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Jeanie clenched her jaw tightly. The next moment, she made a harsh decision—no matter what price she had to pay, she would not let Faye hurt her family again. This would be the last time ever.

Right at that moment, the door to the ward suddenly flew open. Elise walked out of the room, supporting her weight on the door.

Alexander's sharp eyes immediately took notice of this, and he quickly reached out to help her stand, but Elise waved dismissively. "Call the doctors over. He isn't dead yet. Bring the instruments, quick!" she said weakly.

"Oh, all right!" Danny was the first one to react, and he charged over to the reception. "The doctors! Where are they?!"

The doctors and nurses soon arrived. Alexander helped Elise to the side.

The door to the ward was wide open. Faye watched on as an entire crowd worked to save a dead man. Displeasure was clear in her eyes.

And yet, the waves of a heartbeat returned to the heart rate monitor's screen, and they even got stronger and stronger. At this, Faye's expression morphed in a fascinating manner. Her grip on her shoulder tightened to the point that her nails dug into her flesh. Impossible. He was dead. How could he be revived?!

Jeanie took in Faye's sinister expression. She walked over briskly and blocked Faye's view. "Leave this place now." Jeanie's expression was chilly, her tone brooking no argument.

Faye shot a glare at Trevor before turning to meet Jeanie's eyes. After a brief standoff, she immediately changed gears, a concerned look on her face as she spoke to Austin. "Dad, since Mom doesn't want me here, I'll leave. I don't want to rile her up. You two will be fine. Please tell me if there's any change in Trevor's condition."

Austin was vexed as he pinched his forehead and waved at Faye. "Go ahead."

Faye hadn't expected Austin to not even try to get her to stay. Instantly, her expression dimmed. She didn't even bother to hide the displeasure on her face as she stomped off angrily in her heels. As she waited for the elevator, she gritted her teeth. "That ingrate is sturdier than I thought. He still isn't dead even though he's so badly injured!"

Meanwhile by the ward, Danny came running over excitedly to Elise just when she had regained some of her strength. "He's alive! He's alive!"

"Mm." Elise wasn't surprised by this turn of events. Trevor might not be dead, but he would be unconscious for the near future; his body was still frail and weak. "Arrange for a few more guards to stand watch outside of the ward. Do not allow anyone uninvolved in Trevor's care in."

"I know what I should do." Danny nodded solemnly before retreating to give Alexander and Elise some space.

Now that Danny had left, the ward was once again quiet.

"I need to go to the black market again," Elise muttered to herself.

"To look for Claude?" Alexander asked.

Elise nodded. "I managed to bring Trevor back from the brink of death, but to truly save him, I need to find Claude."

“And if he isn’t at the black market?” Alexander asked thoughtfully.
“You and Bryce are... good sisters, as he put it. I don’t think he would pull any dirty tricks.”

“Alexander.” Elise abruptly lifted her head and looked at him seriously.
“There’s no such thing as eternal enemies, or eternal friends.” Especially when it comes to people like Bryce.

Perhaps Bryce did treat her favorably, but that was because there was no one else worthier than Elise for Bryce to maintain a friendship with. The moment a juicier business prospect cropped up, he would definitely not hesitate to turn his back on her.

All of the sudden, Alexander felt like Elise was a completely different person, as though everything in her eyes was just an exchange of mutual interests. He thought she didn’t believe in true love, and she didn’t truly love him.

“But I’ll always be your beloved.” Alexander took her hand, rubbing it gently against his palm as he lowered his head and gently spoke. “If there’s anything you want to do, go ahead and do it. I’ll always support you, but you have to promise me to watch out for your safety.”

A pause, then a sigh. Alexander continued then, “On second thought, let me go with you. I don’t feel at ease letting you go alone.”

Elise smiled mildly. “But you ended up hurt when you came with me last night.”

Alexander had an exasperated expression. “Fine. I am indeed too weak.” He couldn’t protect the woman he loved. He was indeed unworthy of fighting with her side-by side.

“That’s not what I meant.” Elise held his hand, her clear, pretty eyes looking at him with deep affection. “I just can’t stand you getting injured. I won’t be able to focus that well with you there!”

Alexander smiled in response. “So, we’re closer than friends?”

“Yep.” Elise casually threw her arms over his neck and pressed herself close. “Why do you have to be so handsome? I don’t even feel safe leaving you at home; how will I dare to take you with me?”

Alexander withdrew himself from her hold, a playful but confused look in his eyes. “Why does it feel like you’re trying to sweet-talk me? Who taught you to speak like that?”

“Do I even need to be taught to speak that way?” Elise’s eyes turned into crescents from her smiling. “With you around, anyone will be able to master the art of honeyed words without a master!” With that, she shamelessly hugged him tightly without easing up.

Alexander couldn’t resist it when she was acting coy like this. With no other choice, he pitched his voice up. “Okay... I’ll do as you say!”

That night, Elise entered the black market again. It hadn’t been long since her arrival when Macaque came looking for her. “Miss Sinclair, Master Bryce has decided on a change in venue. I shall take you there.”

Elise nodded without answering.

Soon, she reached a pub, where she saw Bryce drinking contentedly. Elise stood by the door and watched him from a distance. “You knew I was coming?”

Bryce put down his glass before he picked up a bottle of wine and languidly poured himself another glass. “I didn’t know you would be

coming. However, I knew that we would certainly be meeting each other again shortly. I am simply unsurprised.” A pause later, he looked at the glass in his hand. “Is that not how things have been for us these few years? We would meet each other often for a while, and then we would go for a long period of time without contacting each other.”

“I don’t have time to reminisce over the past with you,” Elise stated her objective. “One of my people was missing when I left your place. Return him to me.”

“I have never touched anyone from your party.” Bryce’s expression was roguish. “I simply thought that you did not want him any longer.”

“Whether I want him or not, that’s my own business. He went missing in your territory, so you better not tell me that this is something you have no control over.” Elise’s tone took on a sharper edge.

Bryce froze, his hand reaching out for the glass of wine hanging in midair. A dark look flashed across his eyes. “El, you can’t come tyrannizing me so flagrantly simply because I indulge you. I’ve told you that he’s not here. I do not wish to repeat the same line for the third time.”

Elise collected herself. In truth, she had thought that there was a possibility of a third party being involved in Claude’s disappearance; simply, she had been holding out hope for the opposite.

“Sorry for bothering you.” With that, Elise turned to leave.

“Hold it!” The smile returned to Bryce’s face. “Just because he’s not here in my territory doesn’t mean that I can’t help you with his rescue.”

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Elise paused. Before she could turn around, Macaque had respectfully presented her with a box in his hand.

Bryce smiled a faint smile. "I'm also worried about your brother after he was hurt like that, El. This medicine can't bring the dying back to life, but it can keep him in a state of suspended animation for half a year to buy you time to save him."

Elise darted a glance at the box in Macaque's hand. Instead of taking the box right away, she threw a sidelong glance behind her. "And the conditions are?"

That was the reason Elise had never really taken too much advantage of Bryce despite them having known each other for such a long time. Whatever he gave her, he would always have her pay him back doubly in other ways. It had occurred to Elise more than once that it was a waste of his talents for Bryce, who was so good at doing business, to stay in the black market. He should've joined the financial market to play the numbers game with those capitalists, she thought.

"That's why I'd say no one in the world knows me better than you do, El," Bryce replied ingratiatingly.

"Stop beating around the bush. Just cut to the chase," Elise said irritably.

"Alright. You never speak with me longer than necessary, anyway; I'm already used to it." Bryce put down his wine glass. When he looked up again, his eyes flickered with shrewdness. "I want you to participate in the arena ten times and win all of them for me."

“Okay,” Elise replied without hesitation. After a moment’s pause, she turned to look at Bryce, her eyes slightly narrowed. “Tell me who asked you to give me the medicine.” Bryce had few things to care about, but he didn’t have much time to spend at leisure, so he couldn’t possibly have looked into the Anderson Family’s affairs. Since he had the medicine prepared beforehand, someone must have told him to do so.

“Well...” Bryce hesitated without giving Elise the answer. After lowering his head, he continued with a half-smile, “That’d be a separate deal, El. Short debts make long friends. If you want to know who it is, you’ve got to wait until you have something I need.”

“Great.” Elise clenched her teeth. Then, she turned around, took the box from Macaque, and left the room without looking back.

Bryce watched all of this quietly, but the smile in his eyes slowly faded. Then, he said indifferently through his thin lips, “Go make arrangements for the arena matches.”

“Yes, Master Bryce,” Macaque replied reverently.

Elise returned to the hospital with the medicine. After she administered it to Trevor, his vital signs quickly stabilized.

Thomas was called over at the last minute, but the results of the medical examination were similar to what Bryce had said: Trevor had gone into a vegetative state once again. Even though the results were still unacceptable, he was lucky to have escaped death, so Jeanie and Austin thought it was a silver lining.

After the medical staff had left, Elise spotted Harald in the hallway and made an excuse to leave the ward. Seeing him entering the nearest emergency exit, she followed behind him quietly.

Slowly, she heard voices coming from the stairwell. Harald said, “...Have you thought this through? That guy refused to take responsibility for you earlier, and now he’d become a vegetable. You’re not his girlfriend or anything right now, so the Andersons aren’t gonna think highly of you if you volunteer to look after him.”

Then, a young female voice replied, “He j ust didn’t know what had happened, but it’s fine as long as I know it myself. He’s my first man, Harald. I can’t j ust leave him to die.”

The Field Family had only one daughter. Judging from the voice, it was probably Yvonne.

Harald let out a heavy breath. “How could you call that ‘leave him to die? You’re an unmarried lady. How could you go look after a guy? If that guy still refuses to marry you after he comes around, who else in the world’s gonna marry you?”

“If the Andersons are really that ungrateful, I’ll stay unmarried for life. I’m smart, anyway. When I graduate, I’ll naturally find a good j ob to support myself” Yvonne replied in a fit of pique.

Harald didn’t sound very pleased either. “That’s nonsense! There isn’t a girl who stays unmarried for life!”

It surprised Elise that the Field Family still had a daughter who had such a noble character. Indeed, with the state Trevor is in, he needs someone to look after him constantly.

Money can buy people, but it can't buy a genuine heart, she thought. After pondering for a moment, she walked over to the wooden door of the emergency exit and opened it.

Fifteen minutes later, Elise returned to the ward with Yvonne.

Looking at Yvonne, Jeanie asked, "Elise, who is..."

"She's the caretaker I've found for Trevor. She can be trusted." Then, Elise said, "Yvonne, you'll be in charge of looking after my brother from now on."

"Okay." Yvonne nodded.

However, Jeanie doubted Yvonne's capabilities somewhat because of how young she looked. "Are you really up to the task? You look so young."

"I am, Mrs. Anderson. I took care of my mom during the ten years she was bedridden, and the doctors praised me for not letting her suffer the least bit," Yvonne said sincerely.

Seeing that Yvonne was quite well-behaved, Jeanie didn't give her too much of a hard time. "Alright then. Since you're the person Yoyo hired, I'll let you try it. If you can't do the job, we can hire another person to help you."

With that, Yvonne stayed beside Trevor and looked after him under the assumed name of Yvonne Greens.

Having made the arrangements for it, Elise had Jeanie meet her alone outside the ward. She asked with a serious look on her face, "Mom, you said earlier that it was because of Faye that my brother got into this state. On what basis did you say that?"

Upon hearing Elise's words, Jeanie felt a twinge in her nose, and her eyes reddened.

At last, my Yoyo is willing to acknowledge Trevor as her brother, she thought.

"What's wrong?" Elise didn't realize she had just called Trevor as her brother in front of Jeanie. Ever since she acknowledged him as her brother, everything seemed to fall into place, as though that was the way things were supposed to be.

"Nothing." Jeanie fought back the tears that sprang to her eyes. After collecting herself, she explained, "Trevor was supposed to keep me company at home these days, but he got wind that Faye was bidding for a piece of land in Riverdale. If she succeeded in doing so, she'd gain greater support from the board of directors than before, so Trevor drove to Riverdale overnight, planning to stop that woman by

getting his hands on that piece of land before she did. But who would've thought that he'd get into such a terrible car accident as soon as he left the city? Faye has to have

something to do with this!"

Then, she suddenly stopped and grabbed Elise's hand nervously. "That woman's a madwoman, Yoona. I'll avenge your brother, so don't get yourself involved in this. Now that your brother's already in such a state, you mustn't get in trouble as well."

"Mom." Elise took Jeanie's hand with a determined look in her eyes. "The one who's gonna be in trouble isn't me, but the one who did this to Trevor. Please watch over him while I go to the Anderson Residence."

“No, you can’t!” Jeanie grabbed Elise’s hand in a tight grip. “I can’t let you go there. Your dad’s been taken in by her. How are you gonna fight against them alone? Just take this as my plea to you, Yoyo: stay here, and never go anywhere or do anything, okay?”

Elise knitted her fine eyebrows slightly. She replied in a helpless tone, “Do you think she’ll let all of us off if we do nothing?”

“I know she won’t...” Jeanie’s eyes suddenly shone with a determination to face death unflinchingly. “But Yoyo, you’re not supposed to be facing all this. Just give me a bit more time. I’ll take care of all this!”

Elise had a vague feeling that something was amiss. “What are you gonna do?”

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As soon as Elise finished her sentence, though, Alexander stepped out of the ward. “I heard what you two said j just now. Mrs. Anderson, you have to believe that Elise knows what to do and what not to do,” he said impassively. “I’ll go with her, so you can rest assured.”

Since he had said so, Jeanie couldn’t stop Elise anymore, so she had no choice but to give them the nod.

Alexander and Elise then exchanged a brief look before walking outside together tacitly.

The car drove away from the hospital. After the couple were a distance away from the hospital, Alexander broke the silence, asking, “What are you gonna do after arriving at the Anderson Residence?”

Elise rested her elbow on the car window to support her chin. Staring blankly out of the window, she said absentmindedly, “Act according to the circumstances, I guess. I don’t know what’s gonna happen either.”

However, Alexander asked, “What if your dad defends Faye?” He knew it was cruel of him to say this, but he had to do so since he didn’t want Elise to face the scene unprepared.

Upon hearing his question, Elise fell silent for a moment. After all, Austin had viewed Faye as his only daughter over the last dozen years, so their relationship was close. In fact, Faye had already been much dearer to him long ago than Elise—his biological daughter—did. It wasn’t that Elise hadn’t thought of the possibility Alexander brought up; she just didn’t expect that she would be facing it so soon.

However, some things were inescapable.

Elise never intended to provoke Austin and Faye on her own initiative. To put it in an uncaring way, as long as Faye didn’t hurt who she cared about, she wouldn’t give a d**n about it if Faye stole the Anderson Family’s property or even Austin away. But since Faye was behind Trevor’s car accident, she would certainly find out the truth about it.

As for Austin... Elise had seen how much Alexander suffered at the hands of Madeline and Adam, so her reason wouldn’t allow her to make the same mistake. Her only worry was that she might go soft on him because of their blood relationship.

“It doesn’t matter if anyone defends Faye. She has hurt my brother.” She raised her voice, as if talking to Alexander while hypnotizing herself and warning herself not to waver.

“Okay.” Alexander reached his hand out to hold hers. “I’m always on your side.”

Elise fiddled with his hand with a wry smile without answering him.

When the car stopped in front of the Anderson Residence, the couple got out of the car together and rang the doorbell.

The servant trotted out from the inside and stood behind the iron fence. After looking at Elise’s face, she opened the gate from the inside. “Welcome back, Miss Yoona,” she said with a respectful smile.

“Do you know me?” Elise remembered that she had never come to the Anderson Residence before, let alone identify herself.

“Yes, of course. Everyone in the household knows that you’ve been found. It’s Master Austin who said so himself in front of everyone, and he even showed us your picture and told us to keep your appearance in mind and respect you just as we respect Miss Faye. He really cares a lot about you,” the servant said while leading them into the house.

Her words rendered Elise at a loss for a reply for a moment.

Alexander took Elise’s hand while picking up on the topic on his own initiative, asking, “Did Mr. Anderson give any other instructions?”

“That’s for certain,” the servant answered. Her words gushed out as she continued, “Not only did he have Miss Yoona’s room renovated and redecorated, but he even had the kitchen prepare a new menu according to her past favorites to make it convenient for her to come back anytime. Oh, by the way, Miss Yoona, you’re gonna stay for dinner this time, right? What would you like to eat? I’ll tell the kitchen right away.”

“No, that’s not necessary. We’ll leave after saying a few words to Mr. Anderson. Your madam’s still waiting for her to go back, after all,” Alexander replied gently.

“Haha! So Miss Yoona and Madam are closer, huh? But it’s bad to forget about such a good father like Master Austin, Miss Yoona. I’ve watched him have dinner alone every single day, and he seems quite lonely. If you’re free, please come back and visit him often,” reminded the servant.

Alexander replied good-temperedly, “We already have our own plans about this, so please don’t worry about it.”

The servant could tell that Alexander was a well-brought-up man. When he said he and Elise had already made plans, he was actually implying that she shouldn’t be too much of a busybody, but he had said so in a way that spared her feelings. “Yes, you’re right, sir. Sorry for speaking out of turn,” she apologized. Then, she pointed to the sofa, saying, “Sir, Miss Yoona, please wait here while I call Master Austin downstairs.” As she spoke, she was about to go to Austin.

However. Elise said, “Just tell Faye to come downstairs. I know she’s at home.” Before coming here, she had tracked Faye’s location and learned that she was at the Anderson Residence.

The servant didn’t understand why, but Austin had said before that Elise’s orders had to be obeyed too. Therefore, she obediently went in another direction and went upstairs to go to Faye.

Instead of Faye, it was Austin who came downstairs shortly after the servant went upstairs. He slowly came downstairs before greeting Elise and Alexander, saying, “You’re back, huh?” Then, he asked, “How’s Trevor? Has he gotten any better?”

Elise sounded a bit displeased, though. “How much better can he get in a vegetative state?”

“You’re right.” Austin let out a sigh. Then, he looked up at her, asking, “Why are you asking for Faye?”

Coming straight to the point, Elise replied, “To seek justice for Trevor.”

“You came here after listening to your mom’s allegations, eh?” Austin lowered his head with a wave of his hand. “Those were nothing but groundless speculations that have no factual basis. You shouldn’t take them at face value.”

“Who am I supposed to trust if I don’t trust my mom? Should I trust an outsider like you do?” Elise shot back in a confrontational manner.

“What nonsense are you talking about? There are no outsiders in this family!” Austin pulled a long face in displeasure. “Both you and your sister are my daughters. There’s nothing different.”

Elise didn’t want to keep arguing with him over the subject. Directly, she got around the sofa and headed upstairs.

“What are you doing?!” Austin jumped to his feet. “Are you gonna hurt your own sister in front of me?!”

Elise paused in her tracks, but she didn’t look back. “That’s just your imagination. I’ve never acknowledged before that I have a sister,” she said while walking upstairs.

Austin strode up to Elise. Standing on the stairs, he reproached Elise in a condescending manner, saying, “Just walk over my dead body if you want to hurt your sister without any justification!”

Elise retracted her feet and looked up at Austin. Then, she narrowed her eyes, which shone with a dangerous gleam. “Are you determined to defend her?”

Austin didn't answer her.

Elise then asked, “Do you know that Trevor's now as good as dead?”

“He's not dead yet,” Austin retorted almost stubbornly. “I know about my own son. He won't die so easily.”

“Easily?” Elise sneered. “Did you forget the years you guys spent at Pinewood Hospital? You didn't see the nurse wipe the blood off Trevor's body, so you thought he wouldn't be in pain, did you?”

Austin shut up again; he had nothing to say.

“It seems that you've made the choice, but I'm gonna ask you again,” Elise said recklessly in despair. “Either hand Faye over and let me take her away today, or I'll leave right away and take action against the Andersons from now on. Make your choice.”

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“That's sheer nonsense!” Austin flung his arms in vexation.

“Nonsense? I'm not in the mood for nonsense, nor am I joking either,” Elise said expressionlessly. “Well then, I'll take it as you've chosen to stick with Faye.”

Austin didn't refute her.

The words the servant had just said rang in Elise's head. In an instant, disappointment welled up inside her.

Sometimes, being foolish could be fatal. Despite his current age, Austin was appallingly not as farsighted as Jeanie and Bertha. Even they knew that Faye was a greedy and wicked monster who would bite the hand that fed her someday if kept around, but he believed her wholeheartedly. In that case, let him pay for the so-called love between father and daughter and his foolishness, thought Elise.

Shooting a glance upstairs, Elise saw Faye, who quietly avoided meeting the former's eyes while hiding behind a pillar. "Since you've heard it all, keep this in mind," Elise said to the person upstairs. "From now on, you and the Andersons have another enemy." With that, she stormed off right away without taking another glance at Austin.

"You've made another wrong decision," Alexander said before going out after her.

Shortly after the couple walked outside, they saw Bertha waiting in front of them. Even though Elise was in low spirits, she went straight up to the old woman without avoiding her

"Yoona." Bertha looked at Elise while being visibly heartbroken. "I feel I haven't seen you for ages."

"You've got to be kidding, Old Mrs. Anderson. It's only been a month or so," Elise replied flatly.

"No, it's different." Bertha stepped forward and held Elise's hands in her wrinkled hands, rubbing the latter's hands again and again. "I used to know you as Miss Sinclair, but now you're my dear granddaughter. Now that I think about it, we've not seen each other for almost 15 years."

Elise didn't say a word. She didn't understand how Bertha had made the calculations. Regardless of whether she was speaking to Bertha as Elise or as her granddaughter, it

had indeed only been a month since they last spoke to each other. However, when Elise saw Bertha shedding tears of emotion, she decided to not be too particular about it.

After a while, Bertha wiped her tears away. Holding Elise's hand in a tight grasp, she said, "Please don't get angry with your dad. He has his reasons for doing so."

"Are you gonna advise me not to fight Faye like he did?" Elise shot back. At first, she had wanted to tell Bertha that Trevor had nearly died because of Faye, but she bit back the words that sprang to her lips for the sake of Bertha's health.

"I'm not trying to advise you. There are some matters that you don't understand, and the matters at present aren't the only things he needs to consider," Bertha replied with some hesitation. In the end, she dared not reveal too many of the details.

"I'm not gonna try to understand what I don't understand either," Elise replied coldly "I only do what I believe is right and defend the right person."

Bertha replied patiently in earnest, "But there are no absolute rights and wrongs in the world. Perhaps what you see is only an act that people put on to pull the wool over your eyes, no?"

"I don't understand what you mean." Elise was puzzled. "What's right is right, and what's wrong will always be wrong. There's nothing that they should be afraid of facing. If they're afraid, that only shows they're too cowardly to summon up their courage. Are the others supposed to

sympathize and play along with you if you're a chicken? There's no such thing in the world."

"You're gonna suffer for being so young and impetuous, Yoona," Bertha said worriedly.

"I'll suffer, then." Elise withdrew her hand from Bertha's grasp. "I'd rather suffer than have a guilty conscience," she said. Then, she gave Bertha a nod and walked out.

Alexander listened to the two women's conversation from behind them for a while. After Elise had left, he walked up to Bertha and apologized to her on Elise's behalf, saying, "I'm sorry if Elise has offended you. She has a simple heart, so she doesn't see people and things in a roundabout sort of way."

"Do you think I'm gonna get angry with my own granddaughter?" Bertha let out a sigh. Then, she recalled something and added, "Since you're always around her, please always remind her that fearlessness isn't a good thing. I fear that she might end up being covered in scars one day."

"Please don't worry. I won't let anyone touch a single strand of Elise's hair even if that means I'll get hurt myself," Alexander promised.

Bertha nodded. "I'll be entrusting this granddaughter of mine to you, then. Please be sure to take good care of her for me."

"I will. Alright then, I've got to go."

"Goodbye."

Alexander bowed to her slightly before going out after Elise.

Meanwhile, Elise's phone rang as soon as she got into the car. "Hello? Who's that? Just shoot if you have something to say. If not, I'm hanging up," she said in a rapid-fire way.

"Hey, don't! Are you gonna cast me aside now that I'm no longer needed?" Nathan complained. "You can't cozy up to people when you have a favor to ask of them and ignore them when you no longer need their help, sweetie."

"Get straight to the point, please," Elise urged impatiently.

"The point? I thought you knew what it was," Nathan replied. He continued unhurriedly, "The Dahlens have gone bankrupt, no? I'd done the job, but you didn't call me, so I can only call you to have you keep your side of the bargain."

Elise thought she seemed to have underestimated Nathan's capabilities.

"What? That's quick!"

"Well, how long it takes depends on my mood." Nathan stared into space with a grin while holding his cell phone. "I put what you'd asked me to do at the top of my list of priorities. You didn't forget what you'd promised me, did you?"

Elise was rendered speechless; indeed, she had forgotten her promise to Nathan. After a brief pause, she replied boldly, "I didn't, of course. How about tonight? As it happens, she's got time for a couple of drinks."

Nathan replied, "Sure. I'll prepare two bottles of fine wine then. You come over and have Alexander join us too. Let's drink to our heart's content!" His mood uplifted, he turned to look at the Romanée-Conti in the liquor cabinet. It's only proper to serve A with wines of such distinction, I suppose, he thought.

“Okay, let’s meet up at the villa where we were last time,” Elise said. With that, she hung up before Nathan could say the words on the tip of his tongue.

Nathan looked at the phone while smacking his lips in resignation. “Is it really fine for someone as mysterious as A to meet with us casually at Dawn Villa? Does she really have no idea how many people are gonna throng the place if word leaks out about it...” he muttered. On second thought, though, he felt that A was putting her trust in him. She’s only so unperturbed because she believes I won’t erpose our whereabouts, he thought.

That night, Nathan arrived early at Dawn Villa, bringing the wine with him. Not only did he go out of his way to dress himself in the most expensive suit in his closet, but he even had his hair redone so that every strand of his hair stuck up in a meticulous curve.

After waiting for a long time, he finally heard footsteps outside the door.

Alexander was the first to come in, whereas Nathan stood up, getting all psyched up with his eyes fixed on Alexander’s back. At last, I’m gonna meet with the elusive and mysterious A after six years! he thought. He believed that as long as he and A teamed up at this meeting, building a new financial empire would be a piece of cake.

Soon, a thin small figure wearing a peaked cap came in.

Nathan’s eyes dimmed somewhat. A seems far from the towering figure I’d imagined, he thought. However, he braced himself soon afterward. Well, her looks and her stature are secondary; what matters the most are her capabilities. As long as she’s talented, her image will be much more majestic than that of mountains and rivers.

The next second, though, the thin and small figure took off her cap, and her beautiful long hair fell loosely around her shoulders. When she looked up at Nathan, he was completely taken aback. “Elise? What the hell’s going on? Are you fooling me?” He felt deceived

“No one’s fooling you.” Elise tossed her cap onto the sofa. Then, she threw up her hands and said in an easy manner, “Didn’t you say you wanted to meet with me in person? Eye me now to your heart’s content, then.”

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“This is...” This is totally different from what I’d expected, okay?!

Nathan could hardly believe it when he saw the nonchalant look on Elise’s face. Without even bothering about his elegant-looking suit, he quickly walked to the door and craned his neck to look outside. However, there wasn’t a soul to be seen when he looked around. His arms akimbo, he turned around and stood where he was in a daze for a few seconds. Then, he turned back and stood face-to-face with Elise, eyeing her up and down once again with skepticism in his eyes. “You’re A?” he asked.

“Yeah, it’s me.” Elise folded her arms across her chest.

Nathan pulled a long face at once. “Say, even if you didn’t manage to make an appointment with her, you didn’t have to joke with me like this. Don’t tell me you’ve not even met her in person.”

However, Elise asked calmly in reply, “If I’m not A, then what do you think A’s supposed to look like?”

“In any case, she’d never look like you.” Nathan exhaled a deep breath in annoyance. When he turned and saw that Alexander was about to open the bottle of Romanée-Conti, he immediately ran up to the man and stopped him, saying, “Don’t touch it! This bottle’s for A. If you two finish it off, then what am I gonna serve A with when I meet her for real later?”

Just then, however, he heard a lady’s faint and delicate voice speak behind him. “That’s stingy of you, Natty.”

Upon hearing that, Nathan felt like something had exploded inside his head. In an instant, his pupils dilated, and he looked back in disbelief. “How did you know about this nickname?” He looked bemused. “Did A even tell you about that?”

Natty wasn’t Nathan’s actual nickname. It was only a nickname that A gave him without thinking when they were working together back then because she thought Natty sounded similar to his first name. Even though many who had been part of the collaboration were aware of this nickname, no one dared to challenge Nathan’s authority like A did, for he was a big name in the investment community even then. Therefore, he hadn’t heard this nickname for years.

“Jeez, what a bother.” Elise plonked herself down on the sofa.

“Seriously, do you need me to reminisce about how we used the situation to our advantage during the first equity hedge battle between you and that self-important father of yours and how we wiped him out and made him lose all his capital?”

Finally, Nathan had no choice but to look Elise in the face. A kept a low profile and was never keen on acquiring fame or wealth, so she would never brag to anyone in great detail about those exhilarating and unrestrained stock wars. Furthermore, no one knew that the person they

had jointly defeated at the time was none other than Nathan's own father.

Nathan's mother was abandoned by his father before he was born. Not only that, but the man even refused to say goodbye to her for one last time in her dying moments. In order to get back at the man, Nathan amassed his strength until he finally stood in the brokerage firm with dignity and fought him. At first, he thought he had honed his skills enough, but Nathan's father was more experienced and thus much craftier. Halfway through the scheme, he almost had all his

possessions swallowed up by that so-called father. It was A who had saved the desperate situation for him, allowing him to bring the man down from the top of the financial pyramid.

Therefore, to Nathan, A wasn't only an idol but also his benefactor. If it weren't for A, he wouldn't have been able to avenge his mother and reclaim his dignity.

On the other hand, Elise was running out of patience. "Are you still not gonna believe me?"

"No, I believe you. It's just that I still have trouble adjusting to that." Nathan seemed somewhat ill at ease. He continued in self-deprecation, "Perhaps it just never occurred to me that the person who had easily spent more than one billion as she pleased would be a teenage girl."

Elise had yet to celebrate her 20th birthday at present, which meant she was only about 13 years old seven years ago. It was truly unimaginable for someone at that age to have a commanding presence in the capital market.

Elise got up, came to Nathan's side, and gave him a pat of comfort on the arm like a mature and respectable old man. "It's okay, Natty. You're still

young. As you gain more experience, you'll find. that there are always people who are better than you in the world.”

Nathan pulled a wry face; he never dreamed that he would be preached to by a 20-year-old lady one day.

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Elise didn't care much about it, though. After finishing her sentence, she went to the liquor cabinet and picked up the bottle of Romanée-Conti. Then, she opened it right away, pouring the wine into three wine glasses. Picking up two of the glasses, she then turned around and handed one to Nathan.

Alexander picked up the remaining glass of wine and walked over to them, forming a circle with them.

Nathan glanced down at the wine glass with a faint smile. Then, he took the wine glass, clinked glasses with the couple, and finished his wine in one gulp with a toss of his head.

Having finished her glass of wine, Elise licked her lips, seemingly savoring the endless aftertaste that the wine had left in her mouth.

“Pretty nice, isn't it? I bought it at an auction for two million. There are less than ten bottles of it globally,” Nathan said.

“Yeah, it's nice indeed.” Elise compressed her lips into a smile. In an instant, she came up with a mischievous idea. Walking back to the liquor cabinet, she brought the entire bottle of Romanée Conti over and filled Nathan's wine glass with it right away.

“Hey, that’s enough!” Seeing Elise pour wine recklessly into his glass, Nathan immediately held it up, but the glass was already 80% full at that point. He said helplessly, “Elise, you only need to pour a mouthful of the wine into each glass just so we can taste it. It’s not like we’re gonna get drunk.”

Elise crinkled her eyes in a smile. “Well, I was just worried that you couldn’t remember what it tasted like. After all, the bottle will cease to be yours very soon.”

Nathan was puzzled upon hearing her words.

“Didn’t you say you had prepared this bottle of wine for A?” Elise asked shamelessly.

Upon realizing what Elise meant, Nathan panicked at once. I only have a bottle of good wine of such distinction! he thought. “Well, I did say that, but... Good wine is supposed to be shared with everyone!”

“Don’t be so stingy, will you?” Elise shoved him in the chest. “Think about that wretched father or yours and your current standing. Is the huge favor I’ve done for you not worth you giving me a bottle of wine as a present?”

“Well, it’s worth it, but this bottle-”

“That settles it, then!” Elise dashed outside with the wine bottle in her arms without giving Nathan the opportunity to finish his sentence. As she ran, she shouted, “Thanks for the wine! Call me again if you have such a good thing to offer me next time.”

“Hey, wait a minute! Stop!” Nathan yelled. Helplessly, he watched the top-grade wine in his collection being taken away in such an open and

aboveboard way. His face crumpled into a look of desolation, and his heart was bleeding.

At the sight of the scene, Alexander couldn't help bursting into laughter.

Only then did Nathan recall there was another person around. Turning to stare at Alexander, he narrowed his eyes, which flickered with slyness.

“What do you want?” Alexander asked with a straight face. “I’m straight.”

“Bah, who cares about it, anyway?!” Nathan rolled his eyes. “I mean, remember to call me the next time you two are gonna have a drink.”

Alexander replied with a sly smile, “Well, I can call you, but aren’t you gonna give me a bottle of good wine to thank me in advance?”

With a slap on his thigh, Nathan agreed to it without hesitation, saying, “No problem. I still have another bottle of Romanée-Conti at my place, only that it’s not as good as that one. I’ll have it delivered to you later.”

“Thanks.” Alexander gave him a faint smile. Then, he put down his wine glass and walked out with his hands in his pockets.

As Nathan watched Alexander disappear from the door, he suddenly felt that something was amiss. Did I just let them take away two bottles of Romanée-Conti at once? S**t! What a colluding couple!

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Elise kept sending text messages on her cell phone on their way home.

Jealous, Alexander asked, “Who are you texting? You’re replying to the messages so quickly.”

“A wine lover who loves drinking more than everything else. He certainly won’t let this bottle of Romanée-Conti slip through his fingers,” Elise replied. As she spoke, she took a selfie with the bottle of Romanée-Conti in her arms. Then, she opened the chat window on WhatsApp and sent the picture.

When Alexander caught sight of the scene from the corner of his eye, he couldn’t help stepping on the gas even harder. So far, Elise has never done anything intimate to me like sending me selfies. Who’s the one she’s texting, and why do they deserve such treatment? Could it be her grandparents? No, their state of health wouldn’t allow them to drink too much alcohol. Nor could it be the Andersons, who are now in a state of utter confusion. It couldn’t be Elise’s classmates, either. They’re all ladies, so whether they drink alcohol or not is questionable, and besides, they can’t tell good wine from bad, he thought. As he was too absorbed in thought, he unconsciously blurted out what he was thinking. “Who could it be...”

Then, in a moment of inattention, he accidentally rear-ended the car in front of him.

Tacitly, both drivers pulled over to the side of the road to avoid blocking traffic on the road.

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“Are you alright?” Alexander hurriedly checked on Elise’s condition. After making certain that she was unscathed, he unbuckled his seat belt and got out of the car. Then, he walked around his car

other car. However, when he saw the female driver who was checking on the damage done to her car, his bushy eyebrows furrowed. “Maya?”

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Maya looked up at him with mixed emotions flickering across her eyes. “It’s you? Well, never mind.” She kicked the car’s rear bumper. “Just go ahead with your business. You don’t have to take responsibility for this.” Having been reduced to a nobody at present, she could no longer be of any help to Alexander, nor was she good enough for him. On top of that, she didn’t want him to see her at the lowest point in her life.

After the Dahlen Family went bankrupt, all the family’s property, movable or immovable, was sold off by the bank, leaving Maya with nothing else but the SUV. Devastated by the blow, Maxwell went into a coma and was lying in the hospital. In order to pay his medical expenses, Maya sold everything she could. Having parted with her luxury cosmetics, designer clothing, and luxury handbags, she now wore a shirt and a pair of jeans—the simplest and most convenient sort of clothing. As a result, she no longer looked like the daughter of a rich family.

Alexander honestly didn’t recognize Maya at first glance.

Just then, Elise got out of the car and walked up to them. “How is it?”

“It’s fine. I’ll take care of it.” Seeing Maya turn her head away, Alexander considerately stopped Elise from continuing to come toward them. Then, he took out a bank card and handed it to Maya. “Here. The money in it should be enough for you to get the car fixed or swap it for a newer car that’s more comfortable. Your car’s gonna be scrapped soon, I think.”

“No, I don’t want it. Take back your money,” Maya said stubbornly, before biting her lower lip at once. Only by doing so could she prevent herself from bursting into tears.

I wasn’t that Maya didn’t know how worn-out the car—which had been kept in the underground garage for more than ten years—looked, but she had no other option. Everything that belonged to the Dahlens had been taken away, except for this car, which she and her family could keep on using because it was registered under her deceased grandfather’s name. She couldn’t be left without the car. She had to go back and forth between her recently rented home—where she had to move all the usable stuff 10—and the hospital, where she had to look after her unconscious father

If it weren’t for the man named Nathan York, she would still be a little princess living the life of luxury, and her father, who loved her more than anyone else did, wouldn’t have fallen into a coma. Even now, she still had a hard time accepting reality, not to mention facing Alexander.

On the other hand, Elise recognized Maya’s voice at once upon hearing the latter’s words. “Maya?”

“No, I’m not Maya.” Maya sniffled. “You’ve mistaken me for someone else.” Then, after casting a sidelong glance at Elise, she resolutely took the bank card in Alexander’s hand. “I’ll keep the money, so let’s drop the matter. I won’t be bothering you two anymore. Alright, you may leave now.” The Dahlens had gone bankrupt, causing her to be reduced from being the daughter of a wealthy family to her current state. Consequently, she only wished that everyone who knew her

in person would never show up in her life again.

Just then, a luxury car pulled up behind Elise. Getting out of the car, Nathan strode up to the couple with his long legs, asking, “Are you guys alright?”

It’s him! At a glance, Maya recognized Nathan, whom Maxwell had kept talking about on the phone before falling into a coma, and whose name the relatives who came to settle scores with her family had mentioned again and again. It was all because of Nathan that the Dahlens fell from heaven to hell overnight, turning me from a rich lady who lived a life of luxury into the down-and-out woman I currently am! It was him who caused suffering to both the Dahlens and my father, who loves me more than anyone else does! The Dahlen Family’s ruined, yet this guy’s still alive and well like he’s got nothing to do with it. This is simply unfair! Why?! The Dahlens had never offended this guy, so what gave him the right to s****h everything from us as he pleases?!

“Ellie, I’m gonna call you Ellie from now on,” Nathan said while looking at Elise. “It’s okay that you took the wine away, but could you pay attention to your identity and protect yourself, hmm?” Then, he turned to look at Alexander and called him to account, saying, “I seriously wonder if you’re really fit to be her boyfriend.”

Elise shot a disdainful look at him. “That’s none of your business. Why don’t you mind your own business instead?”

“How could you call this ‘none of my business?’” Nathan replied. Then, he continued as if it were a matter of course, “You gave me everything, so your safety is my utmost priority, of course!”

Elise shuddered at Nathan’s words. What he said sounds so embarrassing in every way, she thought.

Meanwhile, Maya stared at the three, her eyes widening in anger as her fingernails almost dug into her flesh. Turns out he's Elise's lackey, huh? So it was Elise who gave the orders. She was the culprit behind everything; it was her, this b*tch, who drove me into such a predicament!

Just then, Nathan urged, "Have you dealt with the matter here? There's still something I haven't

told you; you guys left too early just now."

Alexander knew that Maya probably didn't wish them to stay here for too long. "Alright then, let's go," he replied. As he spoke, he turned around and left with his arm around Elise's waist.

"Well, now that you've met with me, how about you go back to Mesdra with--"

Before Nathan could finish his sentence, he and the couple suddenly heard the sound of someone collapsing to the ground. When they looked back simultaneously, they saw Maya lying unconscious on the ground.

Maya was the daughter of Madeline's best friend, after all, so Alexander couldn't bear to look on without doing anything. Walking over to Maya, he helped her up and leaned her against the car, supporting her with one hand while taking out his cell phone and calling the ambulance with the other.

Elise didn't want to waste too much time, either. With a flip of her hand, she produced a silver needle. Crouching down beside them, she inserted the silver needle into a spot that was several inches below Maya's temple.

After Elise took out the silver needle, Maya opened her eyes. "Were you the ones who saved me?" she asked confusedly.

“No, it was Elise,” Alexander replied.

Maya turned to look at Elise with a frown. Looking both delicate and pitiful, she asked, “Don’t you blame me for having come between you and Alexander?”

“Who said that?” Elise stood up and took out a piece of tissue to wipe the silver needle clean before putting the needle away. “I just didn’t want to stay here and wait for the ambulance. And besides, what you said about your having come between Alexander and me is just your imagination. There was never a third party in our relationship.”

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A flicker of resentment flashed across Maya’s eyes for an instant, but it quickly vanished as she looked up at Elise sincerely. “You’re right I could never have come between you two since the very beginning. Everything that happened in the past is all my fault. I wonder if you can let me stay around you two from now on, even as a servant. Please think of this as giving me an opportunity to make amends for what I’ve done.”

However, Nathan unmasked her mercilessly at once. “What a funny woman you are! Weren’t you having your eyes on Elise’s boyfriend earlier? What, are you switching to the softer approach now? Wanna steal Alexander from Elise by staying close to them? You sure have no problem humbling yourself, huh?”

“No, I won’t do that anymore!” Maya explained in a panic. “I promise that I’ll obey no one else but Miss Sinclair. If you guys are still worried, from now on, whenever I see Alexander, I’ll automatically keep a

three-meter distance from him. Are you guys still not gonna believe me if I do this ?”

Alexander shook his head, sighing. “You don’t have to do this.”

Maya dared not look at him; she merely stared stubbornly at Elise, waiting for her reply.

Finally, after a long time, Elise replied slowly, “That’s not necessary. I have enough servants at home, and besides, I don’t have the habit of abusing others and ordering people around. You’ve paid for everything you did to me when the Dahlens went bankrupt, so we no longer owe each other anything. From now on, let’s go our separate ways. Don’t show up in front of me anymore.” With that, she turned around and got into Alexander’s car without the slightest hesitation.

Nathan and Alexander both darted a glance at Maya before getting into their respective cars. Soon, both cars disappeared into the flow of traffic.

As Maya sat slumped on the ground, her face slowly contorted with hatred. Her hands clenched tightly into fists, and she ground her teeth audibly. Who does Elise think she is by acting all high and mighty? What else does she have left without her man? Does she think she can just walk away after ruining me? It’s not that easy! Since I can no longer find happiness, I’ll never let her live a peaceful life! At the thought of this, she immediately got up and into her worn-out SUV. Then, she quickly started up her car, heading for the Sinclair Residence.

Meanwhile, Elise and the others arrived home just in time for dinner. Everyone in the family sat around the dining table, but their mood was a bit down with the absence of Jeanie, Trevor, and Claude. The only person who enjoyed dinner with great relish was Nathan, who lived alone and thus seldom had the opportunity to eat home-cooked meals.

Even though he often had dinner with his clients, those dinners were all formal with food that was bland and tasteless. On the contrary, both the food served at the Sinclair Residence and the atmosphere here made him feel somewhat at home.

Moses listlessly reminded Nathan, saying, “Watch your table manners a little, Mr. York. You’re a financial tycoon with at least billions of funds in your hands, after all.” I haven’t bickered with Claude today. How boring, he thought.

Nathan’s expression froze for a moment before he smiled with embarrassment. “He he... I’ll try my best, okay?”

“Don’t listen to him, President York! Feel free to eat as much as you please, and come here often.” Danny said. He had heard many legends about Nathan, who was great enough to be idolized by every hot-blooded youth because he had single-handedly striven to become who he was today. It felt like a dream to Danny that he was now having dinner with the legendary man.

Just then, a loud clang came from the gate. When everyone turned to look at the gate, they saw a thin and weak figure dragging a bag of stuff into the yard with great difficulty under the dim light. However, it wasn’t until she came nearer that they got a good look at her face.

“Isn’t she that daughter of the Dahlen Family?” Nathan frowned. “Didn’t she have enough after extorting money from Alexander back on the road? How dare she pursue us all the way here? Seems like I haven’t done enough damage to her family yet,” he said while putting down his cutlery. Then, he walked out first, threatening, “Wanna latch onto us, huh? Don’t you know that an unmarried woman like you should keep your distance from men? Get lost at once along with your stuff, or I don’t mind letting you experience total despair!”

Maya glared at him bitterly. “Well then, just go ahead and let me go bankrupt once again! I’m afraid of nothing. I’ve lost everything now, anyway!”

Indeed, a person who had nothing in the world was the hardest to deal with. They had nothing to lose, so they had nothing to be afraid of.

However, Nathan was no simpleton. Having fought his way up from the bottom rung of society, he had seen all kinds of people and used all kinds of tricks. The instant Maya growled at him, he immediately gave off a commanding aura through every pore with a murderous look in his shrewd eyes. “Well, seems like you aren’t even afraid of death.”

Maya swallowed a mouthful of saliva almost imperceptibly. She was afraid of dying, of course, but she couldn’t yield to Nathan. She had to stay here to pay them back a hundredfold for the suffering they had inflicted on her. “Wanna kill me, huh? Well, you can do that, but get in the line!” She went past Nathan right away. Walking a few steps into the yard, she shouted, “Elise, I know I can’t hide it from you. It’s right that I have a purpose in cottoning up to you, but it’s not for Alexander’s sake—it’s for the sake of my dad. He’s been in a vegetative state since the Dahlens went bankrupt, but I know you have a way of curing him. As long as you’re willing to do so, I’m willing to do anything. Even if you’re not, I’ll stay at the Sinclair Residence as a servant until the day you’re finally willing to treat my dad!”

Elise calmly picked up a piece of vegetable, put it in her bowl, and toyed with it for a moment. Then, she laughed as if she had heard a joke, saying, “Sounds like you’re not gonna leave if I refuse to treat your dad, huh?”

“That’s right,” Maya replied with determination. “My dad has doted on me his entire life, so there’s no way I’m gonna leave him in the lurch. Elise, just take this as my plea to you. I can even kneel down if you

want me to.” Almost as soon as she finished saying that, she knelt down on the ground with a thud. “I can kneel to you. As long as you’re content and appeased, I’m willing to do anything!”

Elise narrowed her eyes. She was unfazed by such moral coercion, but Maya was someone Alexander knew in person, after all. Therefore, she quietly observed his response.

Alexander seemed to be in a world totally different from theirs, though; he was peeling the shrimps before him with rapt attention. After peeling a bowlful of shrimps, he wiped his hands

clean with a napkin and put the bowl of peeled shrimps in front of Elise, smiling faintly. “I tasted one of them, and it’s pretty sweet. You can eat more of these since shrimps won’t make you fat.”

Elise understood what the man was implying with his gesture—he implied that he would let her make decisions herself, and that he wouldn’t interfere with her decisions. Quirking up the corner of her mouth, she picked up a shrimp and put it into her mouth. After chewing it for a while, she swallowed it, crinkled her eyes, and smiled at Alexander. “It’s sweet indeed.”

Alexander smiled with satisfaction without saying a word in response. Lowering his head, he picked up his cutlery and continued eating slowly.

Only then did Elise turn to look at the yard behind her. “Since she wants to kneel, let her kneel as she pleases. Don’t spoil the fun for her, Natty. Come back and eat.” Her voice was neither soft nor loud, but what it said was resounding.

With that, the murderous aura around Nathan disappeared at once, and he quickly returned to his seat and picked up his cutlery. Then, lowering his

head quietly, he asked in a whisper, “Can you address me by a different nickname next time? I’m a financial tycoon, after all, Save me some dignity, will you?” No matter how I think about it, Natty sounds like a name for an odd jobs man or a servant for a rich family!

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“Oh,” Elise murmured calmly.

“Oh?! What does that even mean?” Nathan put on a sullen face; he couldn’t help thinking that Elise was up to some mischief. As such, he took the initiative, suggesting, “How about this? Since we’re the best of friends, let’s address each other by our nicknames rather than our given name. From now on, you’ll call me Nate, and I’ll call you Ellie. What do you think?”

However, his suggestion was met with no response.

The look of anticipation on Nathan’s face froze as he truly experienced what it felt like to make a fool of himself

In the end, it was Robin who saved him from the embarrassment. “Let’s eat first, Mr. York.”

“Alright!” At the mention of eating, Nathan’s spirits rose again.

However, everyone at the dining table except Nathan had something weighing on their minds. They ate much more silently than usual, ending today’s dinner in silence.

After dinner, Maria came in to clear the table.

Maya's legs happened to have gotten numb from kneeling. As soon as she rose unsteadily to her feet, she dashed into the living room and snatched the tray in Maria's hand, speedily filling it with the dishes and cutlery on the dining table.

Maria stood beside her at a complete loss for what to do with some spoons and forks in her hand. Not knowing whether to put them down or not, she turned to look at the Sinclairs for help.

Elise said, "It's okay, Maria. Just let her do it. Take it as you've got a helper, and get some rest."

Astounded by the unexpected honor, Maria replied, "I don't need any helpers! I'm but a maid."

"No, you do need one. Don't be reserved with her. She likes doing these," Elise said nonchalantly.

Upon hearing Elise's words, Maria turned to glance at Maya. There's no way she could serve anyone as a maid with her skinny arms and legs, she thought. However, since Elise had said so, she didn't say anything else and nodded in silence.

Maya plonked the dishes on the tray with a loud clatter as if she was piqued.

Maria's heart ached at the sight of the scene. Luckily, it didn't take long before the table was cleared; only then did Maria feel relieved.

Maya held up the tray while asking with difficulty, "Where am I supposed to wash these?!"

"This way!" Maria hurriedly showed her the way. With that, the two women disappeared from everyone's sight one after the other.

A practiced conspiracy theorist, Nathan had seen too many examples of people who submitted to their enemies and endured humiliation until they successfully made them lose all standing and

reputation. Therefore, he couldn't help but ask, "Are you gonna let her stay around? You don't need me to tell you the examples of people who endured humiliation in order to bring their enemies down, do you?"

"I've got plans of my own," Elise replied impassively.

Seeing that she didn't intend to say another word, Nathan didn't continue the subject.

Just then, Alexander handed his cell phone to Elise. "Take a look at this."

"A land auction in Landred City?" Elise turned to look at him. "You wanna be a property developer or something?"

"No, it's you who's gonna be a property developer." Alexander switched to a more comfortable posture while wrapping his arm around her shoulder. "Land No. 6 is the land Faye has her eye on. It's also the land Trevor tried to acquire."

Upon hearing this, Elise couldn't help turning to read the details of the auction on the cell phone, memorizing the information one by one while scrolling the phone's screen with her fingertip.

Just then, Alexander continued, "I've prepared the money and the plane tickets. We'll set out tomorrow and help your brother get the land."

Elise was lost in thought all of a sudden as she stared at the phone's screen. To think that he would be so meticulously attentive to me! He didn't even overlook my family's honor and needs, she thought.

Seeing that she hadn't responded for a long time, Alexander put out his hand and placed it on her soft, fine hair. "What's wrong? Don't feel like confronting Faye head-on yet?" he asked, before pausing for a moment. With a thoughtful look on his face, he continued with a nod, "Well, that's understandable. Your dad's gonna be present at the auction then. Sorry for not considering that. Let me go to the auction on your behalf, then. Your dad isn't very satisfied with me, anyway, so it doesn't make any difference if I'm meaner."

The furrows in Elise's brow deepened. How could he be so kind to me...

"You're weird," Nathan teased. "Other men would only be too eager to please their father-in-laws, yet you go out and go against Austin in public. I'm afraid he'll never agree to marry his daughter to you!" As he spoke, he came up with an idea in his mind. Now that I've finally learned that Elise is A, how can I let her run away from under my very nose? I'd better offer to represent them at the auction so that I'd have an excuse to go to Landred City with them, he thought.

However, just as he was about to speak, Elise spoke first. "It's not necessary, Alexander. I have nothing to worry about. I'm going in person. I said before that I'll make him pay for his foolishness."

At the sight of the scene, Robin heaved a heavy sigh and got up with the aid of his stick. He commanded in a stern voice, "Come with me, Alexander!"

Noticing that something was wrong with Robin's voice, Elise gave Alexander an innocent look and asked him in a whisper, "Did you make Grandpa angry?" –

"No, I didn't." Alexander shook his head and gave her a reassuring pat on the shoulder. "I'll go

take a look,”

Alexander and Robin went all the way to the innermost part of the backyard before stopping.

Robin turned around with a grave face. After making sure that Elise didn't follow them, he said with a sigh, “Did you ever have Elise's interests in mind when you did this today? She's Austin's biological daughter. Even though she hasn't been formally acknowledged as his daughter, her relationship with him is no longer a secret in Tissote's upper-class circles. And now, you're taking her on a long journey to s****h what her father has his eye on. What do you think the outsiders are gonna think of her? Do you want Elise to become an unfilial daughter in their eyes?!”

Alexander pressed his lips together without answering.

Robin then continued, “We've already been secretly worrying about Elise behind her back, knowing full well how dangerous the Anderson Family is. Trevor's such a fine young lad, but he ended up lying in his sickbed again in a single night. And what have you done? Not only do you not keep Elise away from those infighting, but you even put her out in the spotlight, fooling around and stirring up trouble with her! Do you really want to get Elise killed?!” The more he spoke, the more agitated he became, and he struck the ground heavily with his stick again and again, as if striking Alexander's heart.

After a long time, Alexander looked Robin in the eye and said in all earnestness, “I know that Elise's always been surrounded by malice. She's had a hard life, and she isn't really happy.”

Robin's face turned livid. His eyes shone with flames of anger, and his wrinkled face had the authority of an elder written on it. "And you still wanna do so despite knowing that?"

"Yes," Alexander admitted readily in a dignified voice. "I know she's unhappy, and that's exactly why I'm gonna accompany her while she does what she wants. What you're considering is her reputation as an unmarried young lady, but I just want her to live the rest of her life as she pleases. I want her to smile more."

Robin's expression slowly eased at his words, but he still looked conflicted as he thought of something. "Of course, I know that one would be happiest when they live their lives as they please. But humans are social animals, so we have to think about the consequences before doing anything. If you two are gonna invite endless trouble upon yourselves just for momentary happiness, then I'd rather Elise live a duller life."

"No, that's not gonna happen!" Alexander raised his voice all of a sudden. "I'll back her up. She may do whatever she wants, and I'll take care of all the trouble. I can keep her safe, Mr. Robin!" What I want isn't an Elise who does everything by the book, keeps thinking back and forth to herself, and is full of misgivings, but an Elise who's as laid-back, free, ingenuous, and unaffected as a kid, he thoug

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Robin stared at him for a long time, yet he couldn't bring himself to say a word. Given they were both men, he knew very well it was not an empty promise but a genuine one when Alexander swore to protect Elise's smile.

In that very instant, Robin couldn't feel any older. Or rather, he had been old for a very long time, so old that he had grown so much more timid than a rat, fearing anything that came his way. All this time, he had been

praying for stability that he had shut out everything that was remote from his vision. Perhaps Alexander was right. Temporary stability couldn't be exchanged for eternal security. No one could tell what the future might hold, so instead of living in fear, maybe it was time to live more carefreely and enjoy every moment. Even though they were senile, they shouldn't let Elise live as they did—monotonously and aimlessly. Right now, the only person that was standing in Elise's shoes was Alexander, who was right before him.

The concern on Robin's face gradually waned as he nodded, for he had found someone that could love Elise more than they did. "Very well. Remember what you said today, Alexander. If you fail to protect her even for one second, Laura and I are going to abhor you until our very last breath!"

"Don't worry, Mr. Robin." Alexander seemed more determined than ever. "I will spend forever keeping the smile on her face!"

Robin subtly nodded, and suddenly recalled the incident with Matthew. He warned, "As for your brother, it's best that you handle him as soon as possible. There may be a day when he comes back to ruin you and Elise's life."

"I've got a lead on him. I never spent a second slacking," Alexander earnestly claimed.

As such, Robin, seeing there was nothing else to nitpick, nodded. "As long as you know what to do. Now, I officially hand Elise over to you. Please cherish her."

“Thank you, Mr. Robin! I won’t disappoint you!” Alexander was utterly moved as he revealed his delight.

“My disappointment means nothing. Elise, however...” Robin jokingly teased.

“Hehe...” Alexander chuckled in his baritone voice. “I won’t let her down either!”

Robin stopped teasing him. “Now, go back to her, or she’s gonna think I’m bullying you. This girl, she’s not even married yet, but she has already forgotten about her family!”

Alexander went to help him walk. “Are you kidding, Mr. Robin? I’m now one of you too! Whether she thinks of me or you, her heart will still be with the Sinclairs. There’s not a difference, is there?”

“Keep sweet talkin!” Despite saying that angrily, Robin was obviously on cloud nine.

Seeing them depart with gloomy faces and return smiling, Elise got curious. “Smiley faces, what’s the good news?”

Robin wordlessly beamed as Alexander answered, “Mr. Robin said you’re forgetting about him.”

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“What!” Elise went up and held Robin’s arm, leaning her head against him. “I’ll always think about you, Grandpa!”

“Hahaha! Really? Does that mean you will be my granddaughter forever and not get married to another man?” Robin mischievously poked fun at her.

“No way!” Elise speedily raised her head. With a serious expression, she replied, “I still gotta get married! But I’ll always think of you too!”

Robin lifted his hand and booped her nose. “What a sly, greedy girl!”

Unwilling to give in, Elise pinched her nose and pulled a clown face at him.

Since she was heading to Landred City the next day, she later gave Laura an acupuncture. And by the time she was done, it was already midnight. With that, she walked out of the room and sneaked into Alexander’s yard.

Catching her red-handed, Robin shook his head and sighed. “Heartless little girl...”

Being made fun of, Elise immediately let out a sneeze. “Achoo!”

Hearing that, Alexander came out of his room and took off his coat before covering her with it. “And we have ourselves a doctor who has no concept of keeping herself warm during cold days.”

Elise childishly giggled. “Heh, doesn’t that doctor have you?”

“And what if she doesn’t?” Alexander rebuked.

“Then nobody would know she’s a doctor!” She boldly jested, only to call upon Alexander’s scowl, to which she hastily gratified him. “Okay, okay. I’m just kidding. I’ll learn to take care of myself. Satisfied, Mr. Griffith?”

“Whatever.” After he said that, his frown quickly turned into a smile. “Why are you here this late? Did Mr. Robin actually get it right—someone’s dying to get married to me?”

“Hell no!” Elise pompously turned away. “I came for Captain Gleeman!”

“Jackson?” Alexander questioned, “What for?”

“It’s between me and him. Don’t be nosy!” Having said that, she went to open the door to Jackson’s room and entered.

Meanwhile, Clement, who just took off his shirt and was getting ready to sleep, was startled at Elise’s barging in. Ferociously, he tugged the bed sheet and wrapped his entire body as he curled up in the corner. However, having protected his own bare skin, he exposed Jackson’s skin to Elise.

Although Jackson’s only exposed part was his torso, it was enough to fluster him as a woman’s touch was rare to him. He kept on eyeing at Clement, desperately calling for his rescue, to which the latter simply glanced at the woman before silently clutching his sheets tighter.

Jackson was frustrated yet had no way to express it, D**n it, Smith!

Suddenly, Alexander walked in and gently knocked Elise’s head.

“Ouch!” Elise pretended as if she was in agonizing pain. “Why’d you do that?”

“Know your boundaries!” Alexander viciously glanced at her. Entering the room, he passed to Clement a coat, and covered Jackson with another one. “Okay. You may come in now.”

Rubbing the struck spot on her head, Elise walked to the bed.

Since Jackson had his back facing her, Elise craned her neck and looked him in the eye. “Let’s work together, Captain Gleeman. What do you say? Claude, or Max, is kidnapped. I suspect he’s still in Athesea, and I’m gonna need your help for a city-wide search, in exchange for your

freedom. Contrary to your belief, I did not kill Reuben, but I'd like for you to keep this between us for now. So, if you're game, blink your eyes; if you're not, I'll slit your throat." As she uttered her last words, she brushed the side of her finger against her neck.

Jackson peered at her in stupefaction. Wow, it almost sounds like I have a choice!

Nevertheless, quickly, Elise revealed a grin. "Just kidding. If you don't, you'll have to continue staying here. There's already too much on my plate, and an entire precinct of cops tailing me wouldn't exactly help. I'm sure you understand." Having said that, she gazed at Jackson, awaiting his answer.

Jackson, on the other hand, took his time to contemplate. For starters, he would have to leave the courtyard house to enable himself to make further decisions. With that in mind, he rapidly flickered his eyes.

At once, Elise pulled out a silver needle and punctured him with it.

A few minutes later, Jackson regained control of his body. He rolled out of bed and even started shadow-boxing

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"Don't forget our agreement, Captain Gleeman," Elise reminded.

"I'm a man of my word." Jackson was as cold as ever. "But your friend got me fired. I'd love to help you, but I simply can't."

“Right, Simon Bull! How could I forget about him!” After a sudden realization, Elise muttered to herself, “I should have gone to Mr. Bull right away, and I didn’t have to let you go...”

Hearing that, Jackson was dumbfounded. “You know, Miss Sinclair, I’m still here. Maybe you could’ve omitted some words from your mouth.”

“Nah, it’s fine. We’re literally best friends. It doesn’t matter whether you heard them or not.” After giving him a pat on the shoulder, Elise exited the room.

“Wait, what do you mean?” Jackson stopped her.

“Nothing.” She explained, “I’ll have the mayor look for Claude.”

“What about me?” The man was somehow disaffected.

“Do whatever you want. Who cares.” Elise waved her hand as she walked out.

“I now know Max’s identity. Are you not afraid that I might arrest him?” Jackson warned.

“Be sure to tell me when you do. I don’t mind seeing for myself how the self-proclaimed justice enforcer Captain Gleeman would look like when he abuses his position to handle private affairs.” Elise halted her steps, though she didn’t turn back.

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“What are you trying to say?” Jackson squinted his eyes as he grew more hostile.

“What I’m trying to say is, no matter how shady Claude is, he’s still a doctor at the end of the day. How grave of a crime could he possibly commit? The only reason you’d arrest him pertains to him treating whomever. He’s a trained doctor. That’s why you wouldn’t kill him or hurt him as you couldn’t afford any damage to him. Otherwise, the person you wanted to rescue would have no choice but to die.” Finished, Elise resolutely left.

As Jackson was left standing rooted to the spot, speechless, his eyes grew gloomier. After a while, he regained his senses and slowly turned to Alexander. “Max is Claude, who happens to be so close with Elise, whom Moses always treats with utmost respect. Besides, her needling skills are crazy deadly, and no one could dodge her attacks. Seriously, who’s your fiancée?”

“You figure it out.” Alexander patted him before returning to his own room.

Then, Jackson turned to Clement, who was still hiding in the sheets. Shortly after, he suddenly blurted, “They’re already gone! Why are you so shy? It’s not like I’ve never seen it.”

Clement, who was about to drag the sheets away, heard that and immediately hid in his sheets before throwing himself onto bed.

After an entire day of slumber, Jackson couldn’t feel any drowsiness within him. With that, he

went out and shut the door. Having been confined for so many days, he wished to see how the outside world had become.

Back to her room, Elise dialed Simon’s personal number.

Swiftly, Simon answered the call. “Elise?”

“How did you know?” Elise was surprised.

“Only a few know this number. Besides, everyone I know are old people who sleep early. Who else, except you, would call at such a time?” he explained.

“I see.” And so, Elise cut to the chase. “One of my friends got kidnapped in the black market, and I need your power to run a city-wide search. Are you able to do that?”

Walking down a politician’s path would mean being constantly observed. One wrong step could easily be used by others as a leverage, leading the man to his irremediable demise, and all the hard work he had put into his work would go in vain.

Thus, if she weren’t driven into a corner, Elise wouldn’t have come to trouble Simon. However, since Claude was involved, she urgently had to request for his help.

An anonymous enemy was the most formidable. Elise was worried that Claude might be kidnapped by someone from SK Group. Since they were malicious enough to drug Joseph, they would certainly be capable of doing something more brutal to Claude. Therefore, she couldn’t afford to waste even one minute.

“Send me your friend’s photo and any other details about him. I’ll send men to find him right away.” Simon instantly agreed to her request without hesitation.

Although she didn’t intend to bother him, realizing night was the best time for suspicious activities, she quickly acknowledged it. “Okay. I’ll send them over at once.” Elise was about to hang up after saying that.

“H-Hold on. Don’t hang up yet.” Simon called for her. “You didn’t cause any trouble in the black market, did you?”

“No. The black market’s supervisor is a friend. No one would dare to disturb me,” she confessed. “So it’s not people from the black market.”

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“No, not that. I was talking about your safety.” He grudgingly vented, “I know what the black market is like. It’s where all the filth and terror resides. Is the university’s security that lenient? Don’t they care when students just wander however they wish at night?”

“Ah, time to keep up, Mr. Bull.” Elise helplessly shook her head. “It’s all about empowerment now. Only when unbound can one truly and freely experience the world! The age of locking ourselves in our rooms obediently like a goody two-shoes is long gone.”

“You and your metaphors! Liberty is only good at a suitable amount. Too much of it will only lead to chaos. Without order, society is prone to corruption. And that makes me worried that someone might be taking advantage of you and your fast learner’s gift!” Simon patiently advised.

“Man, you nag more than my grandpa! Maybe I should rat on you to your woman and see if you like the sound of bees buzzing in your ears!” Elise angrily suggested.

“My woman’s not as good at words as you,” Simon replied.

“Okay, fine, husband of the century. Yawn... Boy, am I exhausted. Talk to you later. Bye!” Faking a yawn, Elise immediately hung up. Throwing the phone aside, she grabbed her laptop and hacked into Anderson Pharmaceuticals’ insider site and obtained Faye’s schedule for the following week. Studying the schedule on her computer, Elise crossed

her arms as she slowly lay against the back of her chair. “Oh, Faye, get ready to feel what it’s like to be haunted by guilt! I’ll take everything from you in Trevor’s stead!”

She took a deep breath, and as she was about to turn off her computer, she received a voice call. It was a number from the loophole she created back when she contacted Xavier. Accordingly, she turned on her voice changer application before answering the call.

“Joseph, you there?” Xavier spoke in a suppressed voice, obviously trying to conceal his position.

“It’s Eliza,” Elise replied in a masculine, deep timbre.

“Give me your coordinates. Need a rendezvous.” Xavier warily observed his surroundings. Given his injury, all he could do if he were to get caught now was to acquiesce with his capturer.

After contemplating, Elise glimpsed at Faye’s schedule before giving Xavier a location in Landred

City.

With that, Xavier ended the call.

Elise could vaguely figure out what Xavier had gone through to end up holding onto his last sliver of hope and making that phone call.

Though, fortunately, she didn’t miss it.