

Chapter 492 Mark's Inevitable Compromise

Edwin opened the car door and gazed silently at his father.

Mark was standing under the wisteria tree, his figure still as slender as in his youth, with only his hair slightly grayed under the moonlight.

A cigarette hung loosely between his fingers, seemingly forgotten and unsmoked.

The length of ash that had fallen from it indicated he had been standing there for a considerable amount of time.

Olivia, stepping out of the car, looked bewilderedly at the two men before her, and then suddenly, she understood everything.

Her mind raced to the matter of her brother and Laura, realizing that her father was aware of it all along.

Olivia called out quietly, "Dad"

Mark's gaze shifted to his younger daughter. His voice was soft and gentle. "It's cold; get inside."

Olivia, however, refused to go inside. She moved closer and carefully embraced Mark's arm, pleading, "Dad, you come inside too."

Mark usually showed great fondness for Olivia. His study still housed that little red princess house where Olivia, even grown up, would sometimes crawl into. But now, he simply patted his daughter's hand. "Go inside," he insisted.

Sensing the firmness in his tone, Olivia did not dare to insist further.

She let go and turned to look at Edwin.

Under the same moonlight, her brother appeared as handsome as their father, his eyes showing the same resolute expression.

Fear suddenly gripped Olivia.

After she left, Mark indifferently flicked the ash off his cigarette. "Did you see her? What did she say?" he asked.

Edwin walked closer, a faint smile on his lips.

"You already know, don't you?" he said.

Mark scoffed. "Have you made up your mind to be with her? Did you ask if she also wants this? Don't get carried away and end up with nothing."

Edwin remained silent, his lips pressed together.

Mark continued, saying, "Hah, you're jealous of her new boyfriend, huh? How immature!"

Edwin, skilled at reading people, noticed his father's annoyance but also a softening in his stance.

He relaxed slightly. "A man doesn't live on his physique alone. So what he has some muscles? That doesn't make him a great man," he remarked.

Mark eyed his son. "Maybe Laura just likes that type," he said.

Then, stubbing out his cigarette, he added, "You're not young anymore. Clean up your mess. Don't expect me to fix your problems all the time."

After he finished speaking, Mark felt a twinge of pain.

He realized his compromise was not just for Edwin.

But also for Laura.

The last time he saw her, he knew she had been wronged and his son was to blame. When Laura said she was seeing someone else, he made himself believe her words.

Edwin had been with her for over a year, cohabiting for three months.

Sharing a bed, feelings must have developed.

Mark, not wanting to look at his son or hear more from him, felt a mix of disappointment and unexplainable relief.

"Dad," Edwin softly called out from behind.

Mark didn't utter a word.

He simply waved his hand and walked on, seeming to have aged a few

years in that moment.

His thoughts drifted to his younger days.

He recalled his days with Cecilia, filled with the same forbidden excitement. Cecilia was about the same age as Laura back then, and they were sneaking around just like this.

Mark's figure gradually disappeared into the distance.

Involuntarily, Edwin murmured, "Dad, thank you."

Back at the villa, Olivia, sitting on the sofa, sniffled as she looked up at Mark. "Dad," she murmured softly.

Mark walked over and sat beside his little princess, Olivia.

She wrapped her arms around his, resting her small head on his shoulder.

Olivia was strikingly beautiful, with delicate, supple cheeks and soft, brown-colored hair. It was slightly curled and cascaded over her shoulders.

She bore a resemblance to Rena and also to his sister, Reina.

Every glance at Olivia stirred a tender emotion in Mark.

Olivia softly spoke. "My brother... He's..."

Mark gently stroked her hair, whispering in response, "Don't tell your Mom just yet."

Olivia's eyes widened in disbelief as she looked at Mark, hardly able to believe he had actually compromised. Mark tenderly ran his fingers through her hair, softly saying, "There's nothing wrong with loving someone! Dad doesn't want your brother to be sad."

As for Cecilia, Mark thought, there would always be a way.

They resided in Czanch.

Edwin and Laura spent most of their time in Duefron while Mark and Cecilia in Czanch, barely seeing each other throughout the year. Out of sight, out of mind, he mused. When they passed away and Edwin still had his life to live on, how significant would those past events remain?

Mark was indulgent with his children.

Olivia received his unconditional fatherly love.

Edwin, having missed so much during his childhood, was receiving his due now.

Mark slowly began ascending the stairs.

Olivia watched him go, sniffing quietly. She knew her father was heartbroken that night.

Edwin entered the room.

Olivia, feeling particularly upset, went over to hug Edwin gently. Edwin patted her head, saying, "Don't cry. I'm not in the mood to comfort you."

Olivia pouted and rested her head on his chest.

Mark proceeded upstairs, where Cecilia was fresh from a bath and taking care of herself.

Noticing him, she eyed him for a moment before asking, "Why do you smell like cigarette? Where have you been smoking again?"

It was then followed by, "Hey, have Edwin and Olivia come back? Weren't they supposed to go see the lantern show?"

Mark sat on the bed in silence.

Cecilia raised an eyebrow. "What's with you today? Going through a midlife crisis again? Or are you upset watching Peter celebrate his birthday? Why don't we make a big deal at home too, celebrate your 80th in advance?"

Mark didn't usually appreciate this kind of jokes about his age.

However, this time he responded with a wry smile. "Jealous of him? Hardly."

Deep down, Mark felt a bit unsettled. Yet, the thought of Peter's hard-raised daughter being with his son brought him some comfort.

Cecilia's voice softened. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing!" Mark quickly replied.

He sighed. "Just realizing the kids have all grown up."

Gently, he lowered his head and kissed her nose. "But my Cecilia is still

so sweet."

Cecilia, seeing him relax, released her worries.

Peter's birthday was just a few days away.

He had saved diligently all his life. His birthday was always a grand event.

His son and daughter-in-law hurried back from abroad to help with the preparations. Laura, having a good relationship with her sister-in-law Penney although they didn't see each other often, also lent a hand, feeling very much a part of the family.

The villa's front yard was busy with arriving cars.

Peter and his wife, along with their children, welcomed their guests. They smiled so broadly that their faces seemed to stretch, despite the chilly weather.

Peter, ever the caring father, told the younger ones, "Go inside, eat something and get warm. Don't freeze out here with us."

Lina, his wife, feigned annoyance. "So I should just freeze here with you?"

Peter chuckled. "You're my partner in hardship! The kids can't compare to you."

Lina couldn't help but laugh.

Laura, watching from the side, smiled softly, basking in the family's warmth.

Her sister-in-law nudged her. "Laura, let's go inside and get something to eat."

Laura nodded in agreement.

As they were about to head inside, two black Audis and a Rolls Royce Phantom drove in.

Peter's face lit up. "My old boss is here."

He hurried to open the car door for Mark.

Lina laughed, teasing him. "You're the birthday man today. Don't overdo it."

Peter shrugged. "Why not? My relationship with Mark is special."

As he opened the car door, Mark stepped out and embraced him. Little Olivia, dressed festively, clung to Peter, calling him Grandpa Peter.

Peter indulged her. "Always spoiling you, aren't I?"

Olivia led him to the trunk of Edwin's car, where the gifts were stored.

As the trunk opened...

There was a dramatic reveal!

Peter was taken aback, completely stunned.

As Mark's top strategist, he had faced many situations. But this... this seemed like an arrangement between in-laws... Gifts that symbolized such a bond.

He glanced suspiciously at Olivia, and then at his eldest son.

His son was married!

Peter's heart raced as he watched Edwin gracefully alight from the car and then glanced at his young daughter. The realization finally dawned on him and it felt like a stampede of a thousand horses in his chest.

Edwin, that commendable young man, had made a move on his beloved daughter!

No wonder he refused to marry Vanessa.

No wonder Mark had his sights on the Smith family.

So, this was the grand scheme. Observing Cecilia's clueless expression, it was clear she was unaware.

Mixed emotions played across Peter's face as Edwin, holding gifts, stood before him. "Happy birthday, Uncle peter," Edwin said respectfully.

On such a significant day, Peter couldn't afford to lose his composure.

He managed a strained smile. "Suddenly, I don't feel so happy anymore!"

In front of the guests, he couldn't embarrass Mark. He quickly directed the servants to discreetly remove the conspicuous gifts. Then, lowering his voice, he asked Edwin, "Have you lost your mind, young man?"

Edwin's eyes sought Laura.

After a moment, he murmured, "I'm serious."

Peter worked to control his rising anger. Just then, Lina approached.

He shot her a piercing look.

She must have known all along and kept it from him!

Lina responded with a cold scoff. "The foolish one is you!"

Peter held back his anger and ushered the Evans family inside. As they passed by Laura, she stiffened, unable to meet Edwin's gaze.

Edwin remained silent, but as they brushed shoulders, his fingers lightly touched hers.

Laura bit her lip.

Meanwhile, Cecilia, oblivious to the situation, whispered to Mark, "Laura looks lovelier than before. You know so many people, Mark. You should find her a good match."

Mark replied with a hint of meaning, "I don't really know anyone more outstanding than our own son."

Cecilia, not understanding the implication, felt a surge of pride of her son.

She had brought up her children well.

Mark gazed at his wife's innocent look, his emotions a complex mix of affection and nostalgia. He loved her simplicity, a trait nurtured by his indulgence over the years.

Penney was sharp-witted.

She immediately picked up on the tension between Edwin and Laura. Knowing about the families' connections from her husband, she now saw an opportunity to deepen her involvement.

Coming from a distinguished background, she kept Cecilia engaged in light conversation, also taking great care of little Olivia.

The villa's hall was alive with festivities. Western music played in the background, local renowned singers performed love songs, creating a blend of weird harmony.

Laura felt uneasy.

As Edwin approached, she didn't want to confront him in front of others, so she retreated upstairs.

She was relieved that no one came to bother her.

In the evening, there was a knock at the door. "Miss Laura, your mother sent some food for you," came a voice.

"Please come in," Laura responded softly.

The door opened, revealing not a servant but Edwin.

He held a tray and quietly closed the door with his foot, observing her silently.

Laura rose slowly, her heart pounding with a mixture of confusion and nervousness.

Edwin's voice, deeper and softer than she remembered, broke the silence. "Are you going to avoid me forever?"

"I'm not," she replied quietly.

"That's good. Why don't you eat something?" he suggested, setting the tray down.

As Edwin straightened up, their eyes locked.

Laura's lips trembled slightly.

She was baffled by his presence. He had left her once, and now, he was back and kept popping up in her life. This left her more baffled and scared than before.

Edwin took a step closer, gently cradling the back of her head and moving in to kiss her.

Their kiss was gentle yet filled with emotion.

Laura's response was hesitant, her lips quivering as she took a step back.

Edwin, however, held her closer, deepening the kiss with a passion that spoke volumes of his feelings.

Startled, Laura found herself still in his embrace, his intentions clear.

When she found it hard to breathe, she pushed him away. Both were left breathless, Edwin's face showing the flush of intense emotion.

"My Dad has agreed," he said, looking at her earnestly.

Laura's complexion turned pale, and she trembled visibly. She had harbored feelings for Edwin once, drawn to everything he was. But upon learning his true identity, she had never allowed herself to dream of a future with him.

There was an internal struggle within her.

Laura averted her eyes, taking a moment before meeting his gaze again. "Mr. Evans, I don't understand what you mean."

"I want to be with you. I want to marry you," he stated plainly.

Laura offered a faint smile, her voice soft. "But I can't. I liked you, Edwin, but I can't imagine being with Uncle Mark's son. I'm sorry, but I just don't have the courage to even dream of it."

If she had known who he was from the beginning, she would have walked away without waiting for him to leave her.

Life wasn't a fairy tale, especially not for her.

Her dreams of fairy tales had been shattered long ago.

Edwin was visibly taken aback by her firmness.

His face, usually calm, showed a flicker of surprise. Laura, always gentle, asked him to leave. "Please go, it wouldn't be right for us to be seen like this."

Edwin reached out, touching her shoulder softly.

"I don't believe you've forgotten us," he whispered.

In a sudden move, he kissed her, his hand tenderly tracing the contours of her body, moving from her slender shoulders down to her waist. Laura had two small dimples there, sensitive to even the lightest touch.

In moments when she was slightly perspiring, the effect was even more striking, almost enchanting.

He yearned to rekindle their shared past, to remind her that their physical connection, at least, remained unchanged.