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Alexander had no intention to prolong the conversation. He then ended the call before making another to Cameron. "Is there no way to amend the documents?"

"Mrs. Griffith must have thought of that beforehand. She's now hoarding the document and even told the company's shareholders that you're passing your share and the company's rights to inheritance on to Matthew. And they're heavily against it." Cameron didn't know Alexander's decision was for the sake of Elise until the phone call between Alexander and his mother earlier. *Giving away his honor and benefits without any hesitation, he loves her that much, huh...*

"Thanks," Alexander replied flatly as he frowned.

Given how Matthew had gone this far unscrupulously, if Alexander refused to compromise with him, Elise would definitely be the first one to take the hit. He didn't manage to protect her, so how could he allow her to be harmed the second time? At

once, he summoned his private jet. About two hours later, the jet landed on the grassy yard of Griffith Residence.

At his arrival, Danny was stunned. *He ordered Cameron to handle the matter, but now he's coming back himself? "Alexander, what happened to Boss? Why did you hand everything over to Matthew? Is he threatening her?"* Danny shot a volley of questions. Although he was once resentful toward Elise, ever since he was beaten by her fair and square, he wholeheartedly surrendered and started treating her as his real boss. It pained him to see the lengths his mother would go to hurt her, and he didn't want things to escalate to the point where Alexander and their mother turned against each other.

"She's currently in a bad spot. You know Matthew well. Give him a call. If he's willing to change his mind, I might let him off easy." Despite his aggressive words, Alexander's face revealed only agony. *After all he has done, killing him off is only merciful!*

"What about you, then?" Danny chased after his brother.

Without even turning around, Alexander coldly blurted, "Company." Naturally, he had to head to the company after knowing his mother had perturbed their shareholders.

Danny, still following after his brother, inquired, "It's true that Mom's overstepping her boundaries, but we've all known she's always been like that. And she hasn't recovered from her injury, so can you go easy on her?"

Those words, however, battered Alexander's heart. After all, he wasn't someone who would easily make an enemy out of his own mother. "Make the call, Danny." He pursed his lips, attempting to collect his feelings before extending his arm to give his brother a pat on the back. Among the chaos, one thing he was pleased to find was that his little brother was much more mature than how he used to be.

Having reached the company, Alexander was welcomed by the stony glares of the shareholders. With that, the shareholders started reprimanding him. "You know you're not the only owner of Griffith Group, and that Matthew is in no way capable of managing a company. How could you transfer your shares over to him?"

"You know damn well what kind of a person he is. Are you trying to destroy what we had built?"

"You must have spent too much time with that Elise woman! Can't you see she's tearing you and the company apart?"

Seeing how the shareholders were rebuking him, Madeline felt satisfied. More precisely, she had been ecstatic since the moment Alexander showed up, as that suggested the accomplishment of her plans. *Whatever Matthew intends to do to Elise is solely up to him, and I couldn't care less. They could both die in a car crash and I won't even shed a tear!*

At how the shareholders were each pressuring him by standing on the moral high ground, Alexander coldly scoffed. "Why, everyone of you... Do I no longer have the right to pass on the shares that's legitimately under my name?" Those words, spoken to the shareholders, were also targeted at his mother. He frankly continued, "I didn't come here to beg for anything, for I've come only to notify all of you this I have my rights and liberty on how I manage my own affairs. Anyone who wishes to challenge that can bring it to the court." Alexander had always been an intimidating figure in Griffith Group, and no one dared to defy him. After all, he was already the president of the company at such an early age, and his achievements had surely astounded many. Moreover, with such an overbearing aura he was emitting, no one was bold

enough to raise their voice.

Nonetheless, his speech left a fatal blow in Madeline's heart. With how he brought up "going to court" right in front of her, he was obviously provoking her with a lawsuit. From the start of her rantings to the moment where she stabbed her own chest with a knife, all of those memories flashed across Madeline's mind, and she couldn't repel them. Bearing the stinging ache on her chest, she was finally able to see clearly Alexander's emotions and attitude-how he was willing to neglect her for Elise's sake.

What's the point of persisting any more? Let alone filing a lawsuit, he wouldn't even care if I actually die. Regardless of how arrogant she was, a change of mind was only a matter of epiphany. Upon the realization, she handed the documents to Alexander. Drained, hollow, she couldn't even speak a word.

Instead of grabbing the documents, Alexander was rather concerned about his mother. "Are you okay? Let me send you to the hospital." At the end of the day, they were still family, so there was no way Alexander's feelings wouldn't falter.

Nevertheless, Madeline shoved his hand away. "Take the documents and go save Elise. I'm fine. Don't worry about me." In fact, debating about her condition was no longer relevant.

However, to Alexander, her behavior was totally out of character. Swiftly, he grabbed her arm and pleaded with a raspy voice, "I'm begging you. Stop causing me troubles at such a crucial time, okay?" All he wanted to do now was to rescue Elise from Matthew's hands as quickly as possible. He was utterly exasperated by all these shenanigans.

Look at what I've become in my own son's eyes! All of a sudden, Madeline laughed at herself. She had always taken things to the extreme, always threatening to kill herself when things didn't go her way. "Don't worry. I'm not that eager to die yet. I just need some time alone." She attempted to push Alexander away, but the latter grasped her even tighter.

Given her atrocious condition, Alexander wouldn't feel any less burdened to leave her alone. "You pushed me into Griffith Group when I was still in my teens. Now that I'm an adult, why can't I choose whom I intend to spend the rest of my life with? You're my dearest mother, and that's an unchanging fact no matter what happens, no matter how you end up. All I ever wanted is to be happy following my own heart. If you haven't been stopping me, she would've already become mine. Do you know that?" If it weren't for his mother, Elise wouldn't have returned to the Northwest prairie. Sadly, any further quarrel would only be a waste of time as things were already in the past now.

Upon those words, Madeline felt suffocated. She couldn't bring herself to speak a word. *Right. If it weren't for me, they would've been bound to each other.*

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"..." Madeline began, but her words got stuck in her throat. She had thoughts to express, but couldn't find where she should begin with as she was haunted by her terrible, horrendous mistakes. Eventually, she muttered, "Will you still be able to... begin again?"

Without turning back and responding, Alexander grabbed the documents and left. Yet, in his mind was nothing but resolute answers. No matter what happened, Elise would stay Elise-the woman he would never give up on.

Before Alexander got into his private jet, he received a call from Quentin. "Are you Griffiths handling the Matthew situation, or should I do it for you?" Apparently,

Quentin, too, was informed about Matthew's capture of Elise.

"I'll handle it," Alexander coldly replied. Since Matthew was also one of the Griffiths, it was only right for him to settle the family affair.

In the meantime, Matthew boasted before Elise, "Did you know? Alexander decided to transfer the shares under his name to me in exchange for your freedom. Your grandparents are also begging me. I know that they tensely wished for your release, but what are they gonna do if I'm not going to let you go?"

At that moment, Elise couldn't find the words to describe her own feelings. Alexander knew that she was confined under Matthew's grasp. With how deranged Matthew was growing, Alexander must have figured out what his brother did to her. She was aggrieved, incandescent, but unfortunately, she was no match for Matthew. There was nothing she could do for the time being as he was threatening her with her grandparents. "Do you think you own everything after getting what you want, Matthew? You're a wanted man. Do you seriously think you can run from this?" she questioned with an icy gaze.

Her words pierced right through Matthew's heart. The term "wanted man" felt like a smack to his face.

"What do you know? You think I chose this? Do you know what Madeline did? My mother's life was forced out of her because of that witch! Do you know what she's been doing under the radar all these years: If it weren't for my luck, I, Matthew Griffith, would have died in her hands!" Matthew, whose emotions were stirred, was screaming his words as if he was in hysteria while clutching Elise's shoulders and violently shaking them.

If this was in the past, she would have sympathized with him. But that was no longer

the case. "Why do you think others should pay for your agony? Alexander let you off the last time. If you're truly grateful, restarting wouldn't be an issue, you know?" Elise leered at him.

Matthew scoffed at her words. "Restart? As if it's that simple! Tell me, Elise, if you were in my shoes, would you still be able to forgo this grudge of mine?" After all, only two that had undergone the same torment could truly relate to each other.

But at this point, Jonah had already passed away. Alexander was innocent, but so was she, so why was she the one that was dragged into the matter? "Alexander and I already broke up. There's no use taking me hostage. Do you really expect you can lead him by the nose with what you've done?" Elise snickered as she provoked Matthew.

The Alexander she knew was extremely vengeful, especially toward Matthew, who had repeatedly tilted him. Even if Alexander wouldn't lay a hand on him out of family ties, she herself wouldn't forgive him so easily.

Matthew was shocked to see the hatred and determination in her eyes as he was reminded of the first time she revealed her real self. He was the one who saw her first, and their beginning was so pleasant. How did things turn into such a disaster? The thing that disturbed him the most was the fact that everything he set his eyes upon and everything he could have had were all taken away by Alexander. "You wish to kill me? Even under this circumstance, you wish to kill me?" Despite knowing the answer, Matthew persistently shot the question, and felt a tingling soreness in his throat while he was at it.

"Does a scrub like you even deserve to live?" Elise hit him with a piercing gaze. She never confronted him back when Jonah was in trouble, and she even treated him as a friend. Later when Matthew asked her out, she thought he could still redeem himself. However, she now finally understood that a pitiful man's devastation was only brought forth upon him by himself.

Matthew was aware of Elise's grudge for him, and how much she wanted him dead. Yet, he decided to live, to live until the day where both Alexander and Madeline would eventually kneel before him.

At that moment, Heather walked in carrying a bag of lunchboxes. Without speaking a word, she placed the bag down and headed out.

As she was leaving, Elise quickly stopped her. "Wait a minute, Heather. I need your help. Can we go to the bathroom for a sec?"

However, Heather did not stop walking. She had no intention to help Elise, to which

Matthew voiced. "Help her out

Elise was the unobtainable gem to Matthew's life as Matthew was to Heather, and Heather deeply hoped for her to thoroughly disappear from the universe. Nonetheless, she had no choice but to listen to Matthew's order. After entering the bathroom, she grew impatient at Elise's stillness. -Cut the crap, Elise. Just tell me what you want" She hated even imagining them being together-Matthew putting himself down just to please Elise.

"Why are you following after Matthew so pettily? Are you going to raise his kids after he has one: Have you ever stopped and thought about how your parents would feel: Elise countered with a series of questions.

Disconcerted, Heather replied, "F*ck off with your sentiment cards. You just want a way out from me. Forget it, Elise. That's impossible."

Elise stared at her and continued to interrogate, "Then what? Do you think you, the accessory to murder, can escape this once Matthew kills: Think about your parents before you do anything stupid. You're the only daughter they have, aren't you?"

Heather was around Elise's age. If it weren't for Matthew, she would still be living her lavish life with her family in her parents' loving arms. Nonetheless, she was

now living a nomadic, unstable life, so not missing home was indubitably a lie. Sadly, to her, giving up on Matthew would be much more excruciating than dying. "Stop talking. You can't change my mind."

At once, Heather turned around and left, but was immediately grabbed by Elise. "If you're not leaving Matthew, are you willing to sacrifice your own life for him? And if you die, how are your parents gonna feel? There's still time to pull out from this, Heather."

"But I can't just stand idly and watch him die right in front of me. It has come to this, Elise. There's no way back. And you should know that." Heather understood Matthew had made peace with death before he decided to do all this. She had spent too much time and effort to keep herself by his side, willingly, and regardless of the insignificance of assistance she could provide.

"You can't change her mind. So I suggest you spend your time on things that matter more. A perfect wedding, for instance."

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Elise turned her head around, only to find Matthew leaning against the bathroom door frame. He seemed to have heard everything they said. Like a predator with keen eyes, he was constantly tracking Elise, his prey. He revealed a grin that bore no amicability, as if he was mocking her for her attempt to rebel. "Let's go out," he blurted.

As usual, Heather heeded his order and said nothing more, leaving Elise without turning back.

Once the door was shut, Matthew's grin turned into a glower. He walked into the bathroom and forcibly dragged Elise out before throwing her ferociously onto the couch. Beside the couch was a coffee table, where on top of it lay the trending bridal magazines, along with a number of blue files neatly stacking on top of each other. "You have one night to decide which gown and diamond ring you like best. The other ones are wedding plans given by the bridal company. Keep them if you like it. If you're not interested in any of them, I'll make the choice."

He condescendingly glared at Elise, who was rubbing her wrist that was aching. Even under the pain, she wouldn't reveal a trace of vulnerability on her face. It was as if she was born with nobility and pride flowing in her blood, and such a dominant woman was the only one right for him. However, he was reminded of Alexander, the man who always put himself above all else, who always stepped on him like an ant, and who always thought he knew it all. The jealousy and rage from the mere thought of Alexander was driving him insane, so he didn't dare to dwell on it. With that, he shot Elise an inexplicable gaze before leaving the room and slamming the door shut.

Meanwhile, Heather was making tea in the living room. Striding over, Matthew threw himself onto the couch before staring at the ceiling. He then shut his eyes, letting out a heavy sigh.

Heather felt her heart ache at the sight of that. Thereupon, she fetched him a cup of hot tea and sat down beside him. "Don't push yourself too hard."

Disregarding her concern, Matthew reminded, "These days are most crucial. We can't afford any mistakes."

"I understand." Heather nodded, though she felt somewhat bitter. Her loyalty to Matthew was unwavering, and that was indubitable. However, Elise's words left some doubt in her burning-for-love heart. Is staying by his side unconditionally really the best choice for him? Besides... She touched her abdomen. The child was given to her by God, but she knew very clearly that Matthew would reject it without any hesitation.

"Matthew." She inquired, "If we finally succeed, will there still be a place by your side for me?"

Hearing that, Matthew subtly grimaced. Although he had a soft spot for her, he insisted on keeping up his apathetic facade. "I'm not like those guys. Since things have happened, I'll take full responsibility for it. Even after Elise and I got married, I will pay for all of your expenses, and you won't have to be burdened by anything."

"Is responsibility all there is between us?" Heather's voice was rather raspy. She couldn't stop tears from welling up in her eyes.

"That's enough." Matthew sprung up from the couch and walked toward his bedroom. "I'm tired. We'll talk about this next time." Having said that, he hastened his feet and vanished from Heather's vision in just a couple of steps.

In that instant, no one in the house had a calm mind.

Elise, unaware of the situation between the other two, was still planning her escape. After countless times of her vision brushing over the magazines and wedding plans on the coffee table, her eyes shone as she remembered something.

She recognized one of the magazines was published exclusively for the members of a certain luxurious brand in the city. Although its products' quality didn't live up to its popularity, all the items were subscription based and tailor-made, so all of its subscribers would each receive limited-edition goods periodically.

Given Matthew's current situation, he wouldn't dare to splurge so openly. Thus, he must have received the magazine-the one currently in Elise's hands-from an old acquaintance of his. If she was able to figure out who it came from, she could leave traces for the outsiders and lead them to her. The problem is, how should I bring up the topic of the magazine naturally? After an entire night of pondering, an idea finally popped up in her mind right before dawn.

The next day, Matthew pushed open Elise's door. When he entered the room, she was already in her garments looking neat, casually sitting on the couch as she read the magazines on the table.

"So what will it be?" He placed one of the two cups of hot coffee in his hands on the table before her before taking a seat on the couch across from her. Crossing his legs, he languidly took a sip of his coffee.

Frowning, she pushed the magazines on the table away. "At least find a girl to practice with if you really wanna marry me. Simply picking some women's magazines based on some men's judgment, you're not really good at this, are you?"

Having lived together with her for the past few days, Matthew was already used to her erratic behavior, but he treated it merely as acting. Smiling, he placed his cup on the table. "Well, I do adore how you're way smarter than an ordinary woman. You saw right through me. I mean, can you blame me? It's my first time marrying somebody, and I only had guy friends to ask advice from. Just tell me which one of the designer gowns you favor."

"I prefer something from abroad, but it might take at least three months from ordering, production, and delivery. Can you afford to wait that long?" Elise deliberately troubled him.

"I can't." He candidly admitted, yet his expression was rather amiable. He jokingly replied, "That's why I'm gonna need you-my fiancée-to give me a chance. You can pick whatever that's locally made. I'm sure the Sinclairs and Alexander will definitely do anything to help you."

"Hmph!" Elise harrumphed before she purposefully mocked, "And here I thought you loved me so much you could fly me to the moon if I ever wanted to. It seems like you're just a dependent little man. In this aspect, Alexander's no doubt the winner."

There was a trace of indescribable emotion in Matthew's eyes when he sensed that Elise was deliberately provoking him. She must have come up with a terrible idea, and is waiting for the opportunity to stab me in the back when she gets it! However, he was in a good mood today, so he didn't care to argue regardless of the mockery she threw at him. After all, he would never allow her to leave.

"Don't you know? I'm a wanted man, so my life is naturally my priority. Otherwise, you'd be spending the rest of your life as a widow." Matthew rested his hand on his knee, tapping on it from time to time, "I can't determine how much patience I have left to wait for your answer, so it's best you tell me what you want before I leave, or I'll force whichever gown I like on you."

That was exactly what she had been waiting for. With that, she pretended to be reluctant and gritted her teeth. "You wish! Since I'm forced to pick one, I'll pick something I like. Lay's highlight of the month—I want nothing else other than that."

At once, Matthew revealed a pompous grin as he tidied his attire. "Wise and timely, that's my fiancée alright. You're much cuter this way." After he said that, he turned around and left. When he walked past the doormat in his glowing leather shoes, a small pil formed on the mat before it quickly returned back to normal.

Once the door was shut, Elise let out a long sigh of relief. Right now, that Lay magazine she read earlier was concealed under the very mat Mathew stepped on. Most fortunately, he didn't seem to have noticed it.

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In fact, Matthew hadn't realized there was one less magazine. However, he wouldn't allow Elise to make a fool out of him right under his nose. Therefore, after exiting the room, instead of relaying her request to her family, he went into the study room and turned on his computer and googled for Lay Magazine. To him, a wedding gown meant nothing more than a woman's garment, but for her to make the choice so specifically, she must have had her underlying reasons. After all, the woman was too intelligent to not be cautious of. He looked into every detail of the magazine assiduously, from its founders to its current board of shareholders. After identifying nothing suspicious, he slowly pulled out his phone and dialed Alexander's number.

Meanwhile, Alexander, who was on his way to meet Jessica, saw the call and instantly hit the brakes, pulling his car over by the road. After collecting his feelings and making sure he could draw all his concentration at the conversation, he hit the "accept" button on the car's monitor. After all, he couldn't afford to miss any detail in Matthew's words. Right when the call was accepted, he was greeted with Matthew's impatient tone. "Took you long enough. Perhaps you don't cherish her life as much as I expected."

"I'm busy preparing for your wedding, so I hope it's not all crap that's coming from you." Alexander had no intention to blindly follow Matthew, or he would be walking right into his manipulation. Another minute wasted meant another minute Elise was in danger, and he couldn't bear to risk that!

Hearing that, Matthew subconsciously gripped his phone. One thing he loathed extremely was Alexander's pompous attitude, as if he was donning a crown and an ego that could shatter upon a light tap. In that instance, a suffocating silence surged.

Alexander was growing more anxious as he heard nothing but silence from the other side. As he was about to lose control, Matthew's familiar voice sounded once again. "I've sent the wedding plan to the company email. As for the wedding gown, Elise wants Lay's highlight of the year. Time's kinda tight, but I believe you'll handle it. After all, this is Elise's wish." After laying out the conditions emotionlessly like it was a business deal, Matthew suddenly sounded fascinated as he complacently quizzed, "The woman of your life is preparing for her marriage with me. How do you feel, Alexander?"

“Not good.” Alexander openly expressed his disconcertment. “If you’re the one who lost his woman to another man, would you still be able to laugh?”

“Of course not.” Matthew grinned as he lay back against his leather chair, casually replying, “That’s why I’m the one doing the snatching. I got what I want, and soon, I

will receive everyone’s blessing. Enough. I don’t wish to waste any more time with a loser. Just do as I ordered, and do not tarry. Or I can’t guarantee whether what you see next is an unharmed, living person, or an ice-cold body.” Before Alexander could respond, he hung up the call.

“Beep... Beep... “The static noises in the phone sounded rather irritating, and that distraught Alexander. Matthew was so meticulous that he allowed not the slightest loophole for Alexander to figure out Elise’s whereabouts. Despite the helpless sensation that was agonizing him, he had to remain calm in order to analyze the message within Matthew’s words. Wedding plan, gown... What are they hinting at?Elise’s

intelligence is out of this world, so there’s no way she would surrender so easily. In other words, there must be a hidden message behind these two things. Having thought of that, he sent Cameron a text to summon all of the key managers to an emergency meeting, where they were ordered to scrutinize the wedding plan in the company email, as well as Lay Magazine. After leaving his command, he started his vehicle and headed toward Jessica’s location.

Jamie, who had been waiting by the gates for almost half an hour, finally caught Alexander’s car in sight. Before Alexander was even out of the car, he hastily went to him. “Is there news about Boss?” Although he intended for them to exchange information while walking into the building, Alexander revealed nothing but his cold scowl as he was walking, as if he heard nothing from Jamie. Seeing that, Jamie didn’t care to persuade him and tacitly kept quiet and guided him to Jessica.

The clubhouse, apparently extravagant, was filled with waiters that were all attractive men, as well as consumers that were mostly single ladies. People would even refer to the place as “reverse brothel.” At the door of Room 101 stood a tall, muscular bodyguard. At Jamie and Alexander’s arrival, he opened the door for them to enter.

The scenery in the room was highly obscene, where numerous nude men were stripdancing on the stage, flaunting their figures. In the corner was a group of rather fresh-looking men, each in their space, glaring at each other. Yet, each of them had their own unique charm.

Among all that was happening was Jessica sitting alone in the center of the couch, enjoying what she had in her vision. At first glance, Alexander couldn’t recognize her, but it was no fault of his as no one in the world would ever assume the woman in front of him, who was covered in jewelry and heavy makeup, to be the innocent Jessica he knew.

At that moment, Jamie gave a signal to his underlings, who then barged into the room and cut the music. The music ended, and so did the crowd's chanting. And so, everyone in the room looked toward the entrance. "F*ck y'all lookin'at? Get the f*ck out!" Jamie yelled overbearingly. Even the men that were aggressively staring earlier lowered their heads and retreated along the walls. Very soon, Jessica became the only

person in the room.

"You know why I've come." Alexander cut to the chase as he had done his research.

"I do." Jessica was awfully calm, as if she wasn't surprised at all by his presence.

Jamie, however, was as hasty as a bull, hurrying forward and kicking all the liquor bottles off the table. "Then be quick with it! Where's my boss?"

"Beats me." Jessica was, nonetheless, telling the truth as she was clueless about Elise's whereabouts. After receiving the payment, she had never contacted Elise ever again.

"Don't make me beat a woman up. Spit it out!" Jamie gave no special treatment to women. Anyone who dared to lay a finger on his boss had only death to face, regardless of their gender.

Alexander, on the other hand, was remarkably composed. Steadily, he stated, "Tell me how Matthew found you, how you contacted each other, how many times you've met, and where. Don't miss out on a single detail."

Unable to comprehend the motive of his interrogation, Jamie frowned and shrugged as he was filled with confusion. "Boss has already been kidnapped. What's even the point of discussing the cause and effect now?" Then, he turned his attention back to Jessica, his gaze razor-sharp and penetrating. "You know what? We can only win a scum in her game by becoming another scum. Otherwise, she won't crack." He clenched his fists. If necessary, he wouldn't even mind taking things into his own hands as long as he got the information regarding Elise. Moral obligations no longer mattered to him. After voicing his threat, he took a few steps backward as two of his brawny men that were standing by at the door charged into the room toward Jessica.

Before the men could lay their hands on the woman, Alexander sternly yelled, "She's the last person who saw Elise. Will you be able to uphold her responsibilities once you kill her?"

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Reminded of that, Jamie could only suppress the anger within him.

“Where’s Matthew?” Alexander interrogated Jessica with a tone colder than the harshest winter as he glared at her with a gaze sharper than the tip of a spear.

“Who’s Matthew?” Jessica crossed her arms, calmly lying against the leather couch. She had yet to know how horrendous a man like Alexander could become.

“The man who sent you fifty million.” Alexander’s face was, as ever, unaffected, though the fists he was concealing in his pockets were flexing. Typically, he wouldn’t touch another woman, but given that Elise’s life was at risk, if Jessica still remained uncooperative, he might as well break the gentlemen’s code.

Hearing that, Jessica seemed to have recalled something, mindlessly replying, “Oh, him. Who knows. We only knew each other for a few days. We’re hardly acquaintances. Why would he tell me what his plans are?”

Jamie scornfully scoffed. “Hardly acquaintances? So you’re saying Matthew’s an idiot who would simply give money to any woman he meets on the streets?”

“Can’t recall saying that.” She lifted her glass of champagne on the table and elegantly took a sip. “Then again, nothing is impossible in this world. If a boring woman like Elise could be craved by a couple of men, what’s wrong with me having a few pursuers who would give me anything I want?”

Tilted, Jamie stomped forward and slammed the glass out of her hand as he stepped on the couch with one leg. He leaned his entire body onto the woman and pointed his finger at her nose, threatening, “Stop fooling around! There’s ‘hardly acquaintances’ and then there’s ‘pursuer.’ Seriously, which one is it?”

It would be a lie if she said she wasn’t afraid to be oppressed by such a big man. Nonetheless, she was still a doctor. With her emotions fully under control, she easily shook off her nervousness. “Come on, is it against the law to have some fun?”

“Don’t make me hit a woman!” Jamie’s patience had reached its limit

“Who’s stopping you?” Jessica shamelessly stuck her body against Jamie’s. “I’d take money from literally anyone. Why’d you think I’m scared of you?”

“You...” Jamie was rendered speechless by the woman’s irrationality. As he expected, the woman was harder to reason with than anyone else.

At that moment, Alexander came over and dragged Jamie behind him. He then took a deep breath to maintain his composure. “Elise has always treated you as a good classmate and a good friend. Why are you doing this?”

“A good friend?” Jessica snickered. “What kind of good friend always steals the spotlight of others? I was supposed to be the class representative back then. Ever since she transferred to our school, I was always hard stuck at second place,

losing all my deserved honor to her, so what gives? Sure, she was slightly better than me in her studies, but that's it! What gave her the right to remain above me all the time? I was pissed. I want her out of my life. I want her to have a taste of what it's like living under someone else's shadow!"

Alexander expressionlessly listened to her. When the room was silent again, he slowly blurted, "Is that it?" In order to tear someone apart, one should first understand what was going on in the opponent's mind. As for Jessica, someone who couldn't accept anyone else being better than her, she was prone to making hasty mistakes, and it would hardly break a sweat to goad her into regretting something she'd done.

"That's it." She revealed a look of utter defeat. "Murder, torture, do as you like. I've had my share of pleasure, and I'll die without regrets."

However, Alexander was unresponsive. He stared wordlessly at her for almost half a minute. It wasn't until he sensed a trace of fright in her eyes that he showed her a knowing smirk. "There's a chance of me forgoing what you did to Elise and not calling the cops on you. I might even turn a blind eye to the assets under your name, which you could continue to make good use of."

Surprised by his announcement, Jessica frowned. "Are you joking?"

"I never joke." Alexander gazed her right in the eyes. Suddenly, his eyes darkened and malice surged within. "But if you choose not to cooperate with me, not just you, but your parents as well as your little brothers will each have their fate turned into the biggest jokes you'll ever know."

"What do you want!" Immense terror gushed in her heart. "The blame is all on me! Don't drag my family into this!"

"Why, of course." Alexander shot her a terrifying grin and a glare that bore no delight. "The blame is all on you, but why'd you drag Elise into this? Since you're not seeing reason, I guess I'll play your game to see who's more unreasonable."

Jessica had never been met with a gaze as icy as his. Her entire body was trembling under his leer, as if she had absolutely lost control of her own nerves.

Subconsciously, she gulped and dared no longer to talk back to Alexander.

About time. Knowing he had triumphed in the psychological war, Alexander loosened his face and returned to his humble self. "Tell me everything you know about Matthew since your first encounter till your last rendezvous and everything you've spoken to each other. Every. Single. Thing."

"Fine..." Jessica collapsed onto the couch and began telling stories between her and Matthew.

In the meantime, Elise was still under Matthew's grasp.

After ending the call with Alexander, in order to leave no traces, Matthew no longer had any interaction with the outside world; he spent every day at home. Nevertheless, with three people living under the same roof, a restock of consumables was only inevitable. Although he had stocked up the portion of his and Heather's, now that Elise was here, he had to go out alone in the afternoon to acquire some more edibles. Not in the slightest was he worried about Heather turning her back on him, but he still left a message to her, forbidding her to have any private interaction with Elise. Before leaving, he locked the doors from outside and carefreely departed.

All this time, Elise was leaning against the door to listen to the activities outside her room. After hearing the lock of the door and ensuring Matthew had left, she started pacing around her room, figuring out how to break out of it. Through her last attempt, she knew there was no way to escape if she continued staying in her room. Thus, the only measure was to get out of the room. However, Heather wouldn't come over on her own accord; Elise had to come up with a way to lure her over. Sadly, all Heather cared about was Matthew, and nothing else in the house would be able to draw her attention.

Wait. Me! I'm "nothing else"! No matter how reluctant one was, they would still attempt to look after the person their loved ones desired to protect. Having thought of that, Elise resolutely clasped her hands and punched the glass window of the wardrobe beside her. As the glass shattered, blood stains were seen on the glass fragments. In that instant, her hand was covered in blood. Only under careful observation could one identify the fragments of glass stuck in her flesh. Unsure whether there were cameras around her, she proceeded to strike the walls with her bloody hand while smashing things that would cause blaring noises.

Meanwhile, Heather was watching her in the security room. Despite Elise's actions, she showed no reaction at all. She even thought, Why is such a crazy b*tch receiving all the goodness—all of Matt's love? All of a sudden, a horrifying idea popped up in her mind. If she no longer lives, then I'll be Matt's closest woman!

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As the ill intent wafted in her mind, she could no longer suppress the demon within her. As if she was possessed, she lost control of her own emotions. With that, she grabbed a fruit knife in the living room and hid it in her sleeve. Deranged, she unlocked the door to the room confining Elise.

As Elise, on the other hand, was about to bang on the door, the door was pushed open. When she looked Heather in the eye, she immediately knew the woman in front of her wasn't the Heather she knew. Although she couldn't quite put Heather's shift in behavior into words, her presence undoubtedly put her on edge.

With a still face, Heather stared at Elise for a couple of seconds. She scanned at the latter's injured hand before stating aloofly, "You're hurt."

„Baffled, Elise was only reminded of her injury then, to which she awkwardly replied, "Right. I didn't even realize it until you mentioned it." Perhaps it was the stupefaction upon seeing Heather's sudden change that made her forget the sting on her hand.

With a knowing look, Heather took a step into the room and shifted her body sideways to allow Elise a path out of the room. "I'll treat it outside. Matt will kill me if anything happens to you." As she spoke, she carried a tremendous determination within her, which she revealed not on her face, but under her glistening eyes.

As subtle as it was, Elise was able to sense it, and she grew even more cautious. At the same time, she was tempted by her goal, as she had her keen eyes fixated on the main door which was right opposite her bedroom's door. She would be able to escape once she stormed out the bedroom. Nonetheless, Heather wouldn't be so kind to let her off. There was no telling if she could still breathe after exiting through the door. However, when she thought of her grandparents and Alexander, she gritted her teeth and decided to give it a try.

Under Heather's scorching gaze, Elise grabbed her injured hand and walked out the room. When she was passing by Heather, her steps subconsciously decelerated.

Heather watched as Elise walked past her. It wasn't until Elise's back was fully facing her that she revealed a vicious expression. In a flash, the knife that was in her sleeve was already raised above her head, All she had to do in that instant was stab her. In that case, the blame could be easily deflected by saying the then-dead woman, who was trying to escape, were accidentally murdered in a circumstance where Heather was forced to use a knife after a massive effort of trying to stop her from running. As such, there would no longer be an Elise Sinclair in the world. Simultaneously, Matthew wouldn't blame her for Elise's death. Bearing that in mind, Heather grasped

her knife even tighter and held it even higher before going for the forceful stab.

It was a perfect execution, except for the fact that she had forgotten the giant mirror in the living room that was reflecting every detail of her actions. Elise saw the glinting knife in the mirror, and without any contemplation, she dodged the stab with her agility harnessed from years of experience as a veteran racer.

Accordingly, Heather missed her attack. And when she realized it, Elise was already at the living room's couch. "Why are you trying to kill me?" Elise glowered, unable to take in what just happened.

Heather gnarled her teeth and pointed the knife at Elise. Her facial expression resembled that of the most gruesome demons. "Because you don't deserve Matthew, and you ruined him! Thus, you should pay for it with your life!" Having said that, she recklessly charged toward Elise.

Due to the injury on her hand, Elise couldn't attempt to disarm her. She could only run around the couch as she evaded each attack from Heather. Very soon, they ended up in each other's previous positions, facing each other.

Heather squinted her eyes as she panted, anxiously holding the knife toward Elise. "Stop running. You can't run away from this, Elise. This is your life, destined to be ended for the sake of Matthew and I. Just face the reality!"

"You face the reality!" Elise coldly gazed at her, unable to figure out how idiotic could a woman be to be willing to commit crime for a man's attention. "Matthew never loved you! Whether I exist or not, he won't truly care about you! How much longer are you planning to deceive yourself?"

"Shut up! You're lying! Matt and I are in love. His actions toward you are only out of envy for Alexander. I'm the only person who really understands him! We've been together for so long, and I'm the only one that deserves him. Once you're out of the picture, the three of us can finally live happily ever after!" Heather was so drunk in her fantasy that she'd lost all rationality.

Among her words, Elise caught something rather critical. "You're... pregnant?" She looked at Heather's flat stomach and inquired, to which Heather gave no response, but her silence obviously admitted the existence of a tiny life within her. Instantly, Elise's eyes lit up. She switched up her strategy and aggressively taunted, "Once you kill me, your child will have a murderer for a mother. How happy could that be?"

Hearing the terms "child" and "murderer" in the same sentence, Heather was triggered. Forcibly, she woke up from her fantasy, only to find the knife in her hands, before turning to Elise in fear and agitation. She realized she had been too hasty. In

mere minutes, she simply wanted Elise to disappear so that all her issues could be resolved. Overly immersed, she had completely forgotten about the law and the consequences of killing. She had to admit that Elise had moved her. Even if it was for the sake of her children, she shouldn't be attempting such a crazy stunt.

Seeing as she slowly laid down her weapon, Elise sincerely stated, "You can still come back from this. As long as you're willing to change, it's never too late to turn back. In the same way, if you let me go, I promise not to investigate Matthew once I return safely. I can even help you get out of this place, to somewhere nobody could recognize you. Think about it. Isn't that what you want?"

"What I want..." Heather muttered as she lost herself in thought.

Watching as she'd lowered her guard, Elise immediately turned to the main door of the house and started counting down in her heart. Five, four, three, two... one! Swiftly, she dashed to the door and ferociously pushed down the door handle. To her surprise, the door remained unopened. What. Am I supposed to pull this instead? Pushing and pulling, she found all her attempts were in vain, as if the door was fused with the walls.

Sensing the loud disturbances, Heather regained her senses. "Trying to escape?! Not a chance! Matt says he'll die if you're gone. No! Don't run!" Her mind went overdrive just by imagining Matthew being in danger. At once, she rushed toward Elise and grabbed her, attempting to drag her back into the bedroom.

As Elise had just arduously broken out of the cursed bedroom, going back into it would mean more torment. Thus, she endured the pain on her hand as she withstood the dragging force from Heather.

Consequently, the knife that Heather had yet to unhand was probing Elise's stomach. The more force Elise exerted, the deeper the tip of the knife pressed against her flesh, as if it was about to pierce through her clothes and her tender skin.

Under the tense situation, Elise improvised. Instead of resisting, she pushed along Heather's force. Heather, unable to react in time, fell down. The two of them tripped together, and Elise was on top of Heather, pressing the latter's hand against her body. With that, Heather loosened her grip as the sharp knife fell onto the ground with a clank.

Regaining her senses, Elise swiftly picked up the knife and pinned Heather down with one hand, holding the knife at her throat with the other. "Don't move!"

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With the icy blade of the dagger touching her neck, Heather instinctively flinched back. When she lowered her gaze to see the offending dagger, her breathing hitched.

She was someone who highly valued her life. To top it off, she also had people that she loved

"You won't dare." Heather narrowed her eyes, attempting to see how far Elise's limits stretched.

Elise curved her lips up, but her smile didn't reach her eyes. "You can try me."

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Heather could see from Elise's eyes that she had thrown all caution to the wind. In the end, Heather didn't push her luck.

Elise knew a little about fighting in the first place. Now that she had a dagger, she had the upper hand completely. Once she had ascertained that Heather wouldn't continue fighting, she finally moved on to the next step. "Get up," she threatened. Still holding Heather, she turned to glance at the door. "And open the door," she urged.

Heather obediently did as she was told, moving over to grab the handle. However, the door wouldn't open. "It's locked."

"You better not be playing any tricks." Elise actually didn't believe her.

"If you don't believe me, try it yourself." Heather raised her arms in surrender. "You're Matt's only chance of turning the tables. You think he'll let you escape so easily?"

Elise had enough of pointless blabbering. Matthew could come by any time now. She didn't have much time to waste. Every second was precious.

"Turn around." After getting Heather to stand with her back to her, Elise pointed the dagger at Heather's back while she tried to open the door with her free hand. In the end, there was no miracle. No matter how much strength she poured in, the handle remained resolutely in place.

Heather smiled, pleased. "Matt's going to come back soon. And before that happens, you better go back to the room, or I can't guarantee what kind of treatment you're going to receive otherwise," she reminded.

Go back? Wouldn't that be waiting around like a sitting duck? Elise wouldn't admit defeat

so easily. Thus, she put away her dagger and began to search for another escape route.

Heather, on the other hand, was no match for Elise. They both knew this fact deep down, so she didn't escalate the situation any further.

Like she was watching a show, Heather coldly looked on as Elise searched from the kitchen all the way to the study with nothing to show for it. She once again mocked, "Stop wasting your time. This place is completely sealed off. There's no other exit apart from that door." In addition to that, that door was specially made. No blade was going to scratch that door, and axes wouldn't be able to break it down. Other than getting its key to unlock it, there was no other way to get that door to open.

Elise returned to the living room once more and looked at Heather dejectedly, who was enjoying the show. These two are mad for constructing such a huge hidden space out of nowhere. Am I really never going to escape?

Just as Elise was about to fall into despair, Alexander's familiar low voice sounded from outside. "Elise, are you in there?"

Elise's eyes instantly lit up, and she whipped around. "I'm here! Alexander! I'm inside!" He found me. He really found me. She knew she could trust this man.

"Okay, got it. Don't get overexcited." Alexander unhurriedly calmed Elise before he continued in an unrushed manner, "I'm going inside now. Stand a little further away."

"Sure." Elise took a few steps back, leaving a few feet of distance between the door and herself.

The next moment, something could be heard smashing away at the door. One strike, two strikes... Elise could even feel the floorboards shaking, but there was absolutely no sign of the door opening.

Not long after that, the smashing sounds stopped. Elise heard Alexander again. "Elise, hide. Find a room or stay far away from the door. Can you do that?" He deliberately made his voice louder.

Elise glanced around before nodding at the door. "Yeah. Is the kitchen far enough?"

"Yes. Go and hide. I'll go inside two minutes later for you." Having said that, Alexander disappeared. Elise quickly headed to the kitchen and locked the door to wait for her rescue soon.

Heather sat unperturbed on the couch as though she had just heard the biggest joke

in her life, waiting for Alexander to once again hit another dead end. She had said before that the door would not be opening unless unlocked with its key.

The next moment, though, there was a loud crash as the wall across her suddenly crumbled. Immediately after, an SUV rushed at her. Heather quickly raised her arms in front to shield herself. With the piercing sound of brakes screeching, the SUV stopped just a hair's breadth away from her. She barely escaped with her life.

Alexander opened the door of the vehicle and got out. Once he had determined the location of the kitchen, he quickly ran over and opened the door. The moment he saw Elise, all his defenses came crashing down, and he drew Elise into his arms without a care in the world. He held her tightly, wishing that he could have her permanently in his life.

"I'm here," Alexander said, his voice choking up.

"I know." Elise had never felt so safe before. "Thank you, Alexander."

Alexander shook his head, his large hand moving up and down as he patted her fluffy hair. "Sorry I came too late."

The sticky feeling he got when he touched her hand instantly made Alexander frown. That striking red on her hand when he looked down was like a knife, stabbing right into his heart.

“What happened? Did you get hurt?” Alexander’s heart hurt, but he didn’t dare to touch Elise, fearing that he would hurt her

Elise had already weathered through the worst of the pain. By now, the pain had numbed, so she didn’t really feel anything much. She smiled as she shook her head. “It’s nothing, just a small scratch. It’s no big deal.”

But Alexander wasn’t going to easily give up on this matter. This place was completely sealed off, and other than Elise and that other woman, there was no one else here. He knew very well just who the culprit was, and a chill instantly rose in his eyes. He lifted a hand and gently placed it on Elise’s shoulder. “Wait for me for a bit,” he soothed. Subsequently, his lips curved up. Although he was clearly smiling, the rest of his expression was filled with cruelty. Retrieving Elise’s dagger, he took a deep breath before he headed to the living room for Heather, who still hadn’t calmed down from the initial shock.

As Elise watched his departing figure, she instantly understood what he was going to do. She hastily ran after him and pulled on his sleeve to stop him. “This has nothing to do with her. I actually hurt my own hand.”

Alexander’s anger had reached its boiling point. He simply thought that Elise was making up excuses because she was softhearted. He didn’t listen to her.

Elise could seemingly see the embers of fury in Alexander’s eyes burn larger and faster; he was close to losing control. Realizing this, she was both delighted yet panicked. In her franticness, she grabbed the hand that Alexander held the dagger with, forgetting her own pain as she held on with both her hands. “It’s true—I wanted to hurt myself to make them take me to the hospital so that I would get a chance to escape. Alexander, are you going to kill because of me? If you end up in prison and this happens to me again, who’s going to look for me?!” She was practically begging

now.

Having felt her warmth, Alexander instantly snapped out of his rage. Carefully, he held her face, her expression currently filled with both love and worry. “Don’t be scared. With me here, there won’t be a next time.”

With that, Alexander tossed a frigid look at Heather’s way before he turned to open the door of the SUV. Quietly, he carried Elise and helped her into the passenger seat before he moved over and got into the driver’s seat. Start the engine, get ready, back up. Done. His face was icy as he stepped on the gas, as though this was the only way that would make him feel like he wasn’t useless for not even being able to protect his beloved

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The sound of the engine got more and more distant. Heather stood on the spot for a full thirty seconds before she gradually came back to her senses. As she looked at the rubble and destruction on the ground, the first thing she thought of was that Matthew was certainly going to blame her for not being able to guard Elise well.

If Matthew thinks that I'm useless. I might not be able to stay by his side anymore. "No, I definitely can't leave Matt..." Heather mumbled as she began to pace around the space. Soon, her attention was drawn to the small fruit knife by the kitchen's entrance.

After just a second of hesitation, she walked over and picked up the knife. Then, she ruthlessly stabbed it straight into her left arm.

When Matthew drove back, he could see that the walls on the first floor had already partially caved in. Furious, he smacked his steering wheel. Did you escape again, Elise? Although it wasn't very likely, he still had a little hope as he revved the car. Once the car came to a stop, he immediately ran inside the house without even taking the time to pull out his keys.

The moment Matthew stepped into the living room, he promptly noticed that the door to Elise's room was wide open. His last hope was completely extinguished then. When he snapped out of it, he finally noticed Heather lying injured on the couch. Hunching over, he gently shook her. "Heather?"

Heather wasn't actually unconscious; it was just an act for Matthew. Seeing him panicking, she slowly opened her eyes. "Elise worked together with Alexander. She escaped after she stabbed me. I'm sorry..." she weakly explained.

Now that his chance to turn the tables was gone, Matthew was incensed. However, he couldn't let his anger show with the pale-faced Heather there. All he could do now was set this matter aside and help her up. "You aren't to blame. You were alone-how could you have possibly taken on both of them at once? Let's get you to the hospital first."

Meanwhile, at the emergency room, the nurse applied some ointment for Elise. After telling her about some things she had to look out for, the nurse left the room. Not long after the nurse left, Alexander came in.

It had been a long time since they saw each other. After experiencing the whirlwind

that was earlier and calming down, Elise and Alexander somehow ended up a little more polite and reserved with each other.

Elise pressed her lips together. In order to make Alexander relax, she said jokingly, "The nurse was really patient."

Alexander stood in front of her expressionlessly. He didn't speak, simply opting to look at her without moving. His dark eyes glimmered under the lights, an indiscernible glint shining in them.

It got awkward.

Elise wasn't a master at easing the atmosphere. So, she pretended to shrug casually and averted her gaze.

"You're always like this." Alexander's voice suddenly rang out, low and deep. Chastisement and exasperation could be heard in his words.

Elise looked up at him, her pretty little face scrunching up a little. She couldn't figure out how she had gotten on his nerves again.

Alexander could see through her confusion. Angry, he lifted a hand to pinch his forehead, but in the end, he deflated helplessly. He just wanted Elise to know that her safety was always the priority. Clearly, though, she didn't pay attention to that. Otherwise, she would have just patiently waited for him to save her instead of hurting her hand like that. Nonetheless, he knew that she didn't like him nagging her, so he had no choice but to swallow those words. When he neared her, he reached out and pulled her in for a hug.

Ever since the day Elise was kidnapped, Alexander had been on tenterhooks. It was only now that he finally relaxed. From then on, he made a promise to himself that he would never let anyone take Elise away from his sight again.

After an unknown amount of time, Elise couldn't quite breathe from being hugged for so long. Just as she was about to remind Alexander to ease up, he released her.

"Let's go back first. This place is too close to where Matthew is. It's not safe." Alexander took off his jacket and draped it around Elise's shoulders. They then quickly drove away from the hospital.

Over an hour later, the SUV drove past the Griffith Residence's gates.

This wasn't Elise's first time here, but an awkward look still came over her face when she saw Alexander offer her a hand after the vehicle had stopped. Just because she

had just escaped from a dire situation didn't mean that some things could be easily overlooked. Madeline was the one uncrossable gulf between them. Having only just escaped from Matthew's clutches, Elise truly didn't want to go in and be treated like some pariah while bearing verbal attacks that never should have been directed at her.

Knowing what she was worried about, Alexander stretched his hand out further, his gaze sharp and determined. "Trust me, many things have changed since then. You won't be disappointed."

Elise looked at him. Under the sunlight, his face looked even more bewitching and lively. He looked like he had walked straight out of a painting.

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Just as Alexander said, that distant, excluded feeling that had kept creeping in her heart before didn't arise. Everything in front of her was real. He was right. There was no other person in the world who could have followed the trail and located her with just a wedding dress. With how well Alexander understood her, did she have anything else to worry about?

At that thought, the darkness in Elise's expression dissipated, leaving behind a faint smile. She placed her dainty hand in Alexander's. They then walked hand-in-hand into the Griffith Residence together, the place that she had repeatedly left in fear and panic.

The rest of the Griffiths were currently busy at this hour. Madeline was the only one at home, nursing her injuries, and coincidentally, they ran into each other.

The moment their eyes met, Elise looked at Madeline. She attempted to trust Alexander and awkwardly twitched her lips up in an effort of goodwill.

Seeing her safe return, Madeline studied Elise; her clothes were disheveled and messy, unlike the image of the perfect daughter-in-law that she had in mind. Her first

instinct was to reject Elise, but then, she caught sight of the apathetic look in Alexander's gaze through the corners of her eyes. In the end, she sighed. With no other choice, she reined in her thoughts and nodded, accepting Elise's offered smile. "You're back at last. You've been through a hard time. Go upstairs and get some rest." She then called a servant over. "Mrs. Hilda, tidy up the guest room. Bring Miss Sinclair some clean clothes."

"Yes," Hilda acknowledged in a respectful tone.

Having said all she wanted, Madeline turned and headed for the couch in the living room, coffee cup in hand. She didn't even wait for Elise to thank her.

Everything took time. The fact that Madeline didn't reject Elise and allowed her to

stay was already the greatest concession she could make. As for when she would be able to sincerely accept Elise, there was still a long road ahead.

Madeline had just turned around when she heard Alexander speak to Hilda. "No need for that. Elise, you can stay in my room. Bring the things there."

Madeline paused before lowering her head to stir her coffee indifferently. After years of interacting with other upper-crust ladies, she had already trained herself to discern the truth behind a person's words and actions. She knew very well that Alexander had said that on purpose for her—he wanted her to know that Elise was not a guest in this house.

Elise initially thought that Madeline would make a stand and make some unreasonable demand, but to her surprise, Madeline didn't show any reaction after hearing Alexander. It startled Elise. By the time she snapped out of her shock, Alexander was already leading her upstairs by the hand.

Elise nervously followed behind him. It wasn't until they had gone to the second floor and disappeared into the elevator that she was certain-Madeline had truly changed.

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Elise had no idea what had happened between the mother and son, but one thing was clear: she probably wouldn't have to worry about her relationship with Madeline in the future. This brought her more joy than escaping from imprisonment.

Both Elise and Alexander stayed at the Griffith Residence for an hour. When they left, Madeline didn't press her with questions, allowing Elise's bright mood to continue.

On the way back to Sinclair Residence, Elise could no longer hold herself back. She was all smiles as she looked at Alexander. "Did you hypnotize your mother?" she teased.

A smile tugged at the corners of Alexander's lips, and he deliberately played along with her. "Guess."

"You definitely did." Elise had been bothered about the situation with Madeline for a long time. Now, she felt unbelievably relaxed. Still, she couldn't help her curiosity. Dialing down her expression, she attempted to pry the truth from Alexander. "Come on, tell me: what kind of sorcery can make someone have a personality change? I need to learn it."

Alexander grinned mysteriously. "It's a secret."

He was the only one who needed to know about that time when he fought tooth and nail against the world and practically estranged himself from his family. Telling Elise would simply put more stress on her.

Elise rolled her eyes at him balefully before she mulishly turned her head to the side. "Still keeping secrets from me. If you're not going to say it, then don't. I'll keep my secrets from you in the future too."

Screech

Alexander slammed on the brakes, pulling over by the side of the road.

The sudden stop made Elise lurch forward before her seatbelt catapulted her back firmly into her seat. When she turned around, she saw Alexander looking at her with a sad and hurt look on his face instead of the smug look he had been sporting just before.

“What is it?” Elise was baffled.

“You said that you’re going to keep your secrets from me?” Alexander’s expression was dark, an ugly sight.

For a moment, Elise was at a loss for words. It was only then that she realized she had stepped on a sore spot for Alexander. Just hiding her identity had caused many arguments between them. He had always disliked secrets, and now that Elise openly said she was going to hide things from him, he would of course disagree.

Since Alexander managed to resolve the issue with Madeline, Elise decided to cheer him up. She looked at him with puppy-dog eyes and a cheeky smile on her face. “All right, I’m sorry-I shouldn’t have made such a joke. I promise that I definitely won’t hide anything major from you.”

Alexander’s gaze softened a little. “Not even the small things,” he pointed out.

Whoops, he got me there. Elise initially wanted to sneak in a loophole, but she hadn’t expected Alexander to be so sharp-eyed. He didn’t even give her any wriggle room. With no other choice, she smiled harder. “Heehee, got it. I’ll do as you say.”

Only then was Alexander satisfied. He started up the engine again and sped off toward the Sinclair Residence.

Robin and Laura were already waiting for them. The moment the security guard announced Alexander’s arrival, the old couple promptly helped each other to hurry to the door to wait. Before the car even came to a complete stop, they’d eagerly tottered over to the passenger seat with their walking canes.

“Elise, my darling granddaughter...”

Elise was pulled into a hug by Laura the moment she alighted from the car. When Laura noticed that Elise’s right hand was hurt, her heart ached so much that tears came to her eyes. “Are you seriously injured? Oh, darling, you should have stayed at the hospital if you’re hurt. Why did you have to rush back?” Laura might seem like she was chastising Elise, but every word of hers was filled with love.

Robin gripped his cane hard with both hands wordlessly, his brow furrowing deeply. Worry was plain as day on his face.

"Grandma, don't worry. I was actually responsible for that injury myself. It's not all that bad; it doesn't hurt-see? I'm perfectly fine, right?" Worried that her grandparents didn't believe her, Elise hastily waved her hand a few times.

Laura quickly stopped her and patted her with exaggerated movements, "All right, you heartless little girl. You're going to break your poor grandma's heart!" she

chastised

"That's enough. Poor Elise has suffered enough. Let's continue this inside," said Robin.

It was only then that the four of them noisily headed inside the house.

They had only just sat down when Alexander's phone rang. He took a look at the caller's name; it was Cameron. "I'm going to have to take this call."

Robin lowered his gaze as he dipped his head slightly. "Go ahead."

Having gotten Robin's permission, Alexander went to the balcony with his phone in hand.

Laura ignored this as she simply fired off all her questions at Elise. "Ellie, Matthew didn't mistreat you, did he? That madman is practically inhumane!"

"No. Don't worry about that, Grandma..."

Robin listened to their conversation while occasionally glancing at the balcony, where Alexander was, to look at him thoughtfully.

Not long after that, Alexander hung up and came back to them to indicate that he had to leave. "There are some urgent things that I need to finish up at work. I apologize beforehand for leaving Elise in your care."

Robin's expression darkened. "There's nothing to apologize for. Elise is my own granddaughter; why should I find her presence a problem? Go. Don't ever come back without any good reason."

Upon hearing Robin's tone, both Laura and Elise instinctively turned their heads to look at him.

"What are you saying..." Laura asked.

Elise also couldn't figure out what was going on. Her grandfather had always been a good-natured man, and he was usually friendly to others. But why was he being so antagonistic today?

As a man as well, only Alexander knew what Robin was thinking. He wasn't angry with this either as he gently smiled to show that he was fine with Robin's words. "No problem." He then turned to Elise. "I'll come back later for you," he said

"Okay." Elise nodded demurely, showing some sort of consolation for him.

Alexander pressed his lips into a thin smile before he relaxed and left.

The moment he left, Laura turned on Robin. "What is wrong with you? He saved your precious granddaughter, so why were you in such a rush to chase him away?"

"What do you know?" Robin distastefully frowned, wanting to say more but also trying to stop himself. "You forgot how... never mind. In any case, he and Elise are not meant to be. It is better to cut your losses instead of dragging things out." Having said that, he exhaled deeply. However, his gaze remained on Elise, studying her perhaps on purpose, perhaps not.

Elise was sharp enough to realize that her grandparents were hiding something from her. "Grandpa, did something happen while I was away?"

Alexander had always been respectful toward his elders. He probably wouldn't have started an argument with her grandparents. Elise truly didn't understand he was such a perfect man, and every parent out there fell over themselves to have him as their son-in-law. Why did her grandparents suddenly seem to dislike him so much?

Could the law of equivalent exchange also apply to familial relationships instead of being limited to material things? If one's relationship with one side of their family improved, would the relationship with the other side worsen? Was Elise fated to never be able to have both families bless their relationship?

Laura already understood Robin's hints, so she hastily covered for him. "It's nothing. What could have happened while you were away? We were just worried about you."

But Elise wasn't so easily deterred. Laura's hesitance was a clear sign that she was not telling the full truth, and besides, neither grandparent was good at lying to her. Sighing, she placed a hand on the back of Robin's hand. "Grandpa, you know that you can't hide things from me. Just what happened actually? Tell me, please," she said patiently.

Deep down, Robin knew that it was only a matter of time before Elise found out the truth. With no other choice, he laid out everything about the photos and videos that Matthew had sent. "I'm doing this for your own good. Regardless of Matthew's wicked ways, he and Alexander are still brothers at the end of the day. Now that something like this has happened, you two must break off your relationship no matter how reluctant you are. Girls can only live their lives with pride if they know how to love and respect themselves. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

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Elise understood what her grandfather meant. If she truly slept with Matthew, then she couldn't pretend as if nothing had happened, nor could she continue to enjoy Alexander's love while ignoring everything, regardless whether Matthew and Alexander were brothers or not. It didn't matter whether she didn't want to or if she wasn't the one at fault. Sometimes, though, fate was just that fickle and unreasonable. There was no room for argument.

It might be painful at first, but Elise knew deep down that people could eventually leave. If that was what fate intended, then all she could do was adjust her mindset and force herself to accept it.

But before that, there were some things that she needed to understand fully first.

"Did you save those photos?" Elise asked Robin.

"Well..." An uncomfortable look came over Robin's face, but he quickly caught on as to what Elise meant. He tested the waters. "Did you actually...?"

But Elise's words proceeded to extinguish his hope that had just flickered back to life.

"I'm not sure either." Elise shook her head. "It's just like you said; I wasn't awake when those photos and videos were taken. I was indeed unconscious for a while, unaware of anything. I can't confirm whether Matthew had actually done any of that to me."

"I understand what you mean." Robin nodded solemnly to indicate his understanding, but he was still troubled. "It's my fault. I was so furious by that b*stard that I completely didn't think of that. I didn't save any kind of evidence..."

If that was the case, it seemed that the only proof of whether or not Elise and Matthew had intercourse was purely through Matthew's say-so.

In truth, Elise wasn't actually all that hurt by this. She was the victim at the end of the day. Even if she had lost her purity, the one who should be shamed and humiliated was Matthew. She would not feel like she was lesser because of this. Elise was in a rush to find out the truth simply because she wanted to tie up loose ends with Alexander; she didn't want them to part in such a confusing manner just because of Matthew's slanderous claims.

Seeing how her grandfather blamed himself, Elise couldn't bear to keep asking any further. Instead, she comforted, "It's okay, Grandpa. I'm your granddaughter; something as small as this won't get me down. Don't worry. I'll deal with this

properly.”

Robin looked at her with a heavy gaze, his weathered eyes still filled with heartbreak. “I’m so sorry for you...”

Later that afternoon, Elise took a nice nap at home after a hot shower.

Unknown to her, however, Matthew had already begun a new round of counterattacks as she lay sleeping peacefully in her familiar bed.

Earlier when Alexander and Elise arrived at the Sinclair Residence, various magazine publishers and newspaper outlets received pictures of Matthew and Elise lying topless on a bed together, seemingly all at the same time. These photos were like a bomb, sending shockwaves everywhere. The entire entertainment industry went into overdrive to churn out articles, every outlet wanting to be the first to hog the top trending search by utilizing the controversy—‘Alexander Griffith’s Fiancée Cheating on Him With His Own Brother -as the focal point. Some unscrupulous people simply skipped the magazine path, simply publishing the photos via blog posts or even videos to draw traffic. In just an instant, the internet was abuzz with discussion.

Presumably, Alexander had left Elise earlier to deal with this issue.

Inside the meeting room, the hastily-assembled emergency PR team sat around the table. They argued until they were red in the face, all of them putting their heads together over this PR nightmare for one reason, and one reason only-to prevent Elise’s name from being tarnished.

“...Shifting the public’s attention is the most important thing right now. Listen to me and find a B-lister to take the fall. We’ll certainly be able to shift a lot of the heat away like this.”

“That’s just treating the symptoms, not the cause. Why don’t we get in touch with those platforms and request them to take those topics down? It’s going to take more effort, but we’ll be able to root out the problem. We won’t have to worry about those comments spreading like wildfire. They’ll start spreading again at just the slightest mention otherwise.”

“I say that we just get the legal department to write up a letter to go after those major content creators who are purposely directing the narrative! We’ll make an example of them!”

“No, you listen to me...”

These public relation contingencies all had some flaw to them, but none of them

14.45 MUG.

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were up to Alexander's standards. He sat there quietly in his seat, letting those at the meeting table to squabble like no tomorrow. Yet, he seemed to be in a completely different world, for the aura around him was so chilly that it terrified the others.

There was no doubt that Matthew decided to go for this dirty blow because he wanted to force Elise into a corner, to force her to be tied to him. But he was mistaken: Elise could be reasonable, but she would not be coerced. Such a drastic move would only make Elise even more sure to keep him away at arm's length.

However, this wasn't the problem that Alexander was considering. There was only one thing that he was concerned about no one would be able to get past him in the future to hurt Elise. Collecting his thoughts, he lifted his hand and rapped the table.

"Knock, knock—"

Instantly, the PR team fell completely silent. All of them turned their gazes in unison to their employer.

"Looks like you still don't know what the name 'Elise Sinclair' means. I'll say this once, and once only—as long as I, Alexander Griffith, still remain in this seat, then Elise's reputation is also the Griffith Group's reputation." At that, Alexander lifted his left hand to look at his watch. "It's 1.28 p.m. now. You've already wasted 18 minutes and 23 seconds. By 2 p.m, I hope that I will no longer see the name 'Elise Sinclair' on any social media platform. Use all means possible. If that is not the case by then, all of you will be handing in your resignation letters."

The office descended into a suffocating silence. Other than Alexander, everyone else had the exact same expression, as if the same expression had been copied and pasted onto their faces, all deep frowns and solemnness.

Alexander had given them only half an hour, but it wasn't all that difficult to figure out which was Alexander's most preferred way to deal with this PR case, considering their knowledge. Most importantly, asking Alexander any questions now when he was in this state was a surefire way for them to get a one-way ticket to death.

These people had only two choices: they could just stand there and do nothing, waiting for the seconds to tick down while the public grew even louder. They would take the blame before they packed their bags to leave. Or, they could stick it out and voice their questions to Alexander, only to be killed on the spot with that murderous gaze of his.

Both paths led to death, and no one dared to be the first one to make a move.

After a while, Cameron could no longer take it, and decided to give everyone a

frustrated reminder. "Are you all zombies or something? Mr. Griffith has spoken-do everything that you can to solve this, no matter the price. Get a move on already!"

At the last word, the group of people who had still been sweating buckets just moments ago promptly sprang from their seats and rushed out of the meeting room.

Once everyone was gone, the meeting room fell into silence again. Alexander tilted his head up as he leaned back in his seat. His eyes were gently closed, but a frown could be seen on his forehead, looking out of place on that chiseled face of his.

Cameron couldn't help but console his employer when he saw Alexander's tired form. "I'm sure Miss Sinclair won't take all this to heart."

Alexander merely sat there motionlessly without answering him. No one knew whether he'd heard him.

Cameron felt awkward at the lack of response. After a few seconds of silence, he brought up the task that Alexander had assigned to him earlier. "The general vicinity of the area where Miss Sinclair was found has been checked thoroughly-they still haven't caught the culprit."

"They still haven't caught the culprit."

Upon hearing those words, Alexander felt like he had been given a harsh slap.

How many times had Matthew slipped away right under his nose?

The crux of the problem wasn't whether Elise minded what the media said about her; instead, it was whether he could put Matthew in his place. If he had protected Elise properly, none of this would have happened.

It was time to put an end to everything.