to make her wedding dress? It was actually Cheng Yuwen's gift to me.

"I am sure that he will look into the matter thoroughly. By then he will know what you have done. I am quite worried that..." She hesitated, reluctant to get Lin Xinyan involved.

She only wished to live in harmony with Zong Jinghao. As for the tea silk, it was nothing more than a worldly item, even if it was handed down as a relic of the Cheng family.

Lin Xinyan poked at the blinds, looking through the gap. She noticed Zong Jinghao holding his daughter. "Don't worry; everything is going to be fine."

"Both of you must be careful, now... "

"I've got something on. Bye." Lin Xinyan knew what she wished to say; whatever she had decided, she would not reconsider.

She held her mobile phone, sliding her finger on the screen. Who is this Wen Qing?

However, just based on Cheng Yuxiu's description, she knew that he was a ruthless guy, someone not to be belittled.

Otherwise, Cheng Yuxiu could not refuse to disclose more just for the sake of Zong Jinghao.

The entire journey was rather quiet. By the evening, they entered the territory of B City.

When they reached the inner city, it was already time for dinner. Everybody felt tired at the end of the journey. Su Zhan and Qin Ya brought the old lady home, Shen Peichuan needed to go back to his office to make arrangement for He Ruize before going home to rest.

Lin Xinyan went back to the villa with his wife and daughter.

Aunt Yu and Zhuang Zijin had gotten dinner ready for them, as both had been notified of their return earlier.

When they got out of the car, the bodyguard and the driver carried the luggage back into the villa. Zhuang Zijin missed the two kids dearly. When Lin Xichen stepped in, Zhuang Zijin hugged them and observed carefully whether and how they had grown.

“Where is Ruixi?” Zhuang Zijin looked at Lin Xinyan. At this point, Zong Jinghao entered carrying Lin Ruixi who was asleep. He looked serious and did not greet anyone, walking straightaway into the bedroom.

Zhuang Zijin was fast to notice Zong Jinghao’s bad mood. She asked the daughter, “What happened to him? He seems in a bad mood.”

Lin Xinyan did not say much in reply, so as not to make Zhuang Zijin worry unnecessarily. “Nothing; maybe he is tired.”

Zhuang Zijin did not really believe what her daughter had said. Since Lin Xinyan was unwilling to say more, she knew not to press further.

“Please come over for dinner which the dishes are still warm. Let me take care of the luggage.” Aunt Yu came up wearing an apron, smiling happily in welcoming them home.

“Put the luggage here and let me take care of them.” Aunt Yu signaled the bodyguard to place the luggage at the entrance.

The wind blew in through the door which had remained wide open. Lin Xinyan took off Lin Xichen’s overcoat; the latter had washed his hands before eating dinner.

Lin Xinyan removed her down jacket and placed it on the hanger. After washing her hands, she carried a bowl of rice together with some dishes on the dinner table in a tray, walking into the bedroom.

“Yan.” Zhuang Zijin called and stopped at once.

Lin Xinyan looked at her, “Yes, anything?”

“Nothing, you go ahead.” Zhuang Zijin waved her hand as she walked towards the dining area to get a bowl of soup for Lin Xichen.

Lin Xinyan could feel that Zhuang Zijin had something to talk about with her, especially after they were away from home for quite some time. "Mom, I will come over to have a word with you later tonight."

"Good. I need to discuss something with you." Zhuang Zijin confessed.

"What is it?" Lin Xinyan was curious to know.

Zhuang Zijin found that it was not convenient to disclose the topic of their discussion just yet because Aunt Yu and Lin Xichen were around.

"Later tonight, I will tell you when you come over to my room."

Lin Xinyan nodded. As she carried the tray into the room, Lin Ruixi was fast asleep. Her dress was placed beside her while Zong Jinghao was sitting by her side, looking at her.

Lin Xinyan sighed quietly, putting the food on the table. "Eat something please."

She picked up her daughter's dress and put it on the hanger.

Zong Jinghao sat still. He had no appetite to eat, especially when he saw his daughter's face.

Though the sign of her being beaten had almost disappeared, he was very disturbed by the incident.

Lin Xinyan came near him and placed her hands on his shoulders. She was happy to see him being so concerned about her children.

"Don't blame it on yourself; it was just an accident." Lin Xinyan tried to console him.

Zong Jinghao placed his hands on the back of hers and held them. She conveniently sat on his lap. They stared at each other, speechless. In fact, Lin Xinyan fought back the urge to tell him the matter about Cheng Yuxiu, on several occasions. She knew that it was irrational to tell him the truth which might ruin him, causing Cheng Yuxiu's sacrifices all these years to be in vain.

She asked in a soft tone instead, "Are you still angry?"

Zong Jinghao mumbled affirmatively.

"That wasn't your fault." Lin Xinyan assured him.

Zong Jinghao lowered his head and squinted, "I really regretted the past six years of my life."

He missed the time when Lin Xinyan had needed him the most, with the two children growing up.

"From now on, we'll be staying together." Lin Xinyan let out a laugh. She was beginning to feel uncomfortable with what had become of him now.

He looked serious. "How about you two have another child?" So that I can see you how you look like when pregnant; watch the baby grow day by day.

He wanted to fill up on something that he had missed with much regret.

Lin Xinyan had previously told him that her body was not fit for another pregnancy. That was the truth. However, despite this, she did not want to disappoint him. "Okay."

Zong Jinghao held his hands around her waist. His chin barely touched her shoulder. He could smell her peculiar body scent.

In low yet clear words, he spoke flirtatiously, "Are you going to sleep with me tonight?"

Lin Xinyan appeared speechless. Why must you be so direct?

Lin Xinyan withdrew her hand from his shoulder. "Not tonight."

"Oh! Well?"

"My mom seems worried about something. I am going to see her after this."

"I can wait for you." He did not mind waiting. After all, you won't be sleeping with your mom tonight, will you?

Lin Xinyan felt cornered. Are you really that desperate?

Fearing that Zong Jinghao might say further, she told him what to do, "Eat your dinner first before the dishes get cold. Let me take a look at Xichen. I am also starving."

She had not taken any food the whole day.

Zong Jinghao pulled at her hands and smiled mischievously, "Let me feed you until you are full."

Lin Xinyan blushed immediately. She withdrew her hands from his grip and gave him a stern look, "Don't be so bad."

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“Hurry up, eat your dinner. Don’t let the dishes get cold.” Lin Xinyan pushed him again.

Zong Jinghao stood up and walked over to the table. “Aren’t you going to eat dinner with me?”

“I have only brought in one bowl of rice, I’ll eat outside.”

“Stay please.” Zong Jinghao sat down and pulled her to sit on his lap. Lin Xinyan stared at him, “There’s only one bowl of rice.”

“We can share it.” Zong Jinghao picked some food from a dish as he fed it to Lin Xinyan.

Lin Xinyan simply obliged.

“How is it?”

Zong Jinghao fed her again, this time with lady’s fingers that had touched her lips. “Aren’t you starving?”

Lin Xinyan felt uncomfortable. I’m not a child, there is no need to feed me, please!

“You don’t feel like being fed by me?” Zong Jinghao was sharp to read her body language.

She lowered her head and explained softly, “I’m an adult now, stop treating me like a child.”

Zong Jinghao put the food intended for her into his own mouth instead, "Then, you feed me. I don't mind."

This made Lin Xinyan speechless.

"You may feed me like I am a child." He cast a playful look at her, "Come on, feed me."

The corners of Lin Xinyan's eyes twitched. She knew if she did not oblige to him, he would never stop giving her a hard time.

In order to extricate, Lin Xinyan used the chopsticks to feed him some prawn meat.

Zong Jinghao bit at the chopsticks and refused to let go of them. Just when Lin Xinyan was about to get angry, he quickly released them.

"Tastes very good." He smiled contentedly.

Lin Xinyan stared at him. "All along, the food prepared by Aunt Yu has been good."

"The taste is good because you'd fed it to me." He held her waist and looked up at her, "If you don't believe me, try it."

Lin Xinyan did not know what else to say.

She refused the offer. Zong Jinghao frowned, "Why? You don't like me?"

Lin Xinyan avoided his gaze. "No."

"Then, please eat it."

Lin Xinyan was utterly embarrassed.

“Please stop fooling around with me... “

Before she finished her sentence, a piece of prawn meat had been shoved into her mouth.

Lin Xinyan was shocked, her eyes wide open.

He grinned, “Isn’t it sweet?”

Lin Xinyan had originally thought of spitting it out. However, Zong Jinghao had sensed her thoughts. He pushed her chin up so that the prawn meat would slide down her throat, leaving a strong smell of seafood in her mouth.

“Don’t try to be funny with me.” He laughed at his success in feeding her by a trick. Lin Xinyan did not want to look at him; she ate a morsel of rice. Zong Jinghao stopped his antics in fear of enraging her. He would then have a hard time to appease her, if at all.

It was only a bowl of rice with a few dishes, They devoured them all. Lin Xinyan took the tray out with the empty bowl and plates. Meanwhile, Zong Jinghao went to take a shower.

Aunt Yu was unpacking the luggage as Zhuang Zijin helped to bathe Lin Xichen.

Lin Xinyan cleared up the dinner table and washed the eating utensils in the kitchen.

Aunt Yu came to the kitchen while Lin Xinyan was busy with washing the eating utensils. “You must be tired by now after travelling long hours in the car. Let me finish the washing. You can go ahead and have a shower before you rest.”

Lin Xinyan smiled, “I am not tired, really.”

“Even if you are not tired, you don’t have to do the washing.” Aunt Yu pushed her aside gently and took out her gloves, “Young Master doesn’t look happy today. Go and cheer him up.”

Lin Xinyan preferred to stay in order to avoid getting with entangled with him. While eating an apple, she asked Aunt Yu, “ His mother... “

Aunt Yu raised her head with surprise. She did not expect her to raise this matter. “You mean Madam?”

Lin Xinyan nodded. “Could you please tell me something about her?”

Aunt Yu was stunned at first, then she smiled affably, “No problem.”

She is showing great interest in knowing more about Young Master. Does this mean that all these days Young Master has been away from home, she has fostered a better relationship with him?

“I followed Madam to the Zong family. I was a former maid of the Wen family. When Madam was married into the Zong family, I was sent over to take care of Madam. Madam and Master Zong’s marriage was meant to make both families a strong alliance. Although they did not have true affection towards each other initially, they had still treated each other with all due courtesy and respect. They became closer after the birth of Young Master. After that, Madam passed away due to illness. Within one month of Madam’s death, Master Zong married the current ma’am.”

Lin Xinyan took a morsel of an apple and chewed slowly. Her mind tossed with certain things which seemed inexplicable to her. Wen Xian has passed away. But Cheng Yuxiu said that Wen Xian was once pregnant. What has happened to her child? What about Wen Xian’s lover? All of these seemed unanswered after her death.

Apparently, Aunt Yu knew nothing much. She did not even know that Zong Jinghao was not borne by Wen Xian.

“What do you think of Yuxiu?” Lin Xinyan continued probing.

Aunt Yu thought for a while, trying hard to give an impartial impression. “Although she married Master Zong at the wrong time, she was quite a nice person. It looked like she was in a good health. She didn’t scold Young Master or torture him. She carried herself well. The point is, she did not have a child of her own. I really respect her. At that time, she was rather young. It is quite a sad thing for a woman not to have a child of her own during her lifetime.”

Lin Xinyan squinted. The apple in her mouth had lost its taste after constant chewing. She recalled the call from Cheng Yuxiu that day; the latter had wanted to desist from re-introducing Xiangyun silk on the market.

Back then, Wen Qing had undergone pressure from her family, in terms of marrying Zong Qifeng. This was in exchange for the rescue of the Cheng family’s ancestral business. However, Wen Qing had been principally motivated to proceed with the deal, as she was eager to stay beside her child, taking care of it. She was willing to do so, even though she knew that the child would be unaware of her true identity.

She could not pretend to be unaware of this side of the story. She knew that she had no right to pass judgment over the deal. However, she was sure that the Wen family had gone overboard in the matter.

Instinctively, she held her hands tightly. Once her mind was made up, she would not regret her decision.

Lin Xinyan still felt like asking Aunt Yu more about Wen Qing.

She had worked in Wen family before and would surely know something about Wen Qing. Before she could open her mouth, Zhuang Zijin’s voice interrupted her.

“Yan.”

After Zhuang Zijin had bathed Lin Xichen, she put him to bed. The latter fell asleep almost immediately because of tiredness.

Zhuang Zijin wanted to have a word with her daughter. Seeing Lin Xinyan in the kitchen, Zhuang Zijin called upon the former.

Realizing Zhuang Zijin's intention, Lin Xinyan put down the unfinished apple and approached her mother. "Yes, mom."

"Follow me." Zhuang Zijin turned around to step into her room.

As soon as Lin Xinyan stepped in, Zhuang Zijin told her, "Close the door, please."

After closing the door, Lin Xinyan sat by the side of her mother's bed. "What is it that you want to talk about, mom?"

Zhuang Zijin kept holding her own hands. She did not know how to put it. She was also worried about her daughter's objection to what she would say to her.

"All this while away from home, how have you been getting along with him?" Zhuang Zijin calmed herself down before asking.

Lin Xinyan knew who her mother was referring to.

Coincidentally, Lin Xinyan also wanted her mother to know her decision. "I am getting along quite well with him. I have decided to stay with him."

"That's good." That was what Zhuang Zijin had wished for. "After all, he is the father of the twins. Maybe it is fated. After so many trying times, you two have finally come back to square one."

She had her marriage arranged while she was a child. By a twist of events, she had given birth to his children.

Maybe, it was all fated.

“Yan... “ Zhuang Zijin stopped with hesitation.

“Mom, go ahead and say what’s on your mind. I am your daughter and not some stranger.” Lin Xinyan held her mother’s hands tightly.

Zhuang Zijin stared at her daughter. She waited long enough to muster up the courage to speak her mind, “I have decided to remarry Lin Guoan.”

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Lin Xinyan was utterly shocked to hear what her mother had just disclosed.

Zhuang Zijin pulled her hand at once, "Yan... "

Lin Xinyan pushed her mother's hand away. She stood up and retreated from her mother. Her lips shivered with anger, "Have you forgotten that he had forced you to sign a divorce while you were pregnant? He then sent you overseas, not caring whether you could die or would live. You are telling me that you are prepared to remarry him?"

"Yes, I agree that he was very bad. But after so many years, he has mended his ways. He has frequently approached me, regretting what he had done..."

"And you believe him?" Lin Xinyan interrupted her mother angrily. She scratched her head in disbelief.

"Mom, how could you have fallen for his sweet talk? You must remember, he'd jilted you. He'd also jilted Shen Siuqing. He's just a heartless person. How could you believe his sweet words?"

Zhuang Zijin was unmoved. She lowered her head, "My decision is final."

Lin Xinyan leaned against the wall, staring at her mother. "So, this is what you'd wanted to inform me of today?"

"Sort of, yes!"

"I know that." Zhuang Zijin walked nearer to her daughter, intending to touch her daughter's hands. Nonetheless, her gesture was rejected, once again..

Lin Xinyan turned away, reluctant to look at her mother.

Zhuang Zijin withdrew her hands, fingers curving back in disappointment.
“Anyway, I have made my decision.”

There was no room for rebuttal. Lin Xinyan’s objection was uncompromising. This gave her mother no other option, “I am moving out today.”

“Why the rush?” Lin Xinyan was baffled. She could not stand her mother being so forgiving.

“Have you forgotten about Xinqi?” Though Lin Xinyan had loathed mentioning this name, she had hoped that it might persuade her mother to reconsider the matter.

Zhuang Zijin was overwhelmed with sadness upon hearing the mention of her deceased son. She could not forget him. It was for this reason that she had wanted to remarry Lin Guoan. It made her feel guilty towards Lin Xinyan.

“We have got our marriage certificate already,” continued Zhuang Zijin.

Lin Xinyan wiped her face and smiled with disappointment. “You have already made up your mind, haven’t you?” She took a deep breath, “As a daughter, I know that I have no right to criticize your decision. You should’ve at least asked for my opinion. After all, we have depended on each other for so many years.”

“I am sorry.” Zhuang Zijin had failed to come up with any other reason.

“You don’t have to apologize. This is your matter; it’s none of my business. Do what you like.” Disgusted, Lin Xinyan waved her hands in the air. She could not stay there anymore. She had feared that she would fall into a craze, saying offensive things.

“Yan...”

“That’s enough.” Lin Xinyan staggered out of her mother’s bedroom.

She could not accept Zhuang Zijin’s decision. In light of Zhuang Zijin’s firmness, she knew that there was nothing that she could do to change her mind.

There was a glass of plain water. She gulped it down, shivering upon its coolness. She remained baffled as to why her mother had decided as such.

You should have known that Lin Guoan is a surefire trap. Why are you still walking right into it?

“Why?” Lin Xinyan put her hands on the table to support her upper body that had begun to slant slightly.

She raised her head when she realized that someone was touching her shoulders.

“What happened?” Zong Jinghao queried as he wiped her tears.

His gesture had only caused her tears to profusely drop.

She turned around and planted her head into his chest. Her shoulders continuously shook uncontrollably.

Zong Jinghao caressed her back tenderly. Given her emotional condition, he simply could not find out what had happened.

Leaving her room, Zhuang Zijin saw them in the sitting room. She squinted. “Please take care of her for me.” After that, she quickly left, along with her baggage.

“Where are you going?” Zong Jinghao asked. It’s already late at night.

Zhuang Zijin did not respond. Lin Xinyan roared, “Let her go!”

Zhuang Zijin's eyes were swollen as if she had cried for a long time. She had made up her mind to leave.

"I've raised her since young; life has been difficult for her all these years. If you don't mind, please help me take good care of her."

"I don't need that." Lin Xinyan interrupted, eyes blurred with tears. "If you can still remember the difficult times we'd gone through, you won't be willing to remarry Lin Guoan! Since you have decided to patch up with him, why bother whether I live or die? Go ahead and enjoy yourself!"

With strong emotions, Lin Xinyan kept shivering.

Zong Jinghao held her tightly in his arms. "Calm down."

Seeing Lin Xinyan so emotionally agitated, Zhuang Zijin sighed. She turned around and walked out without a word.

When the door closed, Lin Xinyan cried fervently, "Is her mind blind or what?"

Zong Jinghao did not agree as he readily understood Zhuang Zijin's purpose in doing what she did.

Lin Xinyan was so emotionally worked up that he knew that whatever he said would simply fall on deaf ears.

He could only hold her in his arms to console her.

"I was ten years old then. He divorced my mother in order to appease his mistress. He sent us overseas, where we were left to fend for ourselves. He did not care about us. Now, just because of some sweet talk from Lin Guoan, she is going to remarry him. I just wonder how she could have forgotten all the hardships that she was made to endure? How could she forget this irresponsible man who has harmed her so?"

“She probably has her own view. Or there may be something that must be kept secret...”

“How could Lin Guoan have threatened her? Even so, she could have let us know.”

“You’re too emotional,” professed Zong Jinghao as he wiped the tears on her face. “You must calm down first.”

He immediately carried her upstairs and let her sit by the side of the bed. He went to prepare a hot bath for her. When the bathroom was filled with hot steam, he came out. “Go take a bath and relax. We can look for her later and discuss the matter further when everybody has calmed down. You risk making the matter worse, by being so emotional.”

Lin Xinyan looked up blankly with tears on her face. “Did I say something offensive just now?”

“No.” He combed her disheveled hair to the back of her head. “Listen, why don’t you take a bath and cool down. Get a night of good sleep. We can go talk to her later if you still think that she shouldn’t patch up with Lin Guoan.”

“While I was away, she applied for and obtained the official certificate in respect of her marriage with Lin Guoan.” Lin Xinyan looked teary-eyed again.

“Trust me. If your mother was under duress, I know how to cancel the marriage certificate.”

Tears were trapped in Lin Xinyan’s eyelashes. She blinked while putting her hands around his neck. Her tears dropped at once. “Are you serious?”