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Elise replied, "Thanks for your reminder, Mrs. Griffith, but you don't seem to know your son very well. His views might not be similar to yours, so what you said today didn't crush my determination to stay with him. Instead, it strengthened my resolve. I'm a bit tired, so I'll be going upstairs for a rest. You should rest early, too."

With that, she turned around and left, her back straightened. Madeline looked sullen, her face livid with anger as she was left alone in the living room. What gives this country woman the nerve to stand up to me? she thought. Then, she took out her cell phone and made a phone call, saying, "Hey, Maya, it's me!

Are you free tomorrow..." ... When Elise returned to her room, all her disguises vanished at once, leaving only a despondent look on her face. Back when Jonah was still in the Griffith Residence, she seemed to have nothing to worry about. But now, Madeline was telling her outright to back out and not ask for the moon. But was there room for turning back at this point right now? The next day, Elise got up early in the morning. She had promised Brendan to go to his studio today to help him, so after having breakfast, she had the chauffeur drive her to his studio right away without waking anyone else.

Brendan was somewhat surprised to see her. "What brings you here so early in the morning, Elise?" he asked. Elise raised her eyes to look at him as she replied, "Well, it happens that I've got nothing else to do, so I decided to come early. Is my office still where it was?" "Yeah, I cleared out a large space for you around here. Let me show you the way." Elise hurriedly followed Brendan all the way to the end of the corridor before he stopped and pushed the door open.

Coming into view was a large room that had several mannequins wearing wedding dresses of different styles placed at the door in various postures. "This is where you'll be working during your summer break. Take a look at it. Do you like it?" Brendan asked. Elise entered the room and looked around before walking up to the French window. As she gazed out of the window, she had a panoramic view of the incredibly beautiful scenery in the distance. "What a beautiful place this is! It's simply a pleasure to work here." Brendan chuckled at her words.

"I just knew you'd like it. In that case, this room shall belong to you." Elise gave him a smile in return. "Don't worry, boss! I'll do my best at work." Brendan replied, "Alright then. Go ahead and get busy. Tell me right away if you need anything." With that, he left the room, leaving Elise alone in the spacious office. As Elise looked at the colored pencils and drawing papers before her, she suddenly had a brilliant inspiration in her mind. Therefore, she sat down, picked up the pencils, and started drawing the outlines. As it turned out, Elise was a workaholic who couldn't tear herself away from her work once she was absorbed in it.

It was already 12PM, and the other staff members in the studio had gone for lunch, yet the door to her office was still tightly closed. When Brendan went out of his office, he subconsciously darted a glance at Elise's office. Then, he went over and knocked on her door. "Elise..." Elise was still drawing designs, and she asked without even looking up, "Anything?" Brendan's eyes were full of amazement when he walked up to Elise and saw the completed drawings on her desk. "Did you draw all of these in one morning?" "Uh-huh," Elise mumbled in response.

"I've got my juices flowing today, so I drew a few designs." "You're so productive. Still, however busy you are, remember to eat. Why don't you take a break first?" Only then did Elise stop what she was doing and look up at the wall clock. When she saw that it was almost 1PM, she was stupefied. "No way. It's almost 1PM?" Brendan let out a sigh of helplessness. "Should you go for lunch then?" Elise had a stretch and then stood up. "Alright, I'll be going for lunch now." After leaving the studio, Elise searched for a nearby restaurant with good reviews on her cell phone.

She went to the restaurant and ordered two spicy dishes, but her cell phone rang in her pocket halfway through her meal. It was a phone call from an unfamiliar phone number. Elise hesitated somewhat, but she answered the phone nonetheless. "Hi, may I ask who's—" A familiar female voice sounded through the phone. "It's me. Where are you now?" When Elise heard the voice, she realized belatedly who it belonged to. She quickly answered, "Hi, Mrs. Griffith. Is there anything you need from me?" "I'm now shopping at Moore Plaza. Come and pick me up." "Huh? But I—" Elise replied. Before she could finish her sentence, though, Madeline interrupted her right away, saying, "You don't want to?

Never mind then. Just pretend I never asked." Elise breathed a sigh of helplessness. "That's not what I meant. It's just that I've got some work to deal with over here. How about you do some shopping first? I'll be there later." However, Madeline replied, "I'm giving you half an hour. You'll suffer the consequences if you fail to show up." With that, she hung up right away. When Elise heard the disconnect tone on the phone, she instantly lost all her appetite for the food before her. After checking the time, she paid the bill and hailed a cab to Moore Plaza right away.

Meanwhile, a fashionably dressed lady was holding Madeline's arm while asking in a soft voice, "Is she really coming, Godmother?" Madeline let out a snort. "In any case, I'm now her future mother-in-law. If she doesn't show up, then there's no need to maintain the relationship anymore." Maya Dahlen was inwardly delighted when she heard Madeline's reply, but her face gave nothing away. Instead, she said regretfully, "I think Alexander's really nice, actually. I just couldn't fathom why he would get engaged to such a countrywoman." Madeline immediately took Maya's hand.

"Don't you know, Maya? Your mom and I have been besties for so many years. To me, you're my only candidate for a daughter-in-law. As for Elise, she's only the fiancée arranged by my late father-in-law. Now that he's passed away, the engagement is no longer valid, of course." "Really? Is that so, Godmother?" "It's true, of course! Trust me. When Elise shows up later, we'll let her know the gap between her and our social circle." Maya nodded vaguely, but what she said

betrayed a note of disdain. "She's from the countryside, so she probably hasn't been to a shopping mall.

Say, would she die of shame if she sees us casually spending tens of thousands on clothes and handbags?" Madeline replied with a cold snort, "I simply don't understand how such a country bumpkin won Dad's favor. I suppose she did so by pretending to be pitiful to angle for sympathy. Such a woman just isn't good enough for us Griffiths." "Please rest assured, Godmother. I'll help you teach her a lesson later." Madeline was relieved the instant she heard Maya say so. After about half an hour, Elise hurried to them and stopped in her tracks while still panting for breath.

"I'm here, Mrs. Griffith." Madeline threw a cold glance at her, saying, "Come shopping with us, then." Only when reminded by Madeline did Elise notice the presence of Maya, a rich young lady decked out in designer clothes next to her. She nodded at Maya with a smile out of courtesy, saying, "Hi there. Nice to meet you." Maya smiled back at Elise, saying, "Hi, you must be Alexander's fiancée, aren't you? I've heard about you from Godmother long ago. Alexander's so lucky to be able to marry such a pretty girlfriend like you." As the saying went, an angry fist wouldn't hit a smiling face.

Seeing how friendly Maya was to her, Elise found it rude to give her the cold shoulder, so she merely replied, "Thanks. You look beautiful, too." However, instead of answering Elise, Maya held onto Madeline's arm on her own. "Godmother, I heard that Chanel's got a new product. Let's go and take a look." "Alright, let's go." The two women then walked together affectionately at the front like mother and daughter, completely ignoring Elise, who followed them from behind.

At the sight of the scene, Elise frowned slightly, but she had no choice but to follow them. The three women then walked into the Chanel boutique, though Elise was totally uninterested in those clothes and handbags. Seeing that Maya and Madeline were having a good time shopping, she sat down in the lounge on her own. After a while, Maya came to her with two handbags. "Please help me take a look, Elise. Which of these two handbags look better?"

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Elise glanced up at the two handbags. Then, she said, "The one on your right, I think. It looks simpler and more elegant." "Is that so? But I think the one on my left looks pretty nice, too. What do you think, Godmother?" Madeline replied with a smile, "I think both of them are pretty nice. Why don't you just buy both?" Maya promptly replied, "Well, you're right. These two handbags are of different styles, so they can match different dresses. I'll buy both of them, then." As she spoke, she handed the two handbags to the saleswoman. "I'd like to settle the bill. How much are these altogether?"

The saleswoman was so astonished that her eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. What a rich client! To think that she's buying two limited-edition handbags right away in one go, she thought. She hurriedly replied, "Both the

handbags are limited-edition products, so they cost 300,000 altogether.” Without turning a hair, Maya took out a credit card and handed it to the saleswoman right away. “I’ll pay by card.” The saleswoman then swiped the credit card and handed Maya the receipt. Having finished paying for the handbags, Maya walked up to Elise, saying, “I’m so happy today!

I bought my favorite handbags.” Elise’s face was expressionless, though. She merely replied, “Congrats.” Maya then turned around and said to Madeline, “Godmother, I think the dresses over there look pretty good, too...” As she spoke, she took a few dresses and went to the fitting room. Just then, Madeline walked up to Elise and said with feigned thoughtlessness, “We ladies should be nicer to ourselves. You may choose a dress that you like, but...” She paused for a moment and looked Elise up and down. None of the clothes Elise was wearing were designer clothes, and they were probably just cheap off-the-rack clothes.

At the sight of this, Madeline’s eyes grew even darker. “Judging from your outfit, I suppose you rarely go to a shopping mall. Never mind, you may choose from the dresses here. If you find any dress you like, I’ll buy it for you.” “It’s not necessary, Mrs. Griffith. Thanks for your kind offer, but I don’t really like the clothes and handbags here.” Madeline seemed to have expected Elise to turn her down. Seeing that Elise had done so, she didn’t insist, thinking that Elise had finally known her place. After Maya came out of the fitting room, she said to the saleswoman right away, “Bag them all up, please.” Maya looked surprised. “You don’t have to do this, Godmother. I’ll pay for them myself.”

“It’s alright, Maya. You don’t have to be so reserved with me.” Without the slightest hesitation, Madeline bought Maya several new pieces of clothing without turning a hair. Elise didn’t feel much about this, but the saleswoman handed all the shopping bags to her. For a moment, she followed Madeline and Maya closely while carrying all the shopping bags. However, Madeline thought that these clothes weren’t enough. She took Maya to buy some pieces of jewelry, spending several million before she finally stopped. Maya suggested, “Let’s call it a day, Godmother.

We’ve bought so many things today, and you’ve spent a lot of money for me.” Madeline felt incredibly smug as she looked back at Elise, who was carrying many shopping bags behind her. Well, I’ve taught her a lesson today by letting her know that Alexander’s totally out of her league, she thought. “It’s just a few million. As long as you like it, I’ll buy anything for you.” “Thank you so much, Godmother!” Madeline then said, “For families like ours, this money doesn’t matter at all, but ordinary people might not be able to earn several million in their lifetime.”

As she spoke, she couldn’t help but dart a glance at Elise. “I suppose you’ve never bought these luxury goods before, Elise. Well, it’s good for ladies to see the world.” Both her voice and her words reeked of disdain. Only then did Elise realize that Madeline had called her over to laugh at her for being unable to afford these so-called luxury goods and to let her know her place. But such snobbish behavior is really stupid, she thought. “Indeed, I’ve seen the world

today, Mrs. Griffith. Only now did I know there are such bumptious people in the world." "What did you say?!"

Madeline's voice instantly went up several octaves. Apparently, she was displeased by Elise's words. Just then, Elise's cell phone rang in her pocket. Ignoring Madeline, she took out her phone, glanced at its screen, and answered the phone. "Boss, someone just told me that you're shopping at Moore Plaza. Is that true?" Elise was caught unprepared when Jamie's voice rang in her ear. Surprised, she asked, "How did you know that?" Jamie replied, "Did you forget that Moore Plaza is a part of my family's property? As it happens, I'm here for an inspection.

When my assistant told me that you're here, I decided to call you to ask about it. Boss, just tell me right away if you need anything; I'll have it delivered to your home. Why come here yourself? It's a waste of your money, not to mention your energy." Elise raised her eyebrows slightly while glancing at Madeline and Maya nearby. Then, she replied, "I'm shopping with Alexander's mother." "Huh?" Jamie was surprised. "You're shopping with your future mother-in-law?" "Yeah," Elise replied. Then, she continued, "But it seems that I'm not here to shop with her, but to work as her coolie..." Upon hearing this, Jamie could no longer sit still. How dare someone have my boss work as her coolie?

he thought. "Don't go anywhere, Boss. Stay where you are and wait for me," he said. Then, he hung up and said right away to the manager behind him, "Get me two men." "Yes, Young Master Jamie." Jamie came downstairs with several bodyguards, attracting many people's attention along the way as he walked straight up to Elise. When he saw that her hands were full of shopping bags, his face darkened somewhat. So these people bullied my boss like that while I was absent, huh? He ordered the two men behind him, "You two, take these bags and have them delivered to the Griffith Residence." With that, the two men came forward and took all the shopping bags from Elise. Elise said, "You're quick, Jamie."

It took only a few minutes before he stood in front of me, she thought. Just as Jamie was about to say something in reply, Madeline and Maya walked up to them. Madeline looked at Jamie with a hint of puzzlement in her eyes, whereas Maya knew Jamie, the man at the helm of the Keller Family and a promising young businessman with excellent business skills. She greeted him, saying, "Hi, Mr. Keller. Nice to meet you."

However, Jamie had no impression of her, so he merely replied out of courtesy, "Hi." Madeline asked, "Who is this guy, Elise?" Elise shot a glance at Jamie, who immediately introduced himself, saying, "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Griffith. I'm a friend of Miss Sinclair, as well as the owner of this shopping mall. I heard from my subordinate that Miss Sinclair's here, so I'm here to keep her company while she goes shopping." A friend of Elise?

To think that a country bumpkin like her knew someone from the Keller Family! Madeline thought. She was doubtful deep down. Besides, judging from Jamie's manner toward Elise, their relationship seemed more complex than it appeared. What a country bumpkin! Hasn't she had enough after seducing Alexander?

How dare she fool around with other men! At the thought of this, Madeline thought even worse of Elise. Obviously, Elise is trying to get ahead and climb up the social ladder by relying on men. Hmph! Women like her are a dime a dozen, she thought. "Ho ho! You're talking like you're her boyfriend, Mr. Keller."

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Jamie's eyes darkened at Madeline's words, but his face gave nothing away. He merely said, "It'd be a blessing from God if I could have a girlfriend like Miss Sinclair. It's just too bad that I'm not lucky enough to meet a good partner like her in my lifetime." Upon hearing this, Elise gave Jamie a big thumbs up in her mind. This guy's gotten better at talking, she thought. On the other hand, Madeline's face grew even darker at Jamie's words. Jamie ignored Madeline's expression, though. Instead, he turned to look at Elise, asking, "Did you buy all these, Miss Sinclair?"

Elise was somewhat puzzled. Nevertheless, she shook her head and replied, "No, Mrs. Griffith bought these for Miss Dahlen here." Jamie let out a long sigh. "I see. I saw you carrying these bags, so I thought you were the one who bought all these. Anyway, it's rare for you to come to my shopping mall. Did you find anything you like after shopping around?" Upon hearing this, Elise finally figured out what Jamie was up to. She immediately replied with a smile, "Well, I had my eye on a few Hermès handbags just now." The instant she finished her sentence, Jamie immediately understood what she implied.

He ordered the men behind him, "Pack up all the new handbags in the Hermès store and have them delivered to Miss Sinclair's home." "Yes, Young Master Jamie." The men hurriedly carried out his orders. Meanwhile, Maya was instantly stunned by what was happening. Did he just say 'all the new Hermès handbags'? That's the dream of countless young ladies! A Hermès handbag is as valuable as ten Chanel handbags combined, yet this man offered to give Elise an entire limited-edition series! she thought. In an instant, she felt that the handbags she had just bought today didn't appeal to her anymore.

"What about clothes? Or jewelry?" Elise seemed to give it some serious thought. Then, she said, "I heard that Cion, the jewelry brand, has just introduced a necklace that's worth millions..." Without batting an eyelid, Jamie immediately ordered, "Pack up that flagship piece from the Cion store and have it delivered as well." Even Madeline was stupefied when the man offered to give a necklace worth millions to Elise as a present without the slightest hesitation. Just what's so special about Elise that makes this guy spend so much money on her?

Maya quickly took Madeline's arm and exchanged glances with her, while Madeline patted the back of her hand to comfort her. Well, let's see if this guy's really that generous with money. However, in less than ten minutes, Jamie's bodyguards came carrying many shopping bags. All these bags contained Hermès Birkin bags, and one of them even contained an exquisitely decorated gift box. "I

hope you're happy with these, Miss Sinclair." Elise crinkled her eyes in a smile as she knew the reason why Jamie had done all these. Playing along with him, she replied with a nod, "Thanks for the gifts. I like them very much."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that you like them," Jamie said, before turning to look at Madeline. "So, are you gonna continue shopping, Mrs. Griffith?" At this moment, though, Madeline was no longer in the mood for shopping, for the sight of those shopping bags made her feel very embarrassed. "No, I don't think so. We've bought enough things, so we'll be going back." "In that case, could I have someone escort you home?"

Before Madeline could answer him, Maya replied first, "Sure! As it happens, I'm tired from shopping." She just wanted to run away from here as soon as possible since she really couldn't stand it anymore. Madeline was inwardly displeased. She shot an angry glare at Elise, but she didn't say anything else. Before coming to the shopping mall, she had planned to open Elise, that country bumpkin's, eyes and make her realize the gap between her and the Griffiths. But now, she was dumbfounded by everything Jamie had done. "Sorry for troubling you, then," Elise said. Jamie hurriedly had a special car arranged to drive the three women home.

Madeline kept a sullen face on their way home, whereas Elise was much more relaxed. After arriving home, Madeline tossed the handbag in her hand to the servant and then said to Elise in displeasure, "You're a lady, Elise. Don't you know that a lady should stay reserved? When men give women presents, they usually do so for a purpose. How could you date my son while accepting presents from other men? Aren't you ashamed of that?" However, Elise smiled faintly without the slightest displeasure. She replied, "I think you're overthinking it, Mrs. Griffith."

Mr. Keller and I have known each other for years, so there's nothing wrong with me accepting gifts from him. Besides, you must've gotten tired from an entire day of shopping, so let's not worry about me. If you think it was inappropriate for me to accept gifts from someone else, I can do nothing about that. After all, I've got no right to control what you think." "You... You've got quite the sharp tongue. Aren't you worried that I'll tell Alex about this?" "Well, whether to tell Alexander about this or not is up to you. You're free to choose whether to do it or not."

"I'm going upstairs for a rest," Elise replied. With that, she turned around and left. Madeline was as mad as hell, for she found that she could do nothing about Elise. Just then, the servant came over with the Hermès shopping bags in her hands. She asked Madeline, "Madam, where should I put these bags? Should I put them in your room as usual?" Madeline replied snappishly, "Don't ask me about that! Just put them wherever you like." The servant was confused, but she dared not breathe. Just then, however, Elise poked her head out from somewhere, saying, "Stella, please send them all to my room."

Stella immediately replied, "Yes, Miss Elise." Then, she looked at the servant next to her, saying, "These are Miss Elise's stuff. Just send them to her room." The servant hurriedly brought all the shopping bags upstairs. Madeline felt like a formless fire was burning inside her. I've got to chase Elise out of this house as soon as possible! she thought. As soon as Alexander came home, she went up to

him and said, "I've got something to tell you, Alex! Elise's fooling around with someone else out there..." Alexander's expression changed slightly at Madeline's words, but he merely replied, "What are you talking about, Mom?"

Madeline couldn't care less about anything else, though. She told Alexander everything she had seen today, though she didn't say a word about what she had done on purpose. "I'm telling you, Alex, that Keller guy really spent a lot of money on her! It'd be understandable for him to do that if they were a couple, but he gave her such valuable presents despite them not being a couple. This simply doesn't make sense! Not only that, but Elise accepted his gifts like it was nothing. There's no doubt that she's cheated on you by doing so!" "That's enough, Mom! It's not what you think.

I trust Elise; she's not the kind of person you're talking about." This was the first time Madeline had seen her son talking to her like this, and the fire within her continued to rage. "Alex, you're being fooled by that woman—" However, before she could finish her sentence, Alexander cut her short, saying, "Enough is enough, Mom! Let's not talk about this anymore. I'm going upstairs." With that, he went upstairs, leaving a stupefied Madeline behind. Alexander went to Elise's room and knocked on the door. Right after that, Elise's voice was heard saying, "Come in."

When Alexander pushed the door open and entered, he saw some shopping bags containing high-end luxury items. His eyes darkened, but he walked toward her without looking sideways. At this moment, Elise was sitting at her desk and fiddling with the cell phone in her hand. "Oh, you're back," she said. The next second, though, Alexander grabbed her wrist right away and pulled her into his arms. Then, he held her close, asking, "Did my mom give you a hard time today?"

Elise blinked her eyes before saying with a smile, "No, she didn't! She just took me on a shopping trip. These are the things I got, but they were given to me by Jamie as presents." Alexander said with a straight face, "Just use the card I gave you when you go shopping next time. Don't accept any presents from other men again."

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Elise quickly explained, "It's not like I wanted to accept Jamie's presents, but the situation at the time..." Just then, however, she thought of something. After all, Madeline was Alexander's mother. However displeased she was with Madeline, she couldn't say nasty things about his mother in front of him. Therefore, she changed the subject and said, "Never mind, I'll return them after leaving them here for a few days." However, Alexander tightened his arms around her. "I'm sorry, Elise. I don't think I can accept other men being nice to you, so I've got to be twice as nice to you in the future."

Elise didn't say a word. There were some things that she didn't want to tell him lest it made him feel even more irritable. However, she could sense that Madeline was hostile to her. Seems like it's true that the relationship with one's mother-in-law is the trickiest problem in the world. Perhaps I could reduce the

conflict between us by avoiding her, she thought. At the thought of this, she made up her mind. When Alexander came out of Elise's room, he gave Cameron a call. "Help me find out what happened at Moore Plaza today." Cameron merely replied, "Yes, Young Master Alexander," on the other end of the line without asking any questions.

After hanging up the phone, Alexander looked back and stared at the tightly closed door. Even though Elise said nothing about it, he could sense that there was something wrong with her mood today. What should I do to reduce her worries? he thought. Over the next few days, Elise went out from dawn till dusk, going to Brendan's studio to help him with his work. As she avoided meeting Madeline almost every day, the two women rarely ran into each other, thus avoiding many conflicts.

However, Madeline wouldn't let it go at that. One day, the servant received an exquisitely designed invitation card. "Madam, it's an invitation sent by the SK Group." Madeline took the invitation card and glanced at it. "Just put it there! I'll make time to attend the event." "Yes, madam," Stella said. Just as Stella was about to leave, Madeline stopped her, saying, "Wait a minute, Stella." "Is there anything else, madam?" Coming straight to the point, Madeline said, "You've worked for the Griffiths for years. I suppose I can talk about this with you without mincing words. You've served Dad by his side for so many years, so you know his temperament better than anyone else.

I'm just curious as to why he would arrange for Alex to get engaged to a country bumpkin like Elise." Stella was troubled by Madeline's question. "Madam, this is a matter within the Griffith Family. I'm only a servant, so I'm not qualified to comment on this." Madeline immediately replied, "It's okay, Stella. I just want to know what Dad thought, so you just have to be honest." Still, Stella was unsure of what to say in response. In the past few days, she had noticed that Madeline seemed to be displeased with Elise. Naturally, she couldn't say anything about it as a servant, though she felt more and more sorry for Elise.

"Madam, since you asked me the question today, allow me to say that Elise is actually a fine lady. She excels in her studies and is the top scorer in the college entrance exam this time. Back when the late Mr. Griffith was still around, she never exploited his fondness for her to do anything inappropriate. Instead, she always had the interests of the Griffiths in mind. As for her relationship with Young Master Alexander, I don't think it's proper for us to speak out of turn about the love between a man and a woman. But I believe that Young Master Alexander must've liked Miss Elise because there's something extraordinary about her. Besides, they look like a perfect match. I think they'll definitely be happy if they get married."

"That's enough..." Madeline interrupted Stella before the latter could continue her speech. "Getting married? How could she marry into the Griffith Family with such a family background? Isn't that a bit too laughable?" Upon hearing Madeline's words, Stella realized that Madeline disliked Elise because of the latter's family background. Turns out that rich families value marriages between families of equal social standing above everything else. Well, the late Mr. Griffith

was better; he didn't hold such vulgar and old-fashioned views, she thought. Just then, Madeline said, "Tell me the truth, Stella. Has she done anything... indecent with Alex over the time she spent here?"

Upon hearing this, Stella immediately replied, "You're overthinking it, madam. There's nothing indecent between Miss Elise and Young Master Alexander. I can vouch for Miss Elise about this." Madeline heaved a sigh of relief. Seems like they've yet to reach that point in their relationship. In that case, there'd still be a way to improve the situation, she thought. "Alright, I got it. You may leave." Stella wiped the sweat off her forehead before going to the kitchen. Then, she breathed a sigh of helplessness, saying, "Why would a kind person like you come across such a mother-in-law, Miss Elise..."

Elise didn't know what had happened, and she didn't come home until 10PM as usual. Whenever she came back at this hour in the last few days, the lights in the living room would've already been switched off. Today, however, the spacious living room was brightly lit. "You're back at last, huh?" Elise heard Madeline's voice as soon as she entered the house. When she looked up subconsciously, she saw Madeline sitting on the sofa in the living room. She asked, "Why are you still up at such a late hour, Mrs. Griffith?" "I was waiting for you," Madeline replied succinctly.

"Come here. Let's have a talk." Elise walked over to Madeline and sat down beside her. "Is there anything you'd like to talk to me about, Mrs. Griffith?" "Uh-huh," Madeline replied. "I heard from someone in the family that you'd be staying here for only a year. Since it's about time, I'd say you should consider moving out and staying somewhere else. After all, you're a lady, so it's quite improper for you to stay at someone else's place all year round." For a moment, Elise didn't know how to respond to Madeline's words. She came here because Jonah had invited her to, but now that Jonah was gone, it did seem improper for her to continue staying here. Moreover, Madeline had asked her to leave.

"You're right, Mrs. Griffith. I should be moving out indeed." Madeline then said, "I don't mean anything else, but you're a lady, so your reputation is quite important. Those in our family are mostly guys, so it'll be embarrassing if word gets around about this. How about this? I've got a 2-bedroom apartment downtown, so you can stay there if you want." "Thanks for your kind offer, Mrs. Griffith, but it's not necessary. I'll find a place to stay on my own." Madeline heaved a sigh of relief when she heard Elise say so. "That's good. You're engaged to Alexander, but you two aren't married yet, after all, so your relationship is still subject to change.

I'm doing this for your own good, so if Alexander and the others ask you about it later, I hope you'll tell them that it's your own decision." To put it bluntly, I can't say that she drove me out. There was no way Elise didn't understand the meaning behind Madeline's words. Indeed, she was like an outsider to this family, so it was a bit improper for her to stay here. "Don't worry. I understand that." Therefore, Elise packed up her stuff the next day. She had bought an apartment in Athesea long ago, though the place had always been vacant. Originally, she had planned to move there when she finished spending a year at the Griffith Residence as she had promised to Robin.

Now that she was going to move out, she could stay in that apartment for the time being. She announced right away during breakfast that she was planning to

move out. In an instant, those at the dining table were surprised, and Danny was the first to speak. "You're moving out? Why, Boss? Why are you moving out? You're doing fine while staying here, anyway." Brendan asked right after that, "Did something happen, Elise? Why do you want to move out all of a sudden?" Jack was puzzled, too. "Don't tell me you want to move out because you have a hard time adjusting to it now that my parents are back?"

Elise immediately replied with a smile, "No, that's not it. I just feel that I've bothered you guys a little by staying here for too long. Now that the college entrance exam has ended, I'll be going to university at Tissote when the semester begins in September. It'd be inconvenient for me to continue staying here, so I decided I might as well move out." "That can't be true, Boss! Don't move out, okay? If you move out of here, I'll have a problem improving my ranking in games.

How am I supposed to play games with you then?" Brendan chimed in, "That's right, Elise. There's still a month before the semester begins, so you can totally stay until then." As soon as Brendan finished his sentence, Alexander, who had been silent the whole time, looked up at Elise and asked, "Where will you be staying?"

Elise answered honestly, "I'll be staying at Bollinger Gardens on Ellingmont Lane." "I'll help you move your stuff there later, then." Elise nodded in agreement, but she couldn't help feeling a bit disappointed deep down inside. He didn't even ask me to stay, she thought to herself.

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"What are you talking about, Alexander? Wouldn't it be inconvenient for you and Elise to meet up after she moves out?" "Yeah, that's right! Elise is engaged to you, so she's part of our family. She'll be staying with us sooner or later, anyway." However, Alexander didn't bat an eye. He replied flatly, "I'm just respecting her decision." Elise's heart instantly sank when she heard this, but she put on a calm face without revealing any emotion.

She didn't know what was wrong with her. She was the one who said she would be moving out, and he agreed to that at last, but she became even more upset instead... "Well then, go on with your breakfast. I'm going upstairs to pack up my stuff," she said. With that, she went upstairs, leaving everyone else to look at each other in puzzlement. Jack said, "Something's amiss! Did you guys notice that something was wrong with Elise's mood today?"

Upon hearing Jack's words, Brendan pondered for a moment and then turned to look at Alexander. "I noticed that too. Besides, Elise has been going out early and coming back at night lately. Is she hiding something from us?" Everyone fell silent at his words, whereas Alexander's piercing eyes darkened bit by bit. Elise didn't have many belongings, so she only packed them in a simple suitcase. As she dragged her suitcase downstairs, Danny immediately trotted up to her to help her. "Let me help you with that, Boss," he said while taking the suitcase from her. However, instead of going downstairs, he stood still and continued, "Are you really leaving, Boss?"

I'll miss you very much." Elise comforted him, saying, "I'm just moving out. It's not like we're not gonna meet again. If you wanna play games with me, just text me on WhatsApp. I'll play with you if I'm free." Danny pouted his lips before he replied despondently, "Alright, Boss." Just then, Alexander came over to them. "Just put the suitcase in the trunk. I'll drive her there." Danny still wanted to say something, but when he saw how unyielding Alexander was, he could only hold back the words on the tip of his tongue and obediently put the suitcase in the trunk.

"Let's go," Alexander said before going out first. Elise followed Alexander closely, though neither of them spoke on their way to her apartment. When they arrived at Bollinger Gardens, Elise unbuckled her seat belt, saying, "We've arrived. Just drop me here." To her surprise, Alexander didn't say a word in reply. Instead, he merely opened the car door, got out of the car, and picked up her suitcase. He asked, "Which block are you staying in?" Elise pointed at a building nearby. "Over there in Unit 1002, Block 3B." Alexander then dragged the suitcase toward Block 3B.

At the sight of the scene, Elise hurriedly caught up to him. "Actually, you don't have to escort me there. I can move into my apartment on my own." Alexander raised an eyebrow slightly. Seeing that the elevator had arrived, he motioned for Elise to go in first. As the elevator door closed, he slowly said, "You can move into your apartment on your own, but it's my duty and responsibility as your fiancé to safely escort you to your destination." Silenced by his words at once, Elise replied, "Oh, okay," without saying anything else. The elevator slowly went up until it stopped on the tenth floor.

After the couple walked out of the elevator, Elise hurriedly took out her keys and opened the door to her apartment. The apartment was a fully-furnished 3-bedroom unit, and she had made a special effort to buy it along with the furniture and electrical appliances back then. Therefore, it was very convenient for her to move in with only her belongings. Alexander put her suitcase in the bedroom before surveying the apartment.

He asked, "When did you buy this apartment?" "Before coming to the Griffith Residence," answered Elise. "Uh-huh," Alexander uttered. "This place is nice. Still, it's a bit dangerous for you to live alone as a lady." Elise replied, "It's okay. I have it figured out. I'll buy a pair of men's slippers and put them at the door tomorrow. Also, I'll hang some men's clothes to dry so no one would think that I'm living alone." Alexander narrowed his eyes slightly. "Well, you're quite thoughtful, but don't you have any alternative?" Elise subconsciously asked, "Isn't this good enough?"

Alexander looked around and inspected the balcony and the bathroom window. After making sure that everything was alright, he said, "I've got something to do at my office, so I'll be going there first. Be careful while you stay here alone." Elise nodded repeatedly. "Don't worry. I know that." However, she became downcast at once after Alexander left. Staring at the spacious and empty apartment, she felt a void inside her. Meanwhile, Alexander didn't leave after the

apartment door was closed. Instead, he glanced at Unit 1001 next door and pressed the doorbell without the slightest hesitation.

"Coming... Who is it?" When the door opened, Alexander stood there and said, "Hi, there's something I'd like to discuss with you..." The apartment's owner was startled for a while. Then, he said, "In that case, come on in. Let's talk about it inside." ... On the first day of moving in, Elise did a quick cleaning of the apartment and ordered a takeout for lunch. Everything was fine up until then. However, when she lay alone in bed and stared at the ceiling above her at night, a feeling of loneliness welled up within her.

She had trouble sleeping in an unfamiliar bed, so she had a hard time adjusting to it after moving to a new place all of a sudden... She tossed and turned until the second half of the night before falling asleep. When she woke up the next day, it was already 9AM. She quickly washed up, got changed, and got ready to leave the apartment. However, when she opened the door, she saw a few people moving things into the apartment next door. She asked curiously, "Are you guys the new neighbor?"

The worker answered, "Nope, we're movers. We're helping the apartment's owner move in." Elise thought it coincidental that a new neighbor was moving into the apartment next door after she had moved here yesterday, but she didn't give it much thought. When the elevator arrived, she took the elevator right away. It was already 10AM when she arrived at Brendan's studio. As soon as she arrived, Brendan came up to her, asking, "Are you alright, Elise?"

Elise replied with a smile, "Yeah, I'm fine! I just woke up late because I'd just moved house and was a bit unused to it." "Ah, that's okay. That's not what I'm asking about, anyway. I wanted to ask..." Brendan hesitated for a moment. Then, he asked, "Why exactly did you move out all of a sudden?" Upon hearing Brendan's question, Elise replied slowly without revealing any emotion on her face, "Uh, there's no particular reason, actually. I just wanted a change of environment since I've bothered you guys for too long."

Brendan obviously didn't believe her story, though. "Really? Or do you not want to tell me the reason? We've known each other for such a long time, Elise, so you've got to tell me if anything happened to you. Don't treat me like an outsider." Elise nodded. "Don't worry. I'll tell you about it if anything happens to me. Don't overthink it, though." Brendan was relieved to hear Elise say so. "Alright then. Go ahead with your work while I go back to my office first."

After Brendan left, Elise pulled out her chair and sat down. After looking at her design drawings, she picked up the pencil and continued drawing her designs. However, it didn't take long before she heard what sounded like a quarrel outside. "We placed the order for the custom-made evening dress a month ago. The film festival is coming soon, and you gave us this piece of junk?" "I don't care about anything else. You guys must solve this problem for me right now, or we'll terminate all our contracts with your studio." "You know Maeve's current standing in show business.

Can you afford to pay the losses if she can't wear the dress at the film festival?" Volley after volley of arguments were heard. Elise opened the door and walked

out of the room. Seeing that many people had gathered in front of her, she stopped an assistant and asked, "What happened? Why are they quarreling?" The assistant glanced at the crowd before explaining in a low voice, "Something's wrong with Maeve's evening dress; they're displeased with the dress we designed. We had let them take a look at the design when it came out, and they didn't voice any objections then.

Now that the dress has been completed, they keep finding fault with it instead." Elise frowned slightly. Normally, both the studio and the client would exchange their opinion on such a custom-made evening dress when the design came out. If the client was dissatisfied with the design, they could totally have had it revised at the time. Therefore, it was somewhat unreasonable for them to voice their dissatisfaction with the design now that the dress had been completed. "I'm going to take a look." The assistant hurriedly stopped her. "No, don't do that.

This is Mr. Griffith's design, so he'll take care of this," she said. Then, she deliberately lowered her voice and continued, "It's obvious that Maeve is making things difficult for Mr. Griffith on purpose. Everyone knows she's got feelings for him. You should stay out of this, Elise..." Elise knitted her brows.

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As they were speaking, Brendan came out of his office with an obviously gloomy expression on his face. He then said to Maeve Lindberg's manager, "The dress has already been completed. If you're dissatisfied, we can give you a full refund." Apparently, Maeve's manager didn't expect Brendan to say that. Surprised, she replied with a smile, "Please don't be mad, Mr. Griffith. We aren't saying that we're not satisfied with the dress; it's just that Maeve said the dress is the result of your hard work since you designed it yourself. You know what kind of a person she is, though. She said she'll perhaps be satisfied if you personally deliver the dress to her."

"That's enough," Brendan interrupted her right away. "Please help me tell Miss Lindberg that it's not a problem if she's dissatisfied with the design and needs it to be revised. If she's dissatisfied with the dress, we can have it remade, and if she wants to terminate our contracts, we can choose to terminate the contracts amicably. As for everything else, please tell her to behave herself." The manager quickly replied with an obsequious smile, "You're going a bit too far in saying that, Mr. Griffith. Maeve didn't mean anything else. She just wanted to be friends with you, but if you don't want to, she won't force it, of course.

To put it bluntly, we didn't come to you for the dress; we came to you because Maeve is interested in you. Since you don't reciprocate Maeve's feelings, let's forget about our collaboration. As for the compensation, you just have to pay the money according to what was stated in the contract." Brendan looked as black as

thunder. "Alright then, goodbye and good riddance," he uttered between clenched teeth.

Then, he turned around and left regardless of the manager's response. The manager then said, "Don't show me the door in such a hurry, Mr. Griffith. Actually, you're skilled as a designer, but Maeve admires your personality more. Besides, you're currently single, and Maeve is a popular female celebrity. She's a good match for you, so why put on airs when you don't have to?" As soon as the manager finished her sentence, Elise walked out right away and looked at her with a faint smile. "Since Maeve is a popular female celebrity, why force people into doing things they don't wanna do?" When the manager saw Elise, her eyes widened with amazement, especially when she looked at Elise's face, which was especially fair despite having no makeup on.

Her bright and clear eyes were especially beautiful, and her slender figure made her look like someone born to be a star. Even Maeve would pale in comparison with her if she stood in front of her. However, for some reason, the manager thought Elise's face looked familiar to her. "And you are?" she asked with a groveling smile on her face. Elise replied flatly, "Just one of the studio's designers." The manager then took out a business card from her pocket. "I'm a manager from Bright Star Entertainment. Are you interested in entering show business? You look so beautiful, and you're young. I guarantee that I'll make you the top celebrity in less than three years." "And then you'll make me as overbearing as you are?" Elise shot back. The manager's expression changed at once. "Brendan Griffith should feel honored that Maeve has taken a fancy to him. Do you believe that Maeve can make your studio go out of business with just a word?" Elise had seen some arrogant people before, but she had never seen someone as arrogant as the manager. Folding her arms across her chest, she said, "Well, you can give it a try. Let's see if our studio will go out of business or if Maeve will disappear from show business in the end." Elise's words sent a chill down the manager's spine.

She had a vague feeling that Elise didn't seem to be joking, and that she really seemed capable of doing that. But on second thought, Elise was only a young lady who was still wet behind the ears. How capable can she be? she thought. "Do you think such a threat will work on me? Let me tell you that it's only a matter of minutes if we want your studio to go out of business." Elise replied, "Alright then, I'll wait for it! But let me remind you that a wicked person is doomed to destruction. Lastly, tell Maeve to stop harassing Brendan." The manager gave Elise a long stare before replying with a sneer, "Who do you think you are? What makes you think you can meddle in Maeve's affairs? Here's a piece of sound advice for you: you'll pay the price for poking your nose into somebody else's business."

Without waiting for Elise's response, she shot her a warning stare and left. At the sight of the scene, Elise's eyes grew darker bit by bit. Just then, the assistant hurriedly came to her and asked, "Are you alright, Elise?" Elise's instinct told her that there was more to it than what the manager had said, but she didn't give it much thought. She merely replied, "I'm fine." The assistant sighed. "This isn't the first time Maeve has pestered Mr. Griffith. In fact, she has done it a few times. Mr. Griffith has been reluctant to deal with them, but the collaboration agreement they signed back then is valid for a year, so he's been doing all he can to keep

Maeve away... But it seems that Maeve won't stop until she's got her hands on Mr. Griffith. It's the first time I've seen such a shameless woman.

She pretends to be so likable and innocent on the big screen, but who would've known that she's such a woman in private?" she said. As she spoke, however, she broke off in the middle of her speech and looked at Brendan nearby with a horrified expression. "Mr. Griffith, I..." Brendan opened his mouth, saying, "Just go ahead with your work." The assistant quickly ran away. When Elise realized what had happened, she was already nowhere to be seen. Brendan came over and said, "Thank you, Elise. But please stay out of this in the future." Elise was somewhat puzzled. "Why are you putting up with her like that?" Brendan explained, "Maeve's got connections in the underworld. I'm a businessman, so I can't offend those in the underworld." The furrow in Elise's brow deepened.

"So you're just going to keep putting up with her like that?" Brendan let out a sigh. "I'm fine. The contract will end in less than half a year, anyway." Elise thought that Brendan didn't seem like someone who would swallow his pride, but he kept trying his best to avoid Maeve, as if she were vicious. Elise had a hard time concentrating in the afternoon as she kept thinking about Maeve. In the end, she took out her cell phone and googled Maeve's name, and a detailed introduction of her immediately popped up on Wikipedia... There was nothing special about the introduction on Wikipedia since it had glorified Maeve in every way possible. As Elise had no impression of the woman, she put her cell phone away without giving it much thought. Elise worked overtime until past 9PM as usual. Then, she switched off the lights, ready to leave the office. She was the last person to leave the studio every day, so she had grown used to it. As usual, she left the studio after locking the door. Unexpectedly, as soon as she came out of the studio, a dark silhouette popped up in front of her and then put a gunnysack on her. Elise struggled out of reflex, but she lost consciousness after only a few seconds. A male voice sounded, saying, "Throw her into the trunk." With that, several men quickly threw Elise into the car and then drove off. All of this happened in a flash. Within two mere minutes, the car was nowhere to be seen, and the surroundings were quiet again as usual.

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At Bollinger Gardens, the doorbell for Unit 1002 of Block 3B kept ringing, but no one was answering the door. Alexander checked the time. She's yet to return home at such a late hour? he thought. Immediately, he took out his cell phone and called Elise. "Sorry, the number you've dialed is not reachable..." Alexander knitted his brows as he dialed another phone number. "Is Elise still at the studio?" Brendan had just arrived home and was changing into his slippers on the porch when he got a phone call from Alexander.

Recalling that Elise's office was brightly lit when he left the studio, he replied, "She was still in the studio when I left, but she's supposed to have gone back at this hour. Why not give her a call if you're looking for her?" "Her cell phone is switched off," Alexander said before hanging up. Brendan was left confused. Elise's cell phone is switched off? Well, it's probably run out of juice, he thought. The next second, however, he recalled something and had a bad feeling.

As he couldn't be bothered to put on his shoes, he ran out right away in his slippers. Meanwhile, Alexander drove to the studio, but there was nobody in the spacious studio at this very moment. When Alexander found the security guard at the entrance, he asked, "Did you see a lady coming out of here?" The security guard thought for a moment before he answered, "Are you talking about the lady in the studio opposite? Come to think of it, it's strange that I didn't see her today, but she's probably still inside. Usually, she'd be gone by this hour." Alexander looked back at the studio. For some reason, he panicked a little deep down inside.

When he walked to the studio, he found that the door was locked. He then called out to Elise, but there was no answer. Just then, Brendan arrived in a hurry. "Did you find Elise, Alexander?" Alexander asked, "Did you see her?" Brendan shook his head repeatedly. Then, he said, "Could something have happened to her?" Alexander was astounded. He asked, "What happened?" Brendan then told him about what had happened that morning regarding Maeve. "I should've stopped her from clashing with Maeve's manager. Maeve's got connections in the underworld.

Could they have abducted Elise?" Alexander's hands quietly clenched into fists. "Let's hurry up and look for her. It'd be best if that woman had nothing to do with this. Otherwise... I'd never let her off." His words reeked of such murderous intent that even Brendan couldn't help but shudder in fear. As he couldn't care less about everything else, he turned around and started making phone calls to search for Elise. ... Elise was being tossed up and down when she regained consciousness. She sensed that her hands and feet were tied, and she couldn't move at all.

Not only that, but she couldn't stretch her legs as there was a vague hint of numbness in them. With the benefit of hindsight, she realized that she probably had been kidnapped. But who kidnapped me? she wondered. She tried to struggle, but she couldn't summon up her strength at all. Just then, a creepy male voice sounded. "That b*tch's awake." Elise immediately stopped what she was doing, and she dared not even breathe.

"It's even better that she's awake. After all, I don't wanna do that kind of thing to a dead woman. At least it's more fun to have our way with her like this..."
"Haha... You're right. How much time's left before we reach our destination?"
"Calm down, will you? We'll arrive in a few more minutes. Are you that impatient already?" "Oh, you bet I am. This lady's a stunner. Well, we're lucky to be able to have our way with her today..." The few men laughed as they looked at each other.

Elise trembled with rage when she heard the men's unbearably lewd remarks. However, she was gagged with a piece of fabric, so she couldn't make a sound even if she wanted to. Therefore, she could only try to untie the rope around her hands. Just then, the car jolted, causing Elise to bump her head against the trunk lid. As she gasped in pain, she sensed that the car seemed to be headed for somewhere increasingly remote, and her heart instantly sank. Now I can only try

to save myself. The car slowly drove up to the entrance of an abandoned factory and stopped.

“Drag her out of the car and get her inside.” The few men opened the trunk lid and took off the sack on Elise’s head, revealing her horrified face at once. “What are you looking at? We’re gonna give you a good time later.” The few men guffawed frivolously and wantonly at the remark, whereas Elise struggled with all her might as she kept mumbling in a muffled voice. Seeing that she couldn’t run away, one of the men took off the piece of fabric from her mouth. “Just say whatever you want to say. You’re not gonna have the opportunity to say anything later, anyway.”

Elise’s eyes darkened at once. She said right away, “Just name your price. How much do you want? I can give however much money you want as long as you guys let go of me.” However, the men burst out laughing upon hearing her words. “You’re still clueless at this point, huh? We’re not doing this for money. It’s just that you offended someone, so we’re just carrying out that person’s order to make sure that you won’t live to see the next day.” They’re not doing this for money? Elise was somewhat nervous deep down inside. Nevertheless, she asked, “Are you gonna kill me then? It’s against the law to commit murder, you know?” The man replied arrogantly, “Haha! Against the law? Could the law punish us?”

Why didn’t you ask around about us? We’ve done such a thing many times, but I’m still alive and kicking, don’t you see?” Just then, the man next to him reminded him, “Alright, let’s not waste our time talking to her anymore. Hurry up and get her inside... I can’t wait any longer.” “Alright. Don’t tell on us when you go to hell, lady,” said the first man. With that, the men dragged her into the old and abandoned factory right away. Elise kept struggling, but she couldn’t break free of their grasp. After they entered the factory, the men threw her onto the haystack right away.

“Untie the ropes for her. I’m gonna be the first to have my way with such a stunner.” “No way! Didn’t we agree that I’ll be the first to do so. Go line up behind me.” “How dare you argue with me?” The situation got somewhat out of hand as the two men were instantly locked in a face-off. Just then, another man ran inside and said, “That’s enough! What are you arguing for? All of us are gonna get to have our way with her anyway, so be quick.

That person has told us to do it as quickly as possible and kill all the loose ends. It’ll be bad if you guys mess things up by procrastinating.” Upon hearing his words, the two men stopped confronting each other and turned to look at Elise. Then, the two men came forward at the same time, taking off their clothes as they closed in on her. “Don’t be afraid, sweetie. We’ll be gentle...” one of the men said while pouncing on Elise.

Seeing that the man was closing in on her, Elise steeled herself and kicked the man fiercely in the groin without the slightest hesitation the instant he pounced on her. There was a loud cry of pain as the man instantly covered his private parts while wailing in pain continuously. Even at this moment, Elise was cool-headed enough to warn, “Behave yourselves and stay away from me, or I’m gonna be very unpleasant with you.”

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"Haha! You've got quite the temper, huh? I like it." The man took off his jacket and forcibly pounced on Elise. Elise was instantly filled with disgust, as if her stomach was churning. She kept struggling, but the other men came forward and pinned her down, so she couldn't summon up her strength at all... Elise looked at the shabby roof above her head with her heart full of despair. As she slowly closed her eyes, a tear quietly rolled out of the corner of her eye... Bang! Just then, there was a loud bang, and Elise instantly opened her eyes. "Elise!" Alexander called out to Elise loudly, but the scene before him caused his eyes to redden with rage. He strode forward and sent the man on top of Elise flying with a kick. Then, without the slightest hesitation, he took off his suit jacket and draped it on her. As Elise looked at the man before her through a mist of tears, feelings of grievance welled up inside her, and tears gushed from her eyes. Alexander's heart ached terribly when he saw her like this.

"How dare you f*cking kick me? Guys, get him!" Alexander darted a cold glance at the men. He moved so swiftly that no one could see how he moved, and he knocked them flat in the blink of an eye. "F*ck, we can't beat him! What should we do? Let's run away..." The men quickly got up from the ground and ran to the door, only to see Brendan standing there with his back straightened. There was no warmth in his eyes as he folded his arms across his chest, saying, "Go on, keep running! Why aren't you running?" The few men looked at each other for a while as they were at a loss for what to do.

At last, the man leading them quickly said, "Wait a minute, it's all a misunderstanding! Please let us go this time. When we meet again in the future, I'll definitely reward you for this." Brendan's lips curled up into a chilling sneer. "Misunderstanding? Reward? I'm afraid you're not gonna have the opportunity anymore..." Before his voice faded, police sirens were heard wailing outside. "What do we do, bro? The police are outside. We have nowhere to run..."

Surprisingly, the leader of the group of men calmed down instead. "There's nothing to worry about. We're just gonna have a cup of tea at the police department. What else could happen, anyway? But today's matter..." the man said before looking daggers at Brendan. "We'll definitely kill you once we get out of the police department." Brendan met the man's gaze fearlessly, saying, "You're not gonna have the opportunity anymore."

When he finished his sentence, the policemen had arrived. The few men cooperated obediently when facing the policemen. After frog-marching the men into the police cars, a policeman came to Brendan and asked, "Did you call the police just now? Please come with us to have your testimony recorded at the police department." Brendan looked at Elise nearby with worry in his eyes. Nevertheless, he cooperated with the police. "Alright, sir. I'll be there right

away." It wasn't until everyone had left that Alexander slowly crouched down and looked at Elise, who was trembling like a leaf before him.

With a look of pain in his eyes, he reached out and caressed her cheek. He whispered softly, "It's okay. Everything's fine now." The next instant, Elise flung herself into Alexander's arms, unable to hold back her tears. It didn't take long before her tears formed a wet patch on his chest. "There, now. Nothing's gonna happen since I'm here for you." Elise slowly slipped out of Alexander's arms while looking at him through a mist of tears. "Do you know I really was in despair at that moment? I was so scared..." Before she could finish her sentence, though, he leaned forward and silenced her with a kiss on her lips.

"Let's not talk about it anymore. It's time to go home." Elise nodded. Alexander helped her up and looked her up and down. After making certain that there was nothing wrong with her, he went out carrying her in his arms. Neither of them spoke on their way back since Elise was still suffering from shock. She had no idea who would make such a cruel attempt on her life. When the car stopped at the neighborhood where Elise currently resided, Alexander held her hand and said, "We've arrived.

Let's get out of the car." "Okay." Elise opened the car door and got out of the car. The couple walked side by side toward the lobby before taking the elevator to Elise's apartment. After opening the door to her apartment, Elise turned sideways to make way for Alexander, saying, "Come in." Alexander went in after her. At this moment, Elise no longer seemed as panicky as before. She became unusually calm. After setting aside the shock just now, she was able to calm herself down.

After a long time, she asked, "You... How did you know I was in trouble?" Alexander explained truthfully, "I saw that you had yet to come back, so I called you on your cell phone, but your cell phone was switched off. So, I asked Brendan..." He then summarized the rest of the story in a few sentences. After listening to his words, Elise merely replied, "Oh," in a soft voice without saying anything else. Finally, she said, "Thanks. If you hadn't shown up in the nick of time... the consequences would've been too ghastly to imagine." Alexander came forward and took her hand.

"That's why it's dangerous for a lady like you to live alone out here. Wanna consider moving back with us?" Elise turned down the suggestion without thinking. "No, it's not necessary. I'll be more careful in the future so that such a thing won't happen again." Alexander seemed to have predicted such an outcome. Luckily, he had made preparations in advance. "Since this is what you wish, I'll respect your decision. It's getting pretty late. Go wash up and go to bed early." Elise looked up at the clock on the wall and realized that it was already past midnight.

As it was indeed getting late, she said, "You should go back and rest early, too." However, Alexander fixed his eyes on her face, asking, "Are you sure you're gonna be fine on your own?" Elise nodded. Inwardly, though, she felt somewhat nervous. Seeing her reaction, Alexander said, "Well then, I'll be leaving. Call me if there's anything." With that, he stretched out his hands and hugged her for about ten seconds before letting her go. "See me to the door, would you?" Elise didn't

turn his suggestion down. She showed him to the door and said, "I'll get the elevator for you."

However, just as she was about to press the elevator button, Alexander suddenly reached out and grabbed her. Then, he took a key out of his pocket and opened the door to the apartment next door in an unaffected manner. "Hi! Nice to meet you, my new neighbor." Elise was stupefied at the sight of the scene. Her mouth agape, she stared at the opened door, asking, "Y-You're my new neighbor?" "So? Would you like to visit your neighbor's new home?"

Elise's eyes instantly flickered with a hint of surprise. "W-Why did you move out as well?" Alexander smiled before explaining with a look of resignation, "Well, my girlfriend wants to stay here. I'm worried since she's staying alone, so I moved here to keep her company." Elise looked at him as her face finally broke into a faint smile. She stepped forward, stretched out her hands, and hugged him. "Hi, my new neighbor."

Alexander reached for her head and stroked her hair. He asked again, "Are you sure you're not gonna visit my place?" Elise poked her head out and looked at the apartment. In reality, she was a bit curious about what Alexander's apartment would look like, but they would be staying together in the same room in the middle of the night if she visited his place. Well... What if we start making out by accident?

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"I-I'm good. You should get some rest. I'm also about to head back to sleep." Having said that, Elise waved him goodbye before returning to her home. Once she shut her door, all that was on her face was nothing but joy. For some reason, she no longer felt the fear she once had. And she could finally feel safe solely because he lived right next to her.

The next morning, Elise's doorbell rang. Hastily, she hurried to the door with her cartoon graphic tee on, only to be surprised by Alexander at the door. "Why are you here this early?" He lifted the bag of food in his hand. "I got you breakfast." "Come in." Alexander casually entered her home and closed the door.

Elise was still feeling drowsy moments ago, but she was wide awake now. "I'll come eat after I wash up." Thereupon, she ran into the bathroom. Done with her wash up, she came out of the bathroom, only to be warmed by the sight of the scrumptious delicacies arranged on the dining table. Accordingly, she approached the table, pulled a chair out, and took a seat. "Egg sandwich, shrimp gnocchi, churros, and almond milk—all of them are my favorites..."

Alexander handed her her cutlery. "Then you better eat up. I've helped you apply for leave, so you won't have to go to work today. Rest up, okay?" "Thank

you," she blurted and proceeded to indulge in her feast. Peering at the man in front of her, she quizzed, "Have you eaten?"

"Nope," he answered. Hearing that, she took a piece of gnocchi and put it before his lips, to which the man tacitly opened his mouth, welcoming the corn-mixed shrimp gnocchi to his palate. While he was slowly chewing the food, he was savoring every single moment he was currently in. "You eat up too." She then fed him a piece of egg sandwich, which the man accepted without resistance. He would eat anything she gave him.

After their breakfast, as Elise was about to clean up the mess on the table, she was stopped by Alexander. "Let me. You should really rest." "Okay." Obediently, she stopped the action and passed on the task to him. Swiftly, the man tidied up the table and it looked as good as new. At that moment, the doorbell rang again. Elise went to open the door and saw Cameron carrying a stack of documents. "Good morning, Miss Elise. Is President Griffith here?"

"Please come in." Elise made space for the assistant to enter. With that, Cameron entered with files stacking in his arms, and was stunned. The president's on... cleaning duty? Although he was utterly confused, he pretended as if it was nothing out of the ordinary. "President Griffith, I've brought all the files over. I'll come over again to take them once you're done handling them." With a straight face, Alexander replied, "Just place it there."

Briskly, Cameron placed the documents on the tea table before rushing to offer help to his superior. "Allow me the physical task, President." Nonetheless, Alexander rejected his offer. "No, I'm fine. Just put the files down. You may leave if there's nothing else." Cameron quickly nodded. "As you wish, President Griffith." As he was about to turn around and leave, he seemed to recall something. "Oh, by the way, President Griffith, about the thing you had me look into last night..."

Before finishing the sentence, he took a glimpse at Elise, to which the latter realized that what he was about to say could possibly pertain to her, so she should probably leave the conversation. "Why don't you go on? I'll head back to my room." Unexpectedly, she was stopped by Alexander. "You can stay.

Just say it, Cameron. From now on, you don't have to hide anything from Elise, whatever it is." Acknowledging Alexander's absolute trust in Elise, Cameron said, "Alright. Turns out, the man was hired by Maeve. I've also dug up some dirt on her as you ordered. The thing is, many sources among those I looked for were reluctant to share any bad news about her, as if they were scared of some force behind Maeve.

Hearing Maeve's name, Elise immediately felt pressured. I've never even met her once, yet she's dying to kill me off. "Who's the 'force' behind her?" she questioned. "Well..." Although Cameron was somewhat perturbed, he eventually revealed the name. Hearing the name, Elise visibly frowned, while Alexander was ever-indifferent. "One week. Get that piece of sh*t out of showbiz." His utterance was calm, yet overbearing.

That was when Cameron realized that Maeve had stepped on Alexander's toe. "Yes, President! I'll handle it right away." Having said that, he turned around and left. When Cameron finally left, Elise stared at Alexander. "You know I won't blame you even if you don't help me, right? She has a strong force behind her backing her up. And a duel between two strong figures will only lead to a gruesome result on both ends. Do you really think it's worth it?"

"I know, but no matter who it is that wishes to harm you, I'll make sure to pay it back double. Don't worry about it. Whatever it takes, I won't let her off so easily." Elise couldn't help but feel moved by his words. Peering at the man in front of her, she subconsciously smiled. "Thank you for that answer, Alexander.

I'll make sure 'gruesome' only happens on one end." Baffled, Alexander was about to question her implication, but she spared him no opportunity. "Now, while you work, I'll go get some more rest. Might crave for some seafood stew for lunch." With a pampering beam, he answered, "Let's." When she returned to her bedroom, all of her emotions dispersed. After locking her door, she walked to the bedside dresser and pulled out a tablet from within, turning it on.

Donning a gloomy face, she rapidly tapped her fingers on the tablet's screen. Stripes of black and white flashed across the screen, followed by a series of codes and figures. Shortly after, a number of infographics popped up on her screen. The images were, to say the least, explicit. Elise intuitively scoffed the moment she laid eyes on the person in the image. Oh, how the tables have turned! Who would have expected you to be such a sly vixen, cutie?

Alexander said he'd allow you one week to get out of showbiz, but maybe one week is too long. So, how about three days? Consequently, various unrecognized sources on the internet started publishing scandalous information about Maeve. When Maeve's team saw the news, they immediately released a statement to dismiss the "slander." Typically, once a statement was made, the matter would be resolved immediately. But this time, it didn't.

The scandals were exposed one after another, showing no signs of stopping. Not only did the team fail to contain the spread of the news, but the scandals spread even wider like a wildfire. Within half an hour, social media platforms were flooded by hashtags and discussions related to Maeve.

"What the hell is happening? How are my old photos recurring?" Maeve raged at her manager. "Get them off the internet immediately! I do not wish to see any of those disgusting photos ever again!" "R-Right away, my precious. I'll have them removed at once. However, we've spent so much money, yet there hasn't been any effectiveness. Should I look for Mr. Fagan for help?" "Mr. Fagan this, Mr. Fagan that. Just do your damn work and stop the news from spreading!"

Maeve vexedly screamed. Little did she expect, this was only the beginning of her nightmare. Apart from the before-and-after photos of her plastic surgery, photos of her escorting in bars before she came to fame had also surged on the internet, including very explicit ones. In a flash, Maeve became the hot topic of the internet, drawing viewers and haters onto her Twitter page, shaping her into a public menace.

Right then, '#MaevensOverParty' became the trending tag on the platform. Meanwhile, Elise was scrolling on Twitter. Despite the outburst, she showed no emotions. Instead, she went even more brutal by uploading the dirt she had on Maeve with the hundreds of Twitter accounts she gained control of through her hacking skills, setting them to automatically retweet anything about Maeve's defamation.

In less than five minutes, Twitter's server collapsed, and she took the opportunity to infiltrate the platform's system and made some alteration to its algorithm. With so, anyone who came to defend her would have their accounts suspended. Having done that, Elise erased all of her traces on the internet and shut down her device.

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After she rolled out of bed, she walked toward the door and overheard Alexander's phone call. "Things are going smoothly, President Griffith. The dirt on Maeve is now all over the internet. Other than my 'contributions,' many accounts, too, have appeared to post nasty stuff about her. Who would have thought she had undergone plastic surgery, and even worked as an escort before she grew famous? Most importantly, she's exposed for selling drugs and evading tax, and those two alone are enough to earn her a life sentence!"

Cameron sounded rather ecstatic on the phone. On the contrary, Alexander simply blurted, "Good job." "Government forces are now looking into her case. Young Master Alex, we don't even need a week! Three days are enough to get her out of showbiz!" "Good." Once he finished speaking, Alexander saw Elise walking out of her bedroom. "That's all for now. You know what to do next." Ending the call, he quizzed, "What's wrong?"

Elise silently went to him and wrapped her arms around his waist. "I can't fall asleep." Smoothly, Alexander answered the embrace. "You're thinking too much." As the two wordlessly snuggled against each other, the woman suddenly felt at ease. "You're the best." Alexander rubbed his chin on the top of her head. "No, you're the best." "Ah, right, seafood stew! I'll order some seafood from the store and have them sent over."

Subtly frowning, he inquired, "Are you really planning to cook it yourself?" Elise chuckled. "It's about time you get a taste of my culinary skills! But I do have to remind you to keep your opinions to yourself in case the stew tastes bad." Hearing that, he let out a snicker. "Uh-huh." Thereupon, Elise joyously made the call, and the grocery store delivered her order within half an hour. As she was about to start preparing the meal, she was surprised by how the apron was already on Alexander.

"W-What do you think you're doing?" Swiftly, he reached for the bag of ingredients from her hand. "I'll do it. You go rest up." "I said I'd do it!" "It's fine.

I'll do it." Innocently, she handed him the grocery bag. "Thanks, I guess." Gracefully, Alexander removed the heads of the shrimps and deveined them.

His movements were the exact same as those of any other people. Yet, he emitted a distinctive aura while cleaning mere shrimps. Seeing that, Elise smiled and got out of the kitchen. She then sat on the couch and watched some TV. After some time, a subtle fragrance of seafood wafted in the air. "It's dinner time. Wash your hands."

As such, she sprung up from the couch and hurried to the dining room, only to be blessed by the sight of appetizing, salivating food, to which she wholeheartedly exclaimed, "Have you been hiding your career as a chef from me?" Right when she said that, the doorbell suddenly rang, which apparently frustrated her. Who's visiting in the middle of the afternoon? She skeptically went to answer the door, only to be dumbfounded by the identity of the visitor.

"G-Good afternoon, Mrs. Griffith. To what do I owe the pleasure?" Madeline glared at her and subconsciously let out a scoff. This scheming b*tch. Should have known she's moving out with Alexander when she so obediently chose to leave. "Let's talk, Miss Sinclair." Her tone was obviously hostile, and Elise definitely sensed it. "Why, we can talk here." Madeline took a glimpse into the house and interrogated, "Hmm.

Not willing to let me in, are you?" After saying that, before Elise could respond, she invited herself in. When she entered the dining room, she was surprised by Alexander's presence. "Alex, why are you here?" The man slowly put down his cutlery and calmly countered, "What's wrong with me visiting my girlfriend?" That's... He's right though... Madeline, having no comeback, somehow felt extremely displeased. All my effort into raising this boy into a man, and he's now being drawn away by a woman?

"I was worried sick because you didn't come home yesterday. To find you here... I mean, you should've at least informed us that you're not coming back." Soon, Elise entered the dining room. Despite her urge to disregard Madeline's existence, she couldn't get herself to completely ignore a living person who was right beside her. After all, the woman was the mother of her lover. "You can say whatever you have to say to Elise here, Mom. You're both the most important people in my life.

I'm sure there's no need to be sneaky." Madeline was stupefied by the fact that her own son was defending Elise. Since what she had in mind was intended for Elise, she wouldn't have any issue talking directly to her. However, if she were to say it in front of Alexander, she would surely hurt the relationship between her and her son, and she was fully aware of that. With that, she made a U-turn and beamed at Elise, pulling out an invitation card from her bag.

"Works for me. It's good news anyway. Elise, this is an invitation to SK Group's anniversary banquet, which will be cramped with noble people from the upper class. Since you're with Alex, people will be assuming you're one of the in-laws from the Griffith Family, so your attendance is naturally inevitable.

So, I brought the invitation card over. Why don't you see if you're free to attend then?" Regardless, Elise hadn't the slightest interest in said banquet, though she was amazed by how quick Madeline changed her stance. Honestly, I gotta hand it to her. She's wasting her talent for not pursuing an acting career. "I don't think it's appropriate for me to attend such an event, Mrs. Griffith, so I guess I'll sit this one out. I'm sorry."

Immediately at her rejection, Madeline walked up and pulled her hand. "Oh, you silly girl! You're one of us! It's more than appropriate for you to attend the banquet! It's only a matter of time until you and Alex are in charge of the company, so it'll be beneficial to socialize and forge a network with people from the field. Just see it as paving a way toward the future. Am I right, Alex?" She turned to Alexander, who reacted with a frown.

He then passed the freedom of choice onto Elise. "It's all up to Elise. I'll accompany her if she wishes to; if she doesn't, well, forget it." Madeline simply smirked. Before Elise could give her answer, she pompously made the final decision. "So it's set, then. Better prepare yourself, Elise. Show the world that the Griffiths' in-law is better than them!" Elise was at a loss for words. "Mom, like I said, it's up to her. Don't force her to go if she doesn't want to."

Alexander put his words rather bluntly, which slightly embarrassed his mother. "What's wrong with it, Alex? It's for your sake. How could you not see that? Besides, it is SK Group's banquet, and I heard the company's director is pretty close with Quentin Fassbender, who will also be attending the event. Well, you know who Quentin Fassbender is, right? If our family manages to establish a solid connection with him, it'd be a huge boost to our company's name.

From there, it'll be only a matter of time until we go global." At Madeline's mention of Quentin, Elise's eyes darkened. It had indeed been quite a while since her last meeting with her godfather. If he really were going to attend the banquet, she thought it would be worth it to see her godfather.

"Quentin Fassbender, you said? The billionaire, Quentin Fassbender?" Madeline wasn't at all surprised that Elise knew who Quentin was. After all, he sat at the top of Forbes' Real Time Billionaire, so naturally, anyone would know his name. "The one and only!" Assured, Elise intuitively revealed a smile. "Then I shall attend SK Group's banquet."