

CHAPTER 141 A HANDSOME YOUNG BOY

Jared didn't want to bother arguing with Debbie, so he changed the topic and said casually, "There is a poverty relief project to support the people in the Southon Village. Are you going to sign up for it?" If his memory served him right, Debbie was always enthusiastic about this sort of charity events.

"Yes! Of course, I'm going!" Debbie replied firmly. In the past, she didn't have much money, but she still actively participated in the charity activities. Now that Carlos had given her a large amount of money to spend as she wished, of course she would go and put that money to good use. 'I'll just be doing charity on his behalf, ' she thought to herself and she was okay with it as long as she could help others in need.

"I knew it!" Jared groaned. "But Southon Village is the poorest village in our country. The conditions there are awful. Besides, it's winter and the event will go on for at least a week. Are you sure you want to torture yourself by doing this?"

His words did scare Debbie a little. She hesitated, but when Carlos' face popped up in her mind, she gritted her teeth and said, "Yes, I'm sure. I've made up my mind."

Although Jared was dressed in a warm down jacket, he suddenly felt the whole world freeze after hearing her reply. A chill ran down his spine when he thought about accompanying Debbie to such a remote place where even a heater was a luxury. He couldn't help but pull his down jacket tighter around himself as his body trembled.

In the multimedia classroom

Kasie repeatedly shook her head in disbelief. "Tomboy, please. Please! Think about it. Are you even aware of how bad the conditions in the Southon Village are? Most of the people in the village speak the minority language which you don't understand. There will be no heater, not even an asphalt road to walk on, no shower..." She shuddered as she imagined being in such a place. "Gosh! Believe me! You'll turn into a complete mess after spending a few days there."

Echoing Kasie's words, Kristina nodded her head up and down and then glanced sympathetically at Jared, who looked visibly depressed now. From the expression on his face, Kristina knew that Jared was definitely planning to accompany Debbie in spite of his reluctance. Patting him on his shoulder, she praised him, "I admire your courage, Jared. I didn't know that you were actually this manly."

Unconvinced by her weak praise, Jared yelled, "Dixon, get a leash on your girlfriend and ask her to mind her words! What does she mean 'actually'? I've always been manly, okay?"

Dixon merely smiled and pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Then, he said in a calm voice, "Kasie. Kristina. You two needn't come along. Jared and I will go with Tomboy." Dixon was born in a small village and had lived there before he had come to the university. He was used to the hard life in the village, so it wasn't a big deal for him to spend a few days in the Southon Village.

With an apologetic look, Kasie patted Debbie on her hand and said in a mock serious tone, "Tomboy, as your best friend, I know that I should share weal and woe with you. However, this is a hardship you're begging to be in, so I'm not going to share it. Take care of yourself."

Debbie shrugged. She didn't mind. She had no intention of making Kasie and Kristina go with her. "I'll be okay with Jared and Dixon. The two of you can enjoy your winter vacation in peace."

After their discussion, Dixon wrote their names on the list, signing up for the activity. There were fifteen students who were taking part in the project in total, and four of them were from Debbie's class. Intrigued, Debbie looked at the fourth name—Gregory.

'Gregory...' she pondered. 'Isn't that the docile boy who took me back home when I was drunk that night?'

He looks like an indoor type. Why would he be interested in going to the Southon Village?'

She quickly scanned the classroom and her eyes met Gregory's.

Gregory flustered as they made eye contact. In a split second, he lowered his head and pretended to read his book. His face flushed bright red, but Debbie was too busy to notice it. She was marveling at his good-looking face. She pictured how charming Gregory would be if he dressed up like a hero in a historical soap opera. A lot of girls would fall for him.

'He is such a handsome young boy. He should be staying in a big city. Why would he want to go and do charity in Southon Village?'

Unable to hold back her curiosity, Debbie decided to go and ask him directly.

As she walked up to the row of seats in front of Gregory, she gestured to the girl in the seat and she immediately moved to another seat, making room for Debbie. Debbie casually sat down in front of Gregory and asked outright, "Gregory, are you going to go to Southon Village too?"

Closing his book, Gregory slightly nodded. "Yes. I'm free during that week." The truth was that he actually had something else to do during that week, but he chose to take part in the poverty relief project instead.

He knew Debbie's hobbies and he was sure that she would go.

Seeing Gregory nodding, Debbie suddenly felt that his face resembled someone she used to know. She searched her memories, but failed to identify the person.

Time flew by and it was soon the day of their departure to Southon Village. Wearing a black down jacket, a knitted hat that matched her clothes and a pair of white sneakers, Debbie showed up at the

high-speed rail station with Jared and Dixon. She was pulling Carlos' 26-inch black suitcase behind her.

When all her schoolmates were assembled, Debbie was shocked to see an unexpected person in their midst. She pointed at the masked boy who was dressed in black casual clothes and asked surprisingly, "Gus? You are coming too?"

Gus sneered. "What? Why are you bothered by it? Can't I go where I please?"

He kept it to himself the reason why he was there. The truth was that he was forced to sign up for the activity by his brother, Curtis. Curtis had told him that he should go along and protect the girls.

'Debbie is stronger than most men. She doesn't need my protection.

And even if she needed someone's protection, it shouldn't have to be me! She has nothing to do with me!' Gus cursed angrily.

Suspicious rose in his mind. He wondered why Curtis treated Debbie so well. 'Could it be possible that they are in some sort of relationship?' With that thought in mind, Gus stared at Debbie with contempt in his eyes.

His hostile attitude quickly got on Debbie's nerves. If he hadn't taken the initiative to talk to her on the playground, she wouldn't have said a word to him!

But Debbie didn't want to argue with a wimpy kid like him, so she rolled her eyes and turned around to leave. She spotted another interesting individual in the group and walked up to her. The girl was clearly pretending to be happy as she chatted away with the others. Debbie asked as she approached her, "Gail, does your mother know that you are on your way to Southon Village?"

Gail seethed with anger at Debbie's appearance. With her back against her other schoolmates, she ferociously glared at Debbie and cursed in a low voice, "Damn you! This is all because of you! Why do you have to do this goddamn charity? My father forced me to go and I am supposed to learn from you! Are you insane?"

'Who would willingly want to stay in such a remote and poor village for a whole week? There's something wrong with her pitiful brain, ' Gail thought.

Hearing Gail's words, Debbie instantly understood the situation. She nodded happily and said, "I think my uncle did it for your own good. You haven't gone through any hardship in your life. It's good for a rich lady like you to experience some hard life from time to time."

Gail wanted to vent out her anger on Debbie at that very moment. But since there were other schoolmates around, Gail had to pretend to be an elegant and well-educated lady. So she walked closer to Debbie and grabbed her arm with a fake smile. In a loud voice, she said, "Yes, you're right! I've brought so much snack food with me. I'll be giving it to the children there. By the way, what are you

going to give the children, Debbie?"

"Money." The school had already sent the donated clothes and daily supplies to Southon Village. Debbie didn't think it was necessary to bring more of that for them. But with a little money, they could at least buy something they wanted most. She had brought something else too. But she wasn't going to tell Gail that!

Gail's smile froze on her face. She ridiculed Debbie, "You think you have enough money to spend on charity? And what makes you think that money has any use there? In a remote mountain area like that, what can you buy even if you have money?"

Shaking off Gail's arm, Debbie walked a few steps away and said coldly, "That's none of your business. Remember not to drag the whole team down with you."

Among the fifteen students, ten were boys and the other five were girls. Debbie knew most of them, except two or three students. She usually met them at school and sometimes greeted them on the campus.

So she was excited about going with all of them. 'It's like going on a trip with friends!'

At Southon Village

Jumping off the bus, Debbie quickly ran to the edge of the road and began retching.

CHAPTER 142 REBUKED BY GUS

To get to the Southon Village, Debbie and her schoolmates had first taken a two-hour ride on a high-speed train. Then they transferred to a bus, which took them seven hours. By the time they arrived, it was already dark. The bus had bumped all the way along the rugged mountain roads, jolting the passengers on it badly. Debbie never had carsickness, but this time, she couldn't help but feel dizzy. She bent down on the roadside and retched a few times, but didn't vomit.

A few of her schoolmates had begun vomiting as soon as they got off the bus.

The pungent smell of vomit and the disgusting sight of it only made things worse for Debbie. Just when she felt she was safe, her stomach churned violently, and in one loud retch she threw up.

Dixon opened the lid off his water bottle and handed it to Debbie to wash her mouth. "There's no hot water right now. Just take a few sips of this bottle of water first," he said.

Debbie took the bottle and rinsed the taste out of her mouth with the water. Now that she felt much better, she was finally in a mood to appreciate the scenery.

As they stood up high and looked around, the students could see the small village in the distance—dozens of houses lined up at the foot of the mountain. Most of the houses were smallish one-storey

houses, with the tallest standing only three-storey up.

Still feeling exhausted from the journey, Debbie stretched herself. It was refreshing to finally breathe the clean air of the countryside.

But the biggest problem was... the piercing coldness in the mountain area.

A gust of cold wind blew over, threatening to freeze them into icy stumps sticking out of permafrost.

Although they all came in warm clothing, they were not prepared for biting cold. The girls soon began to complain. Even some of the boys found it worse than they had expected.

Once the villagers learnt of the students' arrival, many of them, especially children, stood at the entrance of the village to welcome the group. As Debbie and her schoolmates walked towards the villagers, they were shocked to realize that the children's faces and hands were turning red from exposure while they waited. And it really gripped Debbie's heart that the kids wore old, worn-out cotton clothes, which were far from enough to keep them warm in such harsh weather. Worse still, some of the children wore thin, baldly beaten shoes.

With wide eyes, the children stared curiously at the visitors from the big city. Expectation and eagerness to learn about the outside world were obvious on their faces.

Behind the children, there stood a group of old or middle-aged women, wearing genuine, welcoming smiles on their tanned faces. They raised their gnarled hands and waved enthusiastically.

The scene moved most of the students close to tears. Born and brought up in affluence, they were jolted, coming face to face with such abject poverty for the very first time.

Even though they had already mentally prepared themselves before they came, the squalid living conditions here were way too unsettling.

The donated relief supplies would arrive at the village tomorrow, so the students would start their work from tomorrow. After greeting the students, the village head led them to the host families, where they would spend the night.

Since there were fifteen students in total, they were assigned into smaller groups for accommodation in different villagers' houses. And some were in individual rooms. When Debbie saw the room that was arranged for her, she gave a helpless sigh.

But she didn't want to complain, because she had seen Jared's and Dixon's rooms too. Compared to their rooms, hers was much better. The conditions were indeed terrible. The room was simple with only a wooden bed, a rickety table, a chair, a broken desk and an old wardrobe. Everything was seen at a glance.

The only thing to comfort Debbie was that there was a new and clean set of bedding. She counted herself lucky for that.

It was getting darker outside. After dropping off their own luggage at their different rooms, the group gathered at the village head's house and had dinner together.

The village head had prepared enough food for the guests. On the long table, various dishes were served, everything from fresh farm ingredients. There was rabbit meat, turkey, pork and fish. All generously provided by farmers across the village. Although the dishes didn't look all that decorated, the aroma aroused Debbie's appetite.

After a moment of hesitation, Gregory finally picked his chopsticks and took a bite. But the other girls sat still, sipping at their cups of hot tea, to get some warmth. Gus and Jared, both born into aristocracy, kept killing time by playing games on their phones, without even lifting their chopsticks. Debbie couldn't help but nudge Jared, and persuaded in a hushed voice, "Jared, eat something. Show some respect to the villagers!"

Debbie knew sacrifice it must have taken the women who volunteered to prepare the meals. 'The villagers would find it insulting, if we don't eat, ' she thought.

Reluctantly, Jared pursed his lips, put his phone aside and grabbed his chopsticks to pick a few slices of meat.

However, Gus didn't care. He remained glued to his phone. Unimpressed by his aloofness, Debbie rolled her eyes, but she didn't want to wheedle him.

As the team leader, Dixon, realized it was incumbent on him to address Gus' indifference and maybe discourage anyone who might have similar thoughts. So when all the villagers went outside, he rose up to speak. "Hey, guys, listen to me! The villagers have devoted a lot of effort to prepare this meal for us. Maybe these foods are not good enough for you guys, but for them, these are the best. Probably, they will only have the chance to enjoy such a big meal once a year, on New Year. So let's be considerate enough, just like what Debbie said. Eat some and show respect to the villagers, okay?"

After Dixon's words, all the students obeyed him and began eating the food, except one person...

Once more, Debbie rolled her eyes. But she came up with an idea. "Dixon, do we have anything to charge our phones tonight?" she asked. Maybe that would distract Gus.

Dixon instantly understood what Debbie meant to say. "No," he answered, his gaze fixed on Gus.

Earlier when they dropped off their luggage, all of their attention was on how bad the living conditions were, so nobody noticed whether there was any socket in the room or not. Thus, when everyone heard Dixon's answer, they woke up to another unpleasant reality. That was an inconvenience to their digital lifestyles.

But right then, the village head and the other villagers came in with some pots of wine in their hands. Seeing them coming in, the students had to suppress their complaints and quietly ate the food again.

Still twiddling his fingers on the phone, Gus squinted at Debbie. "Stupid!" he spat out.

Obsessed with his phone as he was, he had taken the time to check if there was a socket in his room, and to his relief, there was. So he could play on his phone all he wanted without worries on where to recharge.

Since Gus would not budge, Debbie took out her phone and texted him. "If you don't eat the food, I'll call Mr. Loftus," she wrote.

Before she came here, Curtis had given Gus' phone number to her, just in case they needed to contact each other for the time they'd be posted in the village. Curtis had also told her that if she had any trouble, she could ask Gus for help.

When Gus saw the message from Debbie, he shot an incredulous glance at her, just in time to catch her returning the phone back into her pocket. "I've never seen such an annoying woman!" Gus cursed.

His voice wasn't that loud but was enough to be heard by their schoolmates. As Gus' eyes were fixated at Debbie, everyone instantly understood who the annoying woman was in his mouth.

The villagers were preparing the wine at one side so they didn't hear it. Gail and the other girls chuckled under their breaths.

What had Debbie done to earn his rebuke? Was it something major that Gus would carry the disagreement back to school?

Unimpressed by Gus' behavior so far, Jared put down his chopsticks and wanted to retort. But Debbie grabbed his wrist and stopped him. "Never mind. Go on with your meal," she persuaded.

At least, Debbie's message had gotten home. Feeling pressured, Gus had already taken his chopsticks and begun to take a bite of the food. As such, Debbie thought it was unnecessary to let Jared join the argument.

Yet, a question suddenly rose in her heart. She didn't understand why Curtis had to ask Gus to come with her.

In the middle of the meal, the village head's wife came to the dinner table after finishing her housework. A student stood up and politely ceded his seat to her. But she shook her head and chose to sit next to Debbie.

As Debbie was relishing the special flavor of the peach blossom wine made by the villagers, she finally

got to know why the village head's wife chose to sit next to her. She realized that she was specially treated by the village head's wife. The woman happily greeted in her local dialect and proceeded to add more food onto Debbie's plate.

Although Debbie didn't understand her language, she could feel the hospitality in her tone and suppressed the urge to stop the woman from adding food onto her plate.

Seeing how the two got along so well, Jared said jokingly whether the village head's wife wanted Debbie to stay and marry her son. Debbie would probably have a dotting mother-in-law.

Amidst amused giggles, everyone's eyes turned to Debbie, who pretended offense at Jared's joke.

After dinner, the village head took them to attend a campfire party. The bone chilling cold on the way made them yearn for the bonfire so much that when they finally arrived, they couldn't hide their excitement.

A group of young boys and girls dressed in cultural costumes were on the site to entertain their visitors with dance and song. Beaming with glee, they greeted and invited the students to dance together.

Debbie joined the dancing group too. On her left hand was a pretty girl dressed in a yellow cultural costume; while on her right hand was the handsome son of the village head, also dressed in a cultural costume and a large woven hat on his head.

The young man and a few of the young villagers had basic compulsory education, so they at least had enough conversational fluency in standard Mandarin to have chit chat with the students. It was sheer fun to finally have locals to talk to, ask questions and learn about the culture.

After the campfire party, Debbie went back to her room, feeling thoroughly entertained. But she shivered in cold again when she went back to her room. In a few minutes, without washing her face, she quickly went to her bed.

CHAPTER 143 THE WARM BED

"Rat-a-tat-tat." Debbie was startled by a sudden knock at the door. It was already well past her usual sleeping time and she wondered who could it be at this ungodly hour. She had just unzipped her down jacket. She had no choice but to zip it up again.

"Who is it?" she called out.

"Young girl, it's me." It sounded like the voice of the village head's wife.

Her guess was right. When Debbie opened the door, she saw the village head's wife and her handsome son standing outside.

The woman smiled pleasantly on seeing Debbie and asked, "Young girl, did I wake you?"

Debbie shook her head. "No, it's okay. I hadn't slept yet. Is everything okay?" she answered, confused as to why these two were paying her a visit at night.

The woman turned towards her son. He immediately lifted up something from the ground and handed it to Debbie. "This is our electric warming fan. My mother and I have brought it to you so that you don't get cold," he told her coyly.

"But...no... I can't take this. This is too generous." Debbie was deeply moved. As far as she knew, there was not even a water heater in the village. How on earth did they manage to procure an electric warming fan for her?

She didn't want to prove a burden to anyone, but the village head's wife was having none of it and straightforwardly asked her son to carry the fan into Debbie's room. Before Debbie knew how and what, the boy had already plugged the fan into a socket and the room was filled with the slight hum of its motor.

"Thank you so much! But if I keep the fan in my room, what about you? You'll be cold at night without it," Debbie protested, though she wasn't entirely ungrateful. If she had guessed right, then this might have been the only electric warming fan in the whole village.

With a genuine smile, the woman responded, "We're used to this weather, young girl, but you've come from the big city. You can't fall asleep at night without it. Please sleep tight. We should get going now!"

Then, she held her son's hand and they left together, leaving Debbie to her confused thoughts.

With the warming fan on, the room was soon filled with a warm ambiance. Sitting at the edge of the bed in her thoughts, Debbie even forgot to lie down.

She was confused. 'Why does the village head's wife treat me so well? Is Jared's joke true? Does she really want me to stay and marry her son? Truth be told, her son is quite handsome. But...I'm married. I have Carlos. If that's why this whole special-treatment-thing is going on, I'm afraid their wish can't come true, and it's got to stop, ' she mused.

As it turned out, she couldn't be farther from the truth. This was proven when she went to get some hot water.

It wasn't only the village head's wife who was treating her so well. Debbie found that almost every person of the village who was a part of her life at the moment was being very kind. Even the owner of the house which she was staying in gave her special care. When she walked out of her bedroom and told the hostess that she wanted some hot water, the hostess immediately brought three thermoses to her bedroom.

That wasn't the only thing she did. Earlier, she had prepared a new basin and a clean towel for Debbie

too. At the moment, Debbie hadn't thought too much about these new things, because she believed that all the other schoolmates had the same things as hers.

The notion was broken rather abruptly when after washing her face and wiping her body, she slipped into the bed again. Much to her surprise, the bed didn't feel cold. And the fan couldn't have warmed the bed; it was too low for that.

Debbie sat up and took a careful look. It wasn't until now that she noticed there was an electric blanket on her bed. And moreover, someone had turned it on in advance, so it was already warm enough now.

A suspicion rose inside her heart again. Unable to hold back her curiosity, she took out her phone and texted Jared and Dixon. She asked cautiously, "Hey guys! Do you two feel cold in your rooms?"

After waiting for a long while, she received Jared's reply. "Of course we feel cold Deb! I couldn't bear it so I've come to sleep in the same bed with Dixon."

Before Debbie could return him a message, she received a voice message from Jared. "Dude, what the fuck! It is such a cold weather here and I'm freezing to death. What's more, that jerk Dixon asked me to stay in the quilt to warm the bed for him. I'm so pissed!

But I need to stay with someone to keep warm when I sleep, so I have no choice but to tolerate that guy." Though her friends were cold, Debbie couldn't help bursting into a guilty laughter.

She could vaguely hear Dixon's complaint in the background of the voice message and it was really comical. "Jared, are you a snake? Why is the bed still so cold? You've stayed in it for a long while!"

Judging from their words, Debbie was sure that they didn't have an electric blanket.

'Am I the only one who has it?' she wondered. To confirm her guess, she texted Gail too. She couldn't sleep right now anyway if she couldn't figure the whole thing out. She wrote, "Gail, are you asleep?"

Soon enough, she received Gail's voice message. They were all too cold to type with their thumbs. "Is that really a question? It's so cold in this bad place. How the hell am I supposed to fall asleep? I shouldn't have brought snacks for the kids. I should have brought something to keep myself warm, such as an electric blanket. I don't even want to get on this cold bed..."

Debbie paused. After all, Gail was her cousin. Debbie didn't want her to catch a cold or get some serious illness, so she returned a message. "If you can't withstand it, how about you come to my room and we sleep together?"

After waiting for about two minutes, Debbie received Gail's reply. This time, she had resorted to text. "No way! I will never sleep in the same bed with you! Who knows what your body smells like! Not a chance. Damn! What a bad place here! I can't even find an electric blanket anywhere."

'I have bad smell? Fine! Then just stay in your cold bed!' Debbie angrily repeated Gail's sentence in exasperation. She didn't care about her anymore and decided to sleep.

The next day, the first batch of donated supplies had arrived at the Southon Village. Therefore, Debbie and her schoolmates assembled at a small school and began to distribute the supplies to each household. The supplies were numerous and by the time they were finished, it was already dark. One day had elapsed quickly.

During the course of her interactions, Debbie also met a few children who didn't have parents and were being raised by their grandparents. She silently gave some money to the grandparents of these families.

One of the children's grandmother was so grateful that she even knelt down in front of Debbie, which startled her, and she quickly lifted the old woman up from the ground. It would have been a touching scene, but Debbie didn't feel comfortable with someone in her feet.

On the third day, since the second batch of the donated supplies hadn't arrived, the fifteen university students took turns to give classes to the kids there. They shared a lot of things with the kids that they had never heard due to the poor education conditions there. They also sang a lot of popular songs for the kids.

The shabby classroom had become noisy. A lot of villagers had also come to the school and were even standing outside since there wasn't enough space inside. With keen pleasure, they listened to Debbie and Jared singing songs and then listened to Dixon and Gregory telling stories. Everything the students talked about was new and interesting to the villagers.

On the morning of the fourth day, the second batch of supplies arrived. There were new cotton shoes and clothes in this batch. The university students helped the kids wash their feet and then asked them to try on the new shoes.

Debbie didn't have any mission this afternoon, so she silently went to the yard behind the school on her own. She wanted a breath of fresh air for as long as she could have one. Earlier, she had told the village head's son to help her send out a few postcards. 'Have Kasie and the others received my postcards yet?' she wondered.

She had just sat down on a big rock and taken out her phone which had no signal, when a person suddenly showed up in front of her, blocking the cool sunlight.

She raised her head and found that it was Gus.

He was staring at her without saying a word. Debbie looked around and found nobody else here. Confused, she asked, "What do you want?"

Gus kept his eyes on her without responding.

Debbie got goose bumps by his gaze. "Dammit. Hey, you're a man and I'm a woman. Don't stare at me that way. I'm scared..."

Gus rolled his eyes at her. He snorted, "You're as stupid as all the others!"

Debbie was rendered speechless. What did he want? 'Is he here to stir up some new trouble for me?' she thought.

With that in mind, Debbie put her phone back and stood up from the big rock. She was about to leave but Gus stopped her. "What's going on between you and Carlos?" Gus had happened to overhear someone's words. Whoever it was, the person had said that Carlos demanded people here give special care to Debbie.

With Carlos' name being mentioned, Debbie turned around and spat out, "Wimpy kid, just mind your own business and don't poke your big nose where it doesn't belong."

'What? Wimpy kid? Me?'

Gus' face darkened. If Debbie weren't a woman, he would surely have punched her black and blue now.

After Debbie had walked away, Gus immediately texted his brother. "Curtis, Debbie called me wimpy kid! How dare she do that? I need to go back to Alorith now. Arrange for someone to pick me up. I don't want to take that goddamn bus again!"

The signal was really bad in the village, and Gus had to try several times before the message went through.

A few moments later, Gus received Curtis' reply with only a few words. "Debbie is right. Just stay there."

Gus was angry at his cold response. He wondered why his brother always sided with Debbie.

He was sure that Curtis loved Colleen, so there shouldn't have been any untoward relationship between Curtis and Debbie. 'When I return home, I need to ask my father if they mistook me and Debbie when we were born. Could it be possible that Debbie is their biological daughter and I'm the wrong one?'

There were several times when Gus felt like Debbie was Curtis' real younger sister and he himself was the one who had been adopted to protect Debbie.

CHAPTER 144 GREGORY, A DOCILE PUP

Avoiding Gus, Debbie found a quiet corner and sat down, looking blankly into the distance. She was immersed in deep thoughts. 'What's Carlos doing right now? I've been away for a few days. Has he been missing me?'

Since she was on a trip far away from the city, Debbie had left her diamond ring behind.

"Debbie."

Her train of thoughts was interrupted by a voice again and she snapped back into reality.

Debbie turned to look at the person and gave him a friendly smile. "Hi, Gregory." Gregory had helped her several times in the past few days and she felt the need to be polite to him though she did want to stay alone and allow herself to indulge in Carlos' memories.

Gregory sat down next to Debbie. "Why are you sitting here alone? Are you feeling cold?" he asked in a concerned tone.

"No, I'm okay."

She thought about her quarrel with Carlos a few days ago, so she wasn't in the mood to talk much. Gregory was a man of few words, so he didn't know what to say next either. Awkward silence filled the air.

He unwittingly stole glances at Debbie, who had loneliness written all over her face. Finally, he broke the silence and asked, "Debbie, you look upset. What happened?"

"Oh...Um... It's nothing, really." Not knowing how to explain what had happened, Debbie gave him an embarrassed smile and then suggested quickly, "Let's go and find the others!" Being alone with someone who had nothing in common with her made Debbie feel uncomfortable.

Gregory stood still, watching his favorite girl walk away from him. He had a lot of questions for her, but they were all stuck in his throat.

He wanted to ask her about her relationship with Carlos. But he knew that he wasn't in a position to ask such a private question. Left with no choice, he hurried to catch up with her to find their other schoolmates.

On their way, they bumped into Gail, who was complaining to another girl about how dirty the village was. She was telling the girl that she was afraid of catching some infectious disease.

Debbie had been hearing Gail's constant complaint ever since the day they had arrived at Southon Village. Every time she felt like rambling, she would complain to the same girl. But in front of others, she would pretend to be tender and sweet.

And once again, Debbie got to witness Gail's instant change in character. A boy approached Gail and called her name while she was talking to the other girl. She instantly stopped wearing her long face. Forcing a tender smile, she turned around and said, "Hello, Tim. What's up?"

The boy named Tim sheepishly handed a hot-water bag to Gail and said, "Hi, Gail...Um... I filled this bag

with hot water for you. Please use it and keep warm." His heart ached when he saw Gail's reddened face due to the cold.

Gail accepted his kindness with a sweet smile. Tilting her head down shyly, she took the hot-water bag from Tim. He jogged away with his face flushing red.

As soon as the boy was out of sight, Gail looked at the bag in her hands with contempt in her eyes. Debbie noticed it.

She wanted to reveal Gail's true face to everyone so badly. Yet, she held back her anger. There were times that she felt helpless. If she and Gail were to be really considered as enemies, then Debbie would have lost the game the moment they had been born.

Since Debbie was the elder cousin, she had to concede to Gail no matter what.

And taking into consideration her uncle and aunt, Debbie just couldn't get even with Gail, no matter how bad her behavior was. She sighed inwardly and then walked up to her. "Wow! It's so nice to be such a beauty. You even get hot-water bags from your dear classmates."

Gail snorted at Debbie's teasing. "Of course, I do. But what about you? Does a tomboy like you get anything at all from anyone? Boys never treat you well and now even Gus hates you to the bone."

As she was taunting Debbie, she caught a glimpse of Gregory tagging along with her. A pang of jealousy stung her heart. She wondered why there were so many men around a tomboy like Debbie. Did all of the men have such bad taste in women? Shifting her gaze from Gregory to Debbie, Gail mocked, "You usually have a stupid puppet in tow, and now there is a weak lamb following you around. Debbie, where did you find such men of low qualities?"

'A stupid puppet? Is she referring to Jared? Then the weak lamb must be... Gregory?' Debbie thought and looked at the emotionless Gregory for a moment.

A retort was on the tip of Debbie's tongue, but Gregory forestalled her. Without even sparing a glance at Gail, he said, "Being a tomboy means that the girl has a cute, honest and forthright personality. She is what she appears to be. And it's better to be a stupid puppet or a weak lamb than be a hypocritical bitch. Some people appear to be innocent and tender on the surface, but deep inside, they are dirty and vicious. I could never regard that sort of person as a human being."

Unlike the shy and quiet boy that Debbie was used to, Gregory was now provoking Gail aggressively. Even though he didn't spell out Gail's name, everyone knew clearly who the hypocritical bitch he was referring to.

His words irritated Gail and stunned Debbie. Debbie had thought that Gregory was like a cute, docile pup which would never bite anyone. But now, he wasn't just biting. He was viciously tearing someone apart. Debbie had never seen Gregory this way, and she was taken aback.

With her teeth clenched tight, and her face flushing red in anger, Gail pointed at Gregory with a trembling finger, unable to utter a single word. It took her a moment to find her voice again. "You...You! How dare you say that I'm not a human being!"

Gregory smirked. "Gail, I never said that I was talking about you. Don't get me wrong. Or do you actually think that you are one of those people I was talking about?"

"You...You..." Her voice trailed off.

Gail was seething in anger, while Gregory stayed calm. Seeing the exchange between them, Debbie burst into laughter. She walked closer to Gregory and whispered in his ear, "Gregory, thank you for the compliment.

But this girl is my cousin. Could you let her go, please?" Gregory was suddenly lost in a trance as he breathed in her scent and gazed at her delicate face. He couldn't say anything in return.

Hearing no response from him, Debbie misinterpreted his expression and thought that he was angry with her too. Embarrassed, she stepped back and stood at a distance from him.

Her gesture snapped Gregory back to his senses. Recalling what Debbie had asked, he said in a haste, "Rest assured, Debbie. I'm not petty enough to try and get even with a girl. I'm going back now."

He quickly turned around and ran into the courtyard of one of the villager's house.

Soon after Gregory left, Jared showed up and slowly walked towards her. With obvious worry in his eyes, he shouted, "Debbie, where have you been? I've been looking all over for you since noon. Why are you just standing here? Aren't you cold? There's a stove inside the house. Come and warm yourself up."

Debbie sniffled lightly. She felt touched by what all her friends did for her.

Gregory had defended her in front of Gail and now Jared was worried about her health. But somewhere in her heart, she felt like something was lacking. She wondered what it was.

But she soon realized what she had been missing.

When Debbie was close enough to him, Jared whispered, "Hey, I got some interesting news for you. Carlos had apparently arranged for someone to tell the village head to give you special care. Did you know about this? Okay, no need to answer that. I just saw a huge question mark pop up on your face. You had no idea, did you? Your husband is really warm and caring." Jared was so envious of Debbie at that moment. She had received some electric appliances to keep warm at night, but he had nothing. He only had a man to sleep together with in the same bed to keep warm, yet, the man wouldn't allow Jared to hug him.

Debbie blinked her eyes, unable to process the information. "Who told you this?" She had no idea at all. She couldn't believe that Carlos' influence could reach such a remote village.

CHAPTER 145 IF A BEAR MAULED ME TO DEATH

"I heard it from the village head!" Jared replied. He had gone to the village head's house in an attempt to get an electric warming fan or at least, an electric blanket. Much to his disappointment, he hadn't gotten anything. Perhaps, the only thing to help him keep warm now would be wine, which thankfully, their hosts had supplied in plenty. So he joined the village head for a drink with the accompaniment of some hearty talks. But the elder was no heavy drinker. Only a few glasses down and he dropped the guard, turning into a blabbermouth.

In between his juicy tales, he let slip to Jared that someone had requested the villagers to give special care to Debbie. Although he didn't know who that person was, he remembered someone mentioned about a name "Carlos".

From the village head's words, Jared could put two and two together. The surname Hilton was a rare name, and even across the city, there was only one "Carlos" whose influence could reach a remote village like the Southon Village.

Touched by Carlos' gesture, Debbie flashed a sweet smile. But she didn't want to admit the happiness exploding in her heart. Instead she faked a retort to Jared. "No, I don't think the village head was telling the truth."

"Oh, really? But I can see you smiling from ear to ear. Why don't you just admit that you're on cloud nine now?" Jared teased.

Debbie turned around and glared at him. "Just go and do night running. It will help you keep warm!"

'Do night running? No way! I would rather stay under the quilt, though I have to tolerate Dixon, ' he thought.

In Alorith, by the time Carlos came back, Debbie had already been away for about three days. She had left without giving him a phone call, not even sending him a message.

Sulking silently, he took out his phone and called Curtis. "Have they arrived there?"

"Yes, they arrived safely, although my brother lamented the living conditions. Seems a little seedy over there," said Curtis on the other end of the phone. 'His brother? Gus?'

Closing his eyes tight, Carlos said in a stern tone, "It serves her right. She made her own bed." 'She didn't even ask for my opinion before deciding. I didn't know it until the name-list was submitted to the school, ' he thought to himself.

"Rest assured. I've done as per your instructions and asked the people there to take good care of her.

I've also sent Gus there to protect her. I know you feel bad, but it's only a few more days and she'll be back." Curtis understood what was going on in Carlos' mind.

Carlos wasn't convinced that Gus could be of any help. "Do you think I can bank on your unreliable brother for anything meaningful?" he asked. If he hadn't known that Gus had shown no interest in women in the past 22 years and had been suspected to be gay, he wouldn't have agreed Curtis to send Gus there to help Debbie.

The sharp manner of Carlos' question left Curtis doubtful. He paused for a moment and then replied, "Well, anyway, he's a man. Somehow, I believe, he can protect the girl should the need arise. Besides, Jared and Dixon went along with Debbie. So just rest assured."

'Rest assured?' There was no reason for Carlos to be distressed that she might suffer some harm. If anything, he was pretty sure she'd be just fine. But how would she cope with the other inconveniences of the trip?

It was not until she set out for the Southon Village that he learned about the dismal living conditions there. It seemed like a village abandoned by the government, with virtually no basic infrastructure.

'For three whole days of her stay there, she hasn't bothered to call me. Not even once! I think I should just let her be. Why should I care after all?' Carlos was angry at the thought.

Yet much as pretended not to give a damn, for the three days of her absence, everybody around him could sense his palpable anxiety. For fear of getting on his wrong side, they went about work with caution.

Now, seeing Carlos' deadpan face made Emmett shudder in fear. He knew his boss must be in an extremely terrible mood. Before he followed Carlos to the company offices, he took out his phone and secretly sent a message to the WeChat Group consisting of his colleagues. He wrote, "My dear fellows, attention please! A 'volcano' is on the verge of erupting! Anyone who doesn't want to die, please mind your steps and don't step on our CEO's toes!"

So, when Carlos arrived at the company building, all the staff tried their best to stay away from him after greetings.

Nonetheless, even after Emmett's kind warning, there were still a few managers who were unluckily caught by Carlos and given a tongue lashing.

The next day, the air in the CEO's office still felt heavy and oppressive. Standing next to Carlos, Emmett wished the ground under him would magically open up and swallow him to save him from this demon. But he knew he had to finish reporting to his boss no matter how much he wanted to escape. "Ca... Carlos, Debbie is having... a good time with...a minority young boy..." 'The young boy is quite handsome!' Emmett thought in his mind.

He continued, "Carlos... Debbie is dancing with that young boy."

"Um...Ca... Carlos... Debbie is taking a walk with that young boy."

On the third day, everyone in the meeting room held their breaths. They couldn't utter a wrong word, because they could feel the dangerous aura around their boss.

When Emmett saw a postcard, he finally felt a hope. 'Oh! The senior executives and managers of the Hilton Group finally can be saved!' Emmett exclaimed in his mind.

For the first time, as the CEO's personal assistant, Emmett rushed into the meeting room without even knocking at the door.

Carlos' cold voice came. "Emmett, what are you laughing? You have a good mood? Then how about I send you to the remotest place in the world to study the market there?"

Under everyone's curious and nervous gaze, Emmett mustered up his courage and walked toward Carlos.

Carlos' cold voice came to a sudden stop when Emmett handed him a postcard.

He took it and had a better look. On it was a picture of a beautiful landscape. There were words written on its back. "Carlos, this is my second day in the Southon Village. Have you come back from your business trip? I'm freezing to death but you haven't given me one single call. I hate you!

Carlos, I'm still so angry with you. It is just that this postcard is very beautiful so I sent it to you on a whim. Then again, I think I'd better write a few words on it to jolt you out of your arrogance.

Carlos, I said I missed you, but why haven't you said anything back? Do you still love me? Fine, if your answer is no, then I'll stay in the Southon Village for the rest of my life. That way, you can enjoy your time with Megan or Olga. No one will ever stop you from doing whatever you wish.

Carlos, the village head's son is very handsome and his mother treats me really well. I'm moved. What should I do? But when I remember that your mother treats me even better, I'm left at crossroads. How can I forget you, even if it's only on Mom's account?

Anyway, the children here are really cute. I've given some of your money to them in secret. Will you get angry with me? Some of them are orphans. If you still love me, how about we adopt one from them? I won't need to experience the pain of giving birth to a baby. But...if there is a chance that you want a baby of our own and you still love me, then I'll consider giving birth to a baby for you!

Carlos, there is no more blank space for me to write anything on. I'll stop now. Take care! But just if you don't need me anymore, I'll be OK with it. You shouldn't let it bother whether I'll be bored to death or freeze into a cold pillar, planted on permafrost. It shouldn't disturb you even if a bear mauled me to a

horrific, painful death.

Written from a poor girl who will be bored to death, freeze into a cold pillar and be mauled to death by a bear."

Finally, she signed off. "Date: Unclear. (I forgot to charge my phone. It's already out of power. I don't know the exact date, nor do I want to ask anyone. That's it! Goodbye!)"

From top to bottom, she had written on every single inch of the postcard, as if it was a novel she intended to write.

Seeing the thin smile on the corners of Carlos' lips, Emmett heaved a sigh of relief, as if a burden had been lifted off his shoulder.

For a moment, he assumed that the postcard would restore calm to the office, but unexpectedly, Carlos angrily threw the postcard on the table and demanded, "Who allowed you to open my letters?"

The smile on Emmett's face froze. "Carlos... Carlos... but you..." Emmett felt wronged. It was him and Tristan who had been handling Carlos' letters in the company all the time.

But he swore that he hadn't read the content of this postcard when he noticed the name was "a poor girl". He knew it was from Debbie, so he immediately hurried to the meeting room and handed it to Carlos.

Out of the blue, Carlos stood up from his seat and announced, "This project is well planned and very creative. The Planning Department has done a good job and everyone in the department can get a bonus equal to your monthly wage." He then turned to Emmett and instructed, "Emmett, ask the directors of the charity foundations to come and discuss about the investment."

There were some non-governmental charity foundations under the Hilton Group. Emmett instantly understood what Carlos was going to do.

'Ask the directors to come and discuss about the investment? Oh, if I'm guessing right, Carlos is going to invest in the development of the Southon Village!' he thought excitedly.

CHAPTER 146 LOVE LETTER

When Carlos left the meeting room, he took along with him the postcard that had magically changed his mood. As soon as he stepped out of the room, noisy sighs of relief filled the space; some executives almost cried out gratefully, especially the planning department.

"Phew! Thank God! We survived!" one of them exclaimed. "Not just that! Each of us gets twice our pay this month! Isn't this great?" someone responded excitedly.

Back in his office, sitting leisurely in his chair, Carlos couldn't help but re-read the words on the back of

the postcard. Before he knew it, a smile had appeared on his face.

When he had finally savored the words long enough, he opened a folder on his desk and carefully put the postcard in the middle of it. It was made of poor quality paper, but it was his treasure nevertheless.

'Looks like this woman has started to take the initiative, ' he thought.

In Southon Village

It was getting dark. Debbie was jogging when she heard some noise ahead of her, which sounded like two people were having sex.

It was awkward, so she stopped her run and stayed away from them.

The reception was usually awful in the village. Unfortunately, she got signals at the spot she was at that moment and her phone started buzzing in her pocket. It was on vibration, so it didn't disturb the couple.

She hid behind a big tree to take care of the call. Panting for breath, she took out her phone and saw the familiar number.

Tears threatened to roll out of her eyes. 'This grumpy, hateful man! He has finally decided to call me!' she thought, gratified and angry. After wiping her moist eyes, she swiped her finger on the screen to answer the call, but she did not speak first. Their stupid fight was still fresh in her mind. "What are you doing?"

Carlos asked when she refused to say anything. His tone was flat. There was neither rage nor affection.

Debbie was mad because she was disappointed. This wasn't the attitude she had been expecting from him. She wanted to throw a tantrum, but she couldn't find a good excuse. "Having fun," she said, after a long pause.

Despite her sullen tone and short answer, Carlos smiled when he heard her voice. "I got it," he said.

"Huh?" She was perplexed. 'Got what?'

"The love letter you wrote me."

'What? What love letter? I never wrote him any love letter. This fact-twisting capitalist!' Blushing, she corrected him, "It wasn't a letter. It was a postcard." She wouldn't write him a love letter and embarrass herself.

The village head's son had given her some postcards with the landscape of the village on them. She filled the little space with her scribble and had asked the young man to help her send them. Since the village was so remote, she was surprised that Carlos had even received the postcard.

But for Carlos, that postcard was a love letter from her, whether she admitted it or not.

Unwilling to be fixated on such a trifling matter, he moved on. "How are you doing these days?" he asked, his voice full of concern.

Debbie turned her head to listen to the two lovebirds who seemed to have gotten more passionate. 'It's freezing cold outside. Why do they have to do it here? These people are so freaking weird.'

She got up and retraced the path while holding her phone to her ear. "Not so good," she answered honestly.

These past few days had been the harshest days of her entire life. The temperature dropped to at least ten degrees below zero at night. It was so cold that stepping out the door of their designated house was a struggle.

"Hmm." Her answer was more or less what he had anticipated.

Carlos hung up without another word.

'So typical! Would it kill him to talk some more?'

He hardly spoke three lines.'

Debbie went back to her room, with a mad frown on her face. She couldn't stop thinking about Carlos. At last, she decided to text him. "Was there a reason why you called me?"

"Yes." Again, a single-word answer. Debbie cursed him a hundred times in her head. "And? What was it?" she asked, trying to be patient. She was expecting a sweet response despite knowing that she might not get any.

"I wanted to know if you were okay."

That was it! That was all she needed to hear--to know that he cared. Her eyes reddened as she read his message. "...I'm not okay." She missed him beyond what words could express. She missed his voice, his hugs, his tenderness.

Carlos might not have been too busy because he replied very quickly, "I'm relieved."

A hundred question marks flashed across Debbie's mind.

'He's relieved to know that I'm not okay? What does he mean?'

Is he happy that I'm unhappy?! Why does he hate me so much?'

She was too angry to continue talking to him, but what he had said lingered on, bothering her immensely. The more she thought about it, the angrier it made her. "I hope you have a good time in Alorith, Carlos."

"Okay.

"Debbie's eyebrows furrowed while a thousand angry exclamation marks jumped around her head. 'Aargh! This man is so irritating!'

It had been overcast for many days in a row. The next day, the sky finally cleared up.

Gus sat alone, enjoying the sun. Gail was helping an old lady pick out some tea leaves. Others were playing "Drop the Handkerchief" with the children. Jared was one of them. Since he was so tall, it was funny to see him running among the kids. When he started running around the circle, it set everybody off.

The children laughed while shouting, "Jared, tag Debbie! We want to see Debbie catch you."

The kids knew how fast Debbie could run. Many of them even ran with Debbie around the village in the mornings.

Jared refused as he panted, "You're so mean. I won't tag Debbie. I'll tag you."

When he dropped the handkerchief, the kids screamed, "Aaah! Debbie, Jared tagged you! Catch him!"

Debbie looked back. The handkerchief was indeed dropped right behind her. To make the kids laugh, she stood up and challenged Jared, "You, big guy! I'll catch you and make you sing 'Old MacDonald' in the middle of the circle."

Then she started chasing Jared. To her surprise, he ran away from the circle, and she had to run after him. When Debbie was finally close enough to grab him, Jared stopped and pointed his finger into the distance and said, "Debbie, look!"

Everyone was automatically curious and stopped playing at once to look towards where he was pointing at. A little boy ran towards them and shouted cheerfully, "Look! So many cars have come to our village! The cool ones. I've only seen them on TV. What are their names?"

Jared named the cars as he pointed at them one by one, "Emperor. Bentley. And that's a Rolls-Royce Phantom."

The boy jumped in excitement. "Right. Lice-Rice! Pepper, Shorty, Butterball! Let's go take a look. We've never seen those cars before.

"

'Emperor? Is it Carlos?' Debbie wondered. Then the familiar car and its license plate came into view.

The ten-meter-away entrance of the village was on a low terrain. The whole village could see the cars parked there.

Emmett got out of the car in an elegant manner. He immediately spotted Debbie among the others. After a few incidents that had taken place in the past, Carlos' employees had started seeing his cute and sweet wife as their savior. Emmett waved at her excitedly.

The villagers didn't know who he was waving at, so they all waved back at him warmly.

Debbie only looked at Emmett briefly. Her eyes quickly shifted to the back window of the Emperor. She could sense Carlos' tense gaze even with the window rolled up.

'He's here. I'm sure.

Has he come to take me home?

He always makes me mad and then tries to make up for it by doing something nice.' With that thought in mind, she looked at the car expectantly, and all her anger was gone.

CHAPTER 147 WHY HER

Among all the college students in the village, only Debbie, Dixon, Jared, Gus, Gail, and Gregory knew that Emperor was Carlos' car.

However, not a single soul from this group knew why Carlos was here except for Debbie, Dixon, and Jared.

Jared excitedly grabbed Debbie's sleeve as soon as he saw the car, and said, "Tomboy, this is the moment that tests our friendship. Ask your husband to get me out of here too."

As a matter of fact, Jared had called his dad the next day after they reached this village. He was asking the older man to send him a car and take him home. He badly needed a private car because the minibus that had taken them to the village made him vomit for a whole day. There was no way that he would ride that horrible vehicle again. It was bad enough that his dad immediately rejected his request without even letting him rebut the decision.

Worse, Jasper went as far as telling all his friends not to pick his son up. He brainwashed everyone by claiming that his son needed to experience some tough life which might help him change his frivolous personality.

On the other hand, Emmett sent two of his men to discuss the details of the investment they were

planning with the village head. He then walked towards Debbie. His action made everyone turn their head curiously to them. Thus, he and Debbie decided to move somewhere else so that they could talk privately.

"Debbie, Carlos asked me to take you home. I've already sent someone to pack your things. You can get in the car and go home directly," said Emmett.

Debbie looked at the car again with furrowed eyebrows. She then asked, "Is Carlos here or not?"

A knowing smile crept over Emmett's lips before he replied, "Why not go near the car and check for yourself?" 'How would Carlos not pick you up personally when he knew that his precious wife is having a hard time here, Mrs. Hilton?' he thought.

Debbie was still trying to come up with the best response she could give Emmett when a tender voice suddenly cut in through her trail of thoughts.

"Hi, Emmett."

It was Gail.

'What does she want?' Debbie wondered as she gazed at the newcomer.

However, Gail didn't even look at her and just walked straight to Emmett. She exchanged some polite remarks with him. They were in the middle of their endless greetings when Emmett threw Debbie a questioning look after hearing that Gail was actually Sebastian's daughter. Nevertheless, Debbie just remained silent, devoid of any expression. "Oh, so you're Sebastian's daughter. What can I do for you?" he asked Gail.

"Didn't Carlos come here?" Gail responded in a casual tone.

Emmett smiled politely and replied, "He's busy. May I ask why you'd like to meet Carlos?"

Reluctance instantly flooded Gail's face. Of course, she wouldn't want Debbie to know what her real agenda was. Thus, she glared at Debbie and sarcastically asked, "Do you have to be here?"

Debbie nodded calmly. Her face was still unreadable when she said, "Yes. Emmett came here for me."

That answer made Gail feel a little embarrassed. 'Why is that? Are Debbie and Emmett really married to each other just like what the rumor says? Then why didn't Carlos get angry with her after she expressed her feelings for him?

Who on earth is really involved with Debbie? Jared? Emmett? Hayden? Or Curtis?

Ah! Debbie is such a slut!

On the other hand, it wouldn't be impossible for Carlos to just let her off easily if Emmett is indeed her lover. Considering that Emmett has worked loyally for Carlos for a long time, it is possible that Carlos just forgave Debbie because of Emmett.'

With these thoughts in her mind, Gail finally turned to Debbie and asked, "Debbie, what is Emmett to you?"

Debbie was eager to find out whether Carlos was inside the car or not and hoped to finish the conversation as soon as possible. Thus, she rested her arm on Emmett's shoulder and cunningly replied, "We're close. As to how close? Guess."

Since Gail had already taken her for a slut, it didn't matter to add one more name on the list of the men Gail thought she had slept with.

Debbie glanced at Gail provocatively before patting Emmett on the shoulder. She then said, "I'll leave my cousin with you. I have to go pack my things. Wait for me here." The possibility of seeing Carlos put her in such a good mood she even blew a kiss to Emmett while stepping away.

Emmett, who was Carlos' secretary, couldn't be happier upon seeing how chirpy his boss' wife was.

He nodded to Debbie and dotingly said, "No rush. Someone is already packing your things for you. You can get in the car whenever you're ready."

"Got it."

After Debbie left, Gail looked at Emmett and asked anxiously, "How exactly do you two know each other?"

'What does she mean by "you two"?' Confusion flooded Emmett instantly. His eyebrows were furrowed as he tried to figure out what the woman before him was talking about. It took him a while before he finally realized that she was talking about him and Debbie. "I don't think that's what you are really interested in," he coldly answered.

That indifferent reply embarrassed Gail all over again. However, she wasn't going to waste the chance to pry into Debbie's secrets. Thus, she asked, "Umh...When are you leaving here?"

"Right now," Emmett deadpanned since he already knew what Gail was up to.

Frankly, they didn't have time for sightseeing. Every one of the company was super busy since it was the end of the lunar year.

Hearing his answer thrilled Gail a lot. It was such a relief to hear them leaving soon. Nevertheless, she chose to contain her excitement since she had a public image to maintain. She needed to remain

innocent and sweet. Then she asked in a low, soft voice, "Can you give me a lift? I'm sorry to disturb you, but my dad is too busy to spare me any time. So... I..."

She cleared her throat, trying to compose herself and remain polite as she spoke.

Although Emmett was just a secretary, the fact that Carlos was his boss cut him from the rest. Gail couldn't afford to make a mistake, especially when she was asking for a favor, for example, right now.

The fretful look on Gail's face almost made Emmett laugh aloud. This woman had always been rude, arrogant, and mean when she was around Debbie. Emmett would have turned this pathetic lady's request down if he hadn't received an order from Carlos that all Debbie's schoolmates should be sent home together with her.

She had Debbie to thank for that. If it wasn't for Debbie, Gail wouldn't even have a chance to ask. In the end, he smiled slyly, "To be frank, besides the investment project in Southon Village, my job here is to pick somebody up. If you want to go with us, you can ask Debbie about it. If Debbie says okay, then it's fine by me."

Gail's smile gradually melted upon hearing Emmett. She thought, 'So he came here just to pick Debbie up? Huh! It is impossible that there's nothing going on between them!'

Those things kept Gail quiet for a while. It was only after a few seconds when she opened her mouth again. "Why her?" she asked curtly.

Emmett smiled and responded, "Didn't you come here because your dad forced you to learn from Debbie?"

"Yeah, but what does it have to do with me going back with you?" Gail wondered.

"Since you came here because of Debbie, it would be Debbie's decision whether you can go back earlier or not. It's fine if you don't want to ask her. It's totally your call." Time was pressing. Those were the last words Emmett said before nodding at her politely and walking away.

Gail's face turned red with anger. 'Debbie! Debbie! What's wrong with these men? Why are they all so good to her? I have to ask her permission to leave this place earlier? That's bullshit!'

Even though pissed, Gail decided to go find Debbie. It wasn't like she had any other choices anyway. Assuming that Debbie was packing her things, Gail went straight to her place.

CHAPTER 148 GOING BACK HOME

Gail had gone there to meet Debbie, but when she reached Debbie's room, she saw that there were two people looking for something in the room. Her breathing became faster until she realized it was two bodyguards. And after watching them for a while, she realized that they weren't looking for anything. Rather, they were packing Debbie's things for her. What was going on?

What surprised her even more was that there were two bodyguards packing her things. The special treatment wasn't enough to make her suspicious, the number was. How much luggage could Debbie possibly have? Only then did it hit Gail that things were not as simple as she had thought. Something was definitely up, and she was curious what.

The bodyguards saw her, but both of them seemed not to care. They merely continued with their work. After they had packed everything that was visible in the room, one of them flipped the covers over, wanting to make sure that nothing was left behind. Instead of Debbie's belongings, a white blanket came into view. It looked much like an electric blanket to Gail.

Sure that nothing was left behind, the bodyguards remade the bed almost oblivious to the blanket. At that point, Gail couldn't help it anymore and dashed into the room like a tornado. With one enormous swipe, she lifted the covers and the sheets. Aha! It was indeed an electric blanket. Shocked, she looked around to find an electric warming fan in the corner as well. What was more, there were a number of more articles for daily use spread across the room, which were brand-new and barely seen in the village.

'None of us got any of these things except for Debbie. Why?'

It seemed that Debbie had more secrets than she had thought, and there was more to her story than she was letting on. Then Gail recalled that Debbie had invited her to sleep in her room the first night they were here, but she had refused, even insulting her in a way. Thinking about her stupid decision, she was extremely regretful. If she had said yes that night, then not only would she have slept soundly, she would have found out about this whole thing earlier.

Panting, Gail went in search of Debbie once more. The latter was saying her goodbyes to some elders in the village.

Regardless, she dragged her away from those villagers and demanded some answers. "How come your room had much better facilities than ours? What's so special about you? And tell me one thing: why do I need your permission to leave this godforsaken place!? No wait. I get it. Tell me this: is it Emmett or Carlos you are involved with?"

Gail studied Debbie's face after the string of questions she had thrown her way. With makeup, the girl had been the center of attention at the party the other day. But what was surprising was that even with bare face, her skin looked fantastic. Quite unusual!

The past few days had been really tough for every one of those students and they had to make do with the bare minimum of facilities. However, even under such circumstances, Debbie had managed to look more feminine and beautiful than before. Gail hated to admit it, but that was the truth. She had noticed it herself.

And she was convinced that only money, a lot of money, could bring about that kind of change.

The puzzle was—was it Carlos or his secretary who had spent that kind of money on Debbie? Either way, it was clear that Debbie was close to Carlos.

Gail started trembling at the thought. If Debbie's secret lover was Carlos, Gail believed that her miserable days would never end. Since Debbie was in power while she was with Carlos, she could make her life very miserable indeed.

"Who told you that you have to get my permission to leave this place?" Debbie responded with a question of her own. Gail noticed that she sounded a bit curious. 'My permission? Why?' It sounded odd to Debbie.

Gail bit her lower lip hard and answered resentfully after a long while, "Emmett! I don't want to get on that crappy minibus again. And you know... I came here only because of you. My dad wouldn't have forced me to come here if you hadn't joined this project. If you're leaving, then you have to take me with you. And you really don't have a choice, because I am gonna tell my parents what you are. As soon as they find out you've been fooling around with so many men, you're done!"

Debbie valued Lucinda's and Sebastian's opinions quite a lot, and Gail knew that very well. What infuriated her was the fact that it was almost as if Debbie had managed to steal her parents away from her. Nothing she did seemed to be good enough compared to Debbie. She hated every moment of that.

Debbie took a deep breath, trying to control a wave of anger on her face. She then told her, "Gail, I can take you with me, but you have to promise me not to mess with me again. And don't ever repeat that last sentence in front of me. I'll have you know that there's only one man I'm involved with."

"Who is he?"

"You'll know that one day. But today is not that day. Can you do what I asked you to or not?" If Gail knew about Debbie's relationship with Carlos, the whole world would know. She wasn't the sort who were too keen on keeping secrets. Debbie couldn't tell her yet.

Gail was left with no choice now and promised.

When Gail finally left her alone, Debbie bid her farewell to the kids who had just played "Drop the Handkerchief" game with her and her schoolmates. It was a tearful scene with the kids when they found out she was leaving. Her eyes watered a bit too. It was sad to say goodbye to these kids. Although she had not been here for too many days, she still felt a strange attraction to the place.

When she finally left the school, still immersed in her sorrow, Jared suddenly popped out from nowhere and started dragging her towards the village itself.

"Where are we going?" she asked, pulled along. She felt that both Jared and Gail were acting really weird today.

"To where I was staying."

"But why?"

"To pack my things."

Debbie wanted to kick him right in the shins when she heard that. "You can pack your things on your own. What do you need me for? To do it for you?" she asked in exasperation.

"Of course not."

The village was tiny and it didn't take them more than three minutes before they found themselves in Jared and Dixon's room. As soon as they came to the door, Jared pulled Debbie inside and locked the door.

He opened his suitcase and threw all his items in as he kept an eye on Debbie. "You can't get in the car without me. Otherwise, I am going to be stuck here," he explained, noticing her curious glance.

He believed that Carlos wouldn't allow him to get in his car, unless Debbie was with him.

Debbie saw his point. "Dude, you came here with me. Do you really think I will leave you and Dixon behind? Is that how you see me?"

"No. Of course you won't leave us behind," he replied immediately, "but your husband will!"

His packing was done within minutes, usual for boys.

While they were walking towards the luxury cars, Jared grabbed Debbie's arm tightly, as if he was afraid she would run away from him anytime. Emmett was waiting by the Emperor car for her. Upon seeing them, a bodyguard took Jared's suitcase and led him towards the car behind him. "Jared, please follow me," he asked respectfully.

Jared clutched Debbie abruptly like an insecure child while shouting, "Where're you taking me? I'm going nowhere. I just want to go home!" He was sick of this place and couldn't stay here any longer.

Emmett stifled his laughter somehow, even though it was really hard to do after even a fleeting glance at Jared, and assured him, "Jared, please relax. The cars waiting behind are for you and your friends."

Hearing this, Jared was relieved and calmed down. "Okay, that sounds fair. Tomboy, I'm getting in the car." He sounded a bit embarrassed for having made a scene.

Looking at the Emperor beside her, Debbie took a deep breath before getting in. When Emmett opened the door for her, she found the overbearing man she had been thinking of the past few days sitting inside staring at her. "What are you waiting for?" he asked.

Debbie's heart started pounding, and she felt a burning sensation in her face. All the fights and arguments they'd ever had between them vanished completely from her mind. Even before she had gotten in the car completely, she had already wrapped her arms around Carlos' neck and kissed him on the cheek.

Carlos was surprised by her sudden affectionate reaction.

After the kiss, Debbie got out of the car again and smiled. "I have to go find Dixon. Be right back."

"Flirt with me and run away right after?" Carlos complained in a husky voice.

Debbie's face turned crimson. "No, idiot. I don't plan to do that just yet. I'll be back soon," she retorted.

She was about to turn around when Emmett assured her, "Debbie, all your friends have gotten in the cars. Please don't worry."

"All right, then." She found Emmett was a very considerate person. Nothing to worry about, Debbie bent down to finally get in the car.

Suddenly a man in navy blue ethnic clothes called from behind her, "Debbie, wait!"

Debbie turned around. The village head's son was running towards her.

CHAPTER 149 ON THE ROAD

It occurred to Debbie that she had said goodbye to everyone but him. "Just a minute," she muttered quietly to the man inside the car. Before Carlos could protest or ask what was going on, she had shut the car door and was walking towards the young man, who was breathless from all the running.

"Debbie, are you leaving?" he looked at her sadly. From the way he was sulking and the way he looked at her, affection was visible clear as daylight.

"Yes," Debbie replied with a nod. "My... My family has come to pick me up. It was nice meeting you. Keep in touch." Debbie didn't want to break his heart like that and corrected herself.

The young man took out a sachet from his pocket and handed it to her. "I made something for you. It's a silver accessory. I want you to keep it as a souvenir."

Debbie looked at the sachet in surprise. It was meaningful, she knew that. Reflexively, she tried to decline it. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. But it's a very big gesture and I can't take it."

"It may be worth little, but I will be glad if you take it. It would mean a lot to me."

Debbie didn't know what to say. She was saved by Emmett who walked towards her at this point. "Mrs.

Hilton, Carlos is waiting. It's time to go," he reminded her with a smile.

'Mrs. Hilton?' The young man was surprised and confused. He knew what that form of address meant. "Are you married?" he asked in disbelief.

"Yes, I am," she admitted shortly. "Thank you for taking such great care of me these days. My husband is waiting. I have to go."

The young man watched the woman he had fallen for get in the car, heartbroken.

The fancy cars drove away one after another. From the rearview mirror, Debbie could see him standing there alone. She felt sad to see him so heartbroken.

She had only stayed in the village for a couple of days, but the villagers had been so nice to her, and the village head's family deserved a special mention. It was unfair that the young man had to face such heartbreak even after being so nice to her.

"Feeling sad?" a cold voice asked, breaking into her thoughts.

"Yes," she admitted succinctly. Humans were sensitive. It was normal to feel sad on occasions like this.

"Do you want to stay and be the village head's daughter-in-law?"

Carlos asked coldly. Debbie turned towards him in surprise.

His face was grim. 'Damn! What did I do wrong in saying goodbye? I didn't even encourage him.

What's he sulking about now?' she thought.

Pondering over what he had just said, she slid closer to him and asked, "Are you jealous? Huh?"

Seen through, Carlos tried to save face with a poker expression. "Sit back," he demanded, though it was clear he didn't mean it.

She refused to obey. Pressing her cheek against his arm, she asked while fluttering her long eyelashes, "You didn't react much on seeing me. Did you really come here to see me or what?"

The road was bumpy, but sitting in Carlos' car, Debbie could barely feel it. It was much better than riding a minibus.

The next moment, the interior screen was rolled up so that the passengers could have some privacy. Confused, Debbie was about to ask what was going on when her face was lifted up gently. "Do you want me to react?" Carlos asked meaningfully.

Looking into his eyes, she regretted saying that. "No, no. I—" She wanted to say this was not what she had meant.

But actually, she wanted to kiss him too.

Inside the Bentley behind the Emperor, Jared was sitting with an expression on his face that was as annoyed as if he had just eaten a dead fly. It was all because of the woman sitting next to him—Gail.

He couldn't help suspecting that Carlos had made this arrangement on purpose. Although every student unfamiliar to Debbie was sharing a car with others in groups of two or three, whoever was connected with Debbie was given a separate car. Dixon, Gus, even Gregory were enjoying a car alone. Only Jared had to share a car with someone. And to make matters worse, that someone had to be Gail!

The most irritating part was that there were no passengers in the two Bentleys behind them and Gail could have been thrown in any of those two.

Carlos must have done this to torture him!

Jared felt that it was so unfair. He had had to accompany Carlos' wife to the remote, backward village and this was what he had gotten in return. Life was so unfair, especially to men.

"Jared, do you know what Debbie's relationship with Emmett is?" Gail asked, even though she had anticipated that most likely, Jared wouldn't tell her anything even if he did know something.

"I don't know."

"Is she sitting in the same car with Carlos?"

"Go see for yourself."

"What is she to Hayden?"

"Can you just shut up? Or I'll kick you out of the car." Jared was fed up with her questions and couldn't take it anymore. Gail gritted her teeth resentfully but finally had to shut up.

Since it was nightfall, the cars stopped in an urban district on the way. They would spend the night there.

Even in such a simple area, Carlos was famous. As soon as the black Emperor pulled up in front of the fancy hotel, the manager himself came out of the hotel with some foremen.

Emmett got out first and opened the back door for the passengers inside. As soon as people caught a glimpse of their distinguished guest, they all began trying to please him. "Good evening, Carlos! Welcome to our hotel, Carlos!"

Carlos merely nodded to the barrage of pleasantries and held out his right hand towards the car. A woman closely wrapped in a purple down jacket emerged from the car. She had completely wrapped herself and only her eyes could be seen. Her big eyes looked around curiously.

She then took Carlos' hand and jumped out of the car.

The employees of the hotel couldn't believe their eyes. They had received countless upper-class females.

But never had they seen anyone so unique. What shocked them more was that

when the two were about to enter the hotel, Carlos pulled the woman into his arms, as if to tell everyone that the woman was his and his only.

'Is this the woman in the rumors?' they wondered.

Carlos had always told Debbie that they would keep a low-key profile, but anywhere Carlos went, it was never low-key.

Right now only, five men had greeted them by the car alone. And another ten were standing in two lines in front of the door.

Debbie was glad that she had covered her face with her hat and scarf, even though Carlos was against it. She didn't want to expose her face. Anyone could have snapped a picture and posted it online. Then the whole world would know.

Two managers led the way to their Presidential Suite. In the elevator, Carlos was still holding her tightly.

Since they were not alone, Debbie felt embarrassed to be intimate. She tried to pry his hand away, but Carlos wouldn't let her get his hand off her. With two hotel managers and Emmett beside them and two bodyguards behind them, Debbie tried her best to keep the interaction between them inconspicuous.

However, Emmett noticed it and gave her a knowing smile, making her blush a deep crimson behind the scarf.

Soon, the modern elevator reached its destination and the managers themselves opened their suite for them. The bodyguards stopped the managers and the waiters from going inside.

They themselves positioned on either side of the door. Once Carlos and Debbie had stepped inside their suite, Emmett closed the door and with a click, the self-locking door was closed. "Thank you, manager. I think right now what Carlos needs is some privacy. Are the other rooms all set?" he asked one of the managers.

CHAPTER 150 GETTING CLOSE TO THE TRUTH

"Emmett, you're being too polite. We'll leave you be. You know where to find me if I'm needed," said the manager with a smile.

"Thank you."

Emmett had already made arrangements to make sure that Carlos and Debbie arrived at the hotel a few minutes before the others. Five minutes after Carlos had entered his room with Debbie, Emmett parked the car in the parking lot and then walked back to the hotel.

When the others reached the hotel, they didn't see Carlos' Emperor. Jared looked around. When he saw neither Debbie nor the Emperor, he asked one of Carlos' bodyguards where Debbie was. That was when he learnt that Debbie had arrived at the hotel a few minutes before them, and that most possibly, she was already in her hotel room.

Jared hesitated a little before he decided to call her. However, she didn't answer his call. To put it more precisely, she cut the call.

'What's wrong with her?' Jared wondered. After pondering over it, he whispered to one of the bodyguards with a goofy smile, "Carlos is here, isn't he?"

Emmett had told the bodyguards when to talk, and when to keep their mouths shut. The bodyguard assumed that it should be safe to answer Jared's question, so he nodded.

'That's what I thought, ' Jared gloated.

Deciding to leave the couple alone, he put his phone away and strolled into his room humming a tune as he pulled his luggage behind him.

Just as Jared had imagined, the scene in the Presidential Suite was screeching hot. Its two occupants had been apart for too many days. Debbie was stripped down to her bra and panties.

Lost in Carlos' kisses, she lay in bed, enjoying their reunion. When her phone rang, Carlos turned it off impatiently, without even checking who was calling. His lips never left her body the whole time.

"Wait! I have to take a shower first,"

she said as Carlos' breathing got heavier. Southon Village was too cold and lacked facilities. So she had never got the chance to have a proper shower.

"Let's bathe together afterwards," he moaned in her ear.

"But I haven't showered in days," she confessed, a little embarrassed. Knowing he was a neat freak, she thought that he would let her go the moment she said that.

However, Carlos didn't care. He continued to do what he wanted, without a word.

He had wanted to have sex with her in the car on their way to the hotel. But Debbie had turned him down saying that it was embarrassing with the driver in the car.

But he had been very handsy all the way. Frustrated as well.

Now that they were finally alone, he was acting like a wild predator set loose on its prey.

Seeing his hungry eyes, Debbie recalled the crazy night when she had gotten drunk. "Can I ask you something?"

"Hmm?"

"Can you be gentle, Honey?"

'Gentle?' Except for the one night long back, he hadn't been intimate with her for a while. Being gentle was the last thing on his mind.

Two minutes later, Debbie was pressed against the window.

In a Presidential Suite two doors away from Debbie and Carlos', a girl toured the suite excitedly a couple of times, exclaiming, "This is great! You get what you pay for!" She rolled on the soft bed until she was tired. Then with one hand propped against her chin, she said, "I should remember to thank Debbie someday. If it wasn't for her, I would have never had the chance to stay in such a luxurious Presidential Suite."

A chubby boy seconded her, nodding his head. "The car was so damn comfortable! I've never sat inside a Bentley Mulsanne before. Five million dollars! I used to be afraid to even get close to one of those cars. But today, thanks to Debbie, I was in it! Who could have imagined it?!"

Hearing all the fuss, Jared joked as he leaned against the door, "You should hang out with me from now on. I'll make sure that you get to ride in a luxury car every day."

Jared had despised Gail the whole time since they had been stuck in the same car. And finally here came her chance to humiliate him. She took it immediately. "Ride in a luxury car every day? The entire city knows how strict your dad is. Nobody came to pick you up from Southon Village. You can't even get yourself a luxury car. How do you plan on letting others ride in them every day?"

Ever since he had gotten out of the cold village, Jared had been in a good mood. Right now, enjoying the heat and the luxury of the suite, he couldn't have been happier. Even Gail's insults didn't make him lose his temper. "Your dad didn't pick you up either. You are here because of your cousin, Debbie. Don't forget that. You're no better than me."

Surprised gazes fell on Gail when the other students heard what Jared had said. A barrage of questions was thrown at her. "Gail, Debbie is your cousin?"

"How come you've never mentioned it before?"

"How are you two related?"

"

Gail smiled awkwardly. She had never mentioned her relationship with Debbie to anyone. She didn't want to have anything to do with Debbie.

Now that Jared had revealed her secret, she was forced to admit it. "Yes, Debbie is my cousin. My mom is her aunt."

"What's her family like?" a gossipy girl asked. "So many posh cars came to pick her up. She must be rich."

Gail cleared her throat and acted sad. "Actually, she is from a poor family. She had a tough childhood. Her parents got divorced when she was little and her dad died later."

Gail's words at once denied the theory that Debbie was from a rich family.

However, they saw that Debbie was living an extravagant life. They wondered where her money came from. Another theory popped up into everyone's head. Yet, no one dared to say it since her good friend, Jared, was among them.

But he could sense what they were thinking. His good mood disappeared in an instant. He started yelling, "You bunch of pathetic nosy idiots! Debbie may be rich or poor, but what does it have to do with you? Debbie's boyfriend is rich and he loves her. He came to pick her up today. Moved by the fact that you all had volunteered for some public good, he decided to give you people some comfort. And now, you are all talking about Debbie behind her back! I'm ashamed to be with you knuckleheads."

It was true that Carlos had sent the cars because the students had volunteered to help the villagers and kids in Southon Village despite the cold weather. Also, he had taken care of the expenses on the road, including the food, hotels, and the transportation.

Carlos somehow made the students attribute everything to Debbie.

The students quieted down after Jared's outburst.

Gregory, who had been silently staring at his phone all the while, decided not to utter a word, no matter what. Back in the village, he had seen Debbie get into Carlos' Emperor and Emmett was driving the car.

In the city, Carlos was the only one who could boss Emmett around.

Considering the fact that Carlos' car had reached the hotel five minutes earlier than them, he figured that they were trying to avoid the others. He assumed that Carlos had indeed come to the village and had been in the same car with Debbie.

He had always refused to give any heed to the rumors about Debbie. But now, it all added up.

Debbie's boyfriend, whom Jared had just mentioned, had to be Carlos.

Gregory recalled that the other night when Debbie had gotten drunk, she had gone to Carlos' house. Debbie had shouted "Carlos, I love you" ten times on campus. She had confessed her feelings for Carlos in Curtis' presence and she hadn't faced any punishment for doing so.

If Debbie and Carlos were really lovers, then all of those made perfect sense.