

Extraordinary 681

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"I want to protect her, but I can only distance myself from her right now. I even dream of being with her all the time. My heart aches whenever I think of this. I really love her a lot. I had never suspected her when Claire died, and I have never thought of seeking revenge on her. I know her the most. How could she kill an innocent woman like Claire? She's a righteous person who would even send help when she encountered an accident. How could such a kind person like her harm Claire? Naomi, I only hope to protect her for the rest of my life. I don't even care if that means I am against the world."

Naomi was stunned as she stared at the man's handsome face. She could only see his lips moving, but she could not hear anything he said.

I really can't hear anything at all.

Anxious, she uttered, "Lucas, what are you saying? Can you please write them down?"

Meanwhile, Ashlyn, who was outside the door and was about to knock, froze on the spot.

Lucas' low voice continually entered her ears.

Every word he said rang through her eardrum.

He said he loves me. He said he wants to get so strong that nobody can defeat him.

Taking a deep breath, Ashlyn was about to turn and leave when she bumped into a nurse. The nurse was holding a tray as she approached Naomi's ward. She asked curiously, "Dr. Berry, why are you not entering the room?"

"I-I'm not going in."

With that, Ashlyn turned around and left the scene.

"I want to protect her, but I can only distance myself from her right now. I even dream of being with her all the time. My heart aches whenever I think of this. I really love her a lot. I had never suspected her when Claire died, and I have never thought of seeking revenge on her. I know her the most. How could she kill an innocent woman like Claire? She's a righteous person who would even send help when she encountered an accident. How could such a kind person like her harm Claire? Naomi, I only hope to protect her for the rest of my life. I don't even care if that means I am against the world."

Inside the ward, Lucas was stunned upon hearing her clear voice.

It was a dark and quiet night; neither the stars nor the moon could be observed in the sky.

Ashlyn huddled in her room. Her eyes were wide-opened, and she had difficulty falling asleep.

Suddenly, moonlight streamed into the room. A tall man dressed in black jumped through the window just as a gentle breeze blew by.

Who is it?

Frowning, Ashlyn pretended as if she was sleeping, attempting to let his guard down.

However, she instantly felt a sense of relief when she heard the familiar footsteps.

Lucas? It's late now. What is he doing in Bayview Villa?

Lucas walked to her bed and stared at Ashlyn, who was sleeping soundly.

He only dared to visit her when the night had fallen.

Otherwise, they only seemed like two strangers during the day.

He had even attended the preliminary rounds of the piano competition as a spectator.

He sat in an unnoticeable corner, keeping an eye on her every move.

Ashlyn, who sat on the judge's panel, exuded an attractive charisma.

Besides, he observed her through the surveillance cameras when Ashlyn had a meal with the Field family in The Peacock.

He would not want to miss out on any scene of Ashlyn.

She has been swamped and tired recently, judging from her expression. She seems to lose some weight, too.

Lucas' heart ached for her.

Reaching out a hand, he wished to caress her face, but he feared it might disturb her sleep.

Hence, he could only stand beside her bed and stare at her instead. A wave of emotions washed over him at that instant.

He recalled the past four years they had spent together as a married couple.

Everything seemed like a dream following Claire's death.

He vowed to himself that he must strive to be better. He swore he would find out the relevant terrorist

group.

He was determined to be stronger than the couple in Nolan Group so that he could protect her.

Feeling his headache, he lowered his head, but his heart ached more.

In the meantime, Ashlyn lay on the bed motionlessly, pretending to be sleeping soundly.

The man guarded at her bedside for a long time, and Ashlyn fell asleep unknowingly.

When the sky was starting to brighten, she merely heard the sound of someone leaping out of the window.

Opening her eyes, she noticed the man jumping out of the window.

Did he really... stay with me for a whole night?

Ashlyn had complicated emotions.

Whenever she consumed the antidote, she was reminded that the ingredients were Lucas' aorta blood and bone marrow. A wave of mixed feelings would instantly flood her heart.

The feelings were incomprehensible, and she could not even figure them out.

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She did not understand why a domineering guy with an aloof bearing would sacrifice everything for her.

Even so, she did not dare to dwell on this matter anymore.

The next morning, Twitter was ablaze again.

There were some heated trending topics.

Ashlyn, the judge, deliberately gave a low score to a contestant.

Ashlyn, aren't you shameless? This is biased toward Charlotte.

There were a lot of comments scolding Ashlyn for being unfair.

They stated she had a bias toward Charlotte and was unfair to the other contestants that she deliberately gave a very low score to them.

They cursed Ashlyn without showing any mercy.

Just as Jared saw the comments, another person commented and came up with a conspiracy theory.

How much did Ashlyn receive from Charlotte?

They commented Ashlyn must have received tons of money from Charlotte. They even found out about Charlotte's close relationship with Ashlyn and Fae and that she was James' goddaughter.

They had even drawn a family tree to relate Ashlyn and Charlotte, analyzing the incident thoroughly.

Countless netizens were trying to disclose their relationship.

Upon seeing the comments, Jared was on the verge of breaking. When he passed his phone for Ashlyn to take a look, the latter raised her brows and took a sip of the milk.

“Do they really think I'm that weak? How dare they falsely accuse me?”

“Boss, what should we do now?”

“What else can we do? Ask Harrison and Anderson to take care of this matter. How dare those people hire ghostwriters to jeopardize my reputation?” Ashlyn frowned, exuding a domineering aura. She did not understand why a domineering guy with an aloof bearing would sacrifice everything for her.

“Okay. Roger that.” Jared hurriedly went upstairs to wake up the twins, who were still sleeping.

At the same time, Ashlyn continued to enjoy her breakfast. When she suddenly thought of Kate acting like a madwoman the day before, she felt like ripping that woman's mouth into pieces.

In the Fraser residence, the Fraser family's personal beautician crouched before Kate, helping the latter polish her nail while grabbing onto her feet.

“Be gentler,” Kate reprimanded the beautician, looking at the trending topics on Twitter.

Petrified, the beautician apologized profusely, “I'm sorry, Mrs. Fraser.”

“Are you always this clumsy?” Kate rolled her eyes, visibly pissed.

Suddenly, a trending topic appeared on the trending list.

Mrs. Fraser of Fraser Corporation hired ghostwriters to slander Ashlyn.

Kate felt a buzzing in her head. She widened her eyes, staring at the topic in disbelief.

At that point, she even suspected her phone was broken.

After all, how was it possible for her to be on the trending topic in just a day?

No! This can't be happening!

Restarting her phone, she went on Twitter again.

However, the trending topic was still at the top of the trending list.

The post had blown up in no time.

Kate was so livid that she almost choked on her breath, and her heart almost stopped beating at once.

Initially, she dared not to click the post. However, after a while, she clicked on the trending post with trembling fingers.

The solid proof of her recruiting ghostwriters to slander Ashlyn was attached to the post, including bank transfer records from the butler of the Fraser family to the ghostwriters, as well as their conversation.

There were messages from the butler when he had hired the ghostwriters.

They read: Keep retweeting the post regarding Ashlyn being unfair on Twitter. Here's five hundred thousand. You guys must make the topic enter the trending list. Mrs. Fraser had said that whoever offended her would meet a horrible end. We must send Ashlyn's reputation to the ground this time.

The chat history clearly recorded how the butler had traded with the ghostwriters, the process of negotiation, and the requirement to complete the task.

The chat history, including the butler's WhatsApp number and his personal details, were all exposed to the public.

That included the pictures of the garden in the Fraser residence and parts of the mansion he had posted on his Instagram previously.

Some of Lochlan's photos were included as well.

The comments then flooded the post. It's real.

There's no way they can deny the fact.

It is apparent that it's the butler's account. It's impossible that he's an imposter, a fake account, or that he's being framed.

Infuriated, Kate vented her anger by kicking the beautician's chest, causing the beautician to slump to the ground.

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The manicurist looked at her in shock. "Mrs. Fraser..."

"Get lost!" Kate was so angry that she violently swept all the bottles of nail polish in front of her down, causing them to fall onto the ground and break into pieces.

Some of them did not break as they rolled away from her unscathed.

The nail polish of various colors was sticky and spilled on the floor, which created a messy scene.

A strong smell of nail polish soon filled the air.

The beautician fled the scene immediately with all her equipment.

It was as if there was a ghost chasing her.

When the butler saw the fleeing beautician, he was frightened. He quickly walked to Kate and asked, "Mrs. Fraser... What's wrong? Why are you so angry?"

Kate threw a phone at the butler forcefully.

He reflexively dodged the phone, and it instantly smashed to the ground.

"Look at what you've done! How did she find this? What's that b*tch's real identity? Doesn't she just know how to play the piano? How can she be so capable that she was able to find out all these things!" Kate's eyes were so wide they looked like copper bells. She shouted hysterically, "It was you, wasn't it? You betrayed me!"

"Mrs. Fraser, I wouldn't dare to even try!" The butler picked up the phone. Its screen was cracked, looking like a cobweb, but the image displayed on the screen could still be vaguely recognized.

He looked at the trending content, including the chat history between him and one of the ghostwriters. The manicurist looked at her in shock. "Mrs. Fraser..."

His expression darkened with panic.

He looked at Kate, his ear ringing. "Mrs. Fraser, I really don't know what's going on. I told him to keep it a secret!"

A wave of panic swept over his expression as he knew Kate's bad temper.

The best punishment that he could have gotten for offending her was getting fired. If she kept thinking about it every day, it would be even worse.

His life would be made a living hell.

Just then, the ghostwriter called him over the phone.

“What has gotten into you? Why is everything exposed?”

The butler could not hold back his anger and shouted back, “I’m the one who should be asking that question, yet you still have the guts to ask me? Now, my employer’s reputation is ruined. You were the one who leaked all the information!”

“That’s not true! Why would we even leak our customers’ information? We still have a business to run. What’s going on now?” The ghostwriter speaking on the phone was anxious as well.

“Why would I know? I don’t know the way all of you work.” The butler was so anxious that he almost cried. If this matter is not handled properly, Mrs. Fu would definitely chop me up!

“We can only count on Twitter to suppress the trend and make it not go viral. However, this is going to cost a fortune. So you better have the money ready. I’ll be reaching out to Twitter.” The ghostwriter hung up as soon as he finished his sentence.

“Mrs. Fraser, what do we do now?” the butler asked tentatively, looking over at Kate.

She was so angry that she wanted to rip Ashlyn apart bit by bit. “What else can we do? Suppress the trend! Do we have any other options besides that?”

That b*tch!

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll do it right now.” The butler quickly left.

Kate stared at the colorful nail polishes on the floor. She clenched her fists in anger, digging her fingernails into her palms.

On Twitter, everyone was criticizing her and the Fraser family.

All of them mocked her so harshly that they even chided her ancestors.

Flying into a rage, she ordered the housekeepers to clear up the mess on the floor.

Before the cleaning was done, she received a call from Raphael.

“What did you do behind my back? Our stock fell by ten percent in just half a day! Are you crazy? What have you done to provoke Ashlyn? Do you think she is a doormat? Do you still want to get bitten by a scorpion? Honey, please stop bringing trouble to our company! Ashlyn is not a woman you can afford to

offend. A woman who can have good relationships with Lucas Nolan and James Field must be a woman of extraordinary means,” berated Raphael.

“Why are you yelling at me? I'm in a very bad mood right now. Don't push me over the edge!”

Due to her pent-up anger, she yelled back at Raphael a few more times before finally hanging up.

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After that, she sat on the couch as she started to break out in cold sweat profusely.

Even the company's stock price has been affected... It has fallen so much! If it keeps dropping...

She could not imagine the consequences.

However, no matter how much she tried to suppress the trending topic, it was no use.

Once it was removed, another one would simply pop back up.

Every time they succeeded in removing the trending topic, the people on the internet would just come up with another one.

In the end, someone from Twitter contacted Kate.

“There's nothing we can do. The other party has invaded our system. Now our programmers are trying hard to regain control. They are too strong, and this might take some time,” the person said.

“What did you say? Twitter is such a large company with so many technical staff, yet you guys don't even have control over the website and even the system management? All of you are nothing but trash!” she scolded angrily.

“The other party is very professional. It seems to be a well-trained team of hackers. That team is very powerful, and they have never failed yet. I'm sorry. We will also fight back and try to regain our authority and control as soon as possible,” that person said apologetically and hung up quickly.

Kate slumped on the couch, her face ashen.

The whole Fraser family was being criticized online, which meant her son, Lochlan, was involved as well.

Moreover, many people brought up the issue between Lochlan and Charlotte, claiming that the Fraser family had abused their foster daughter.

All of the scandals involving the Fraser family were being brought out one after another.

On top of that, even the housekeepers, who had left the Fraser family previously, commented how

violently Kate had treated them in their times of service and how she had treated them as if they were her enemies.

They claimed that the lightest punishment they received was being splashed with cold water and oatmeal porridge. Kneeling as a punishment had become the norm for them as well.

That was the reason that the resignation rate of the housekeepers in the Fraser residence was very high.

The Fraser family soon became the internet's laughing stock.

Moreover, their company's stock price had plummeted after the disclosed scandals. It had fallen by twenty percent, with no intention of stopping.

The Fraser family was on the verge of downfall.

Raphael was so infuriated that he almost had a heart attack.

He did not go anywhere else but home.

As soon as he burst through the front door full of rage and went straight to Kate, he raised his hand and threw a slap across her face.

"You jinx! Why did you have to provoke Ashlyn? Do you even know who you have just offended? Not only is that woman Madeline Saunders, but she is also the chairman of Centennial Healthcare. There's no difference between offending her and offending the Grim Reaper. She just attended the Global Enterprise Summit and even had the chance to give a speech! If it wasn't for the boss of a foreign company that I have a good relationship with telling me about what happened today, the entire Fraser family would be destroyed by you!" he scolded.

Trembling with fear, Kate ignored the pain of her swollen face and tugged at his arm. "Honey, what do we do now?"

"What else? Go and make an apology right now!" Raphael ordered while pointing at the door.

Her face turned white. She could not handle the shame of apologizing to Ashlyn.

"Mrs. Fraser, bad news! Someone on Twitter said you poked Charlotte with a needle and ruined her appearance!" said the butler as he came running in with a phone in his hand. Panic was written across his face.

"You narrow-minded woman! Charlotte is just a young lady, and yet you can't even let her go? Now, look what you've done. The incident is exposed! You're seriously pissing me off!" Raphael was so angry that he slapped her again. "If the Fraser family is really destroyed, I'll make sure you pay for it!"

“Honey, don't be like this. I was wrong. I just wanted to let my anger out. Ashlyn was just too big of a bully! I had to—” Kate tried to explain, but she was interrupted by Raphael. “She was one of the judges, and you were just a spectator. Who did she bully? Can't you think straight?” he scolded again.

Meanwhile, Lochlan sped all the way home. Once he got out of the car, he went straight for the living room.

When he entered, he saw his parents arguing fiercely.

He did not know which one to stop, so he could only get anxious as he watched from the side.

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“What should we do about the news on the internet now?”

“You know Ashlyn, right? You and your mom should meet her to apologize. After you've settled this issue, we can then discuss the other issues,” Raphael ordered.

“Dear, I'll go and ask Dixon for help. I'm sure he can help us!” Kate cried as she suddenly remembered that Dixon could possibly help her. “He's my nephew. As long as he agrees to help, I can settle this issue. Ashlyn is a nobody compared to him! She is just a woman who can play the piano. I'm sure her position as the director at Centennial Healthcare is just an honorary position. Jared is the president of that company. Everyone knows that he's the one who's in charge there. Ashlyn doesn't contribute anything and only waits for her share of the profits. She can't be a capable person. Let me go and look for Dixon, Dear. I'm sure he will help me. We're relatives!”

Kate tugged on Raphael's arm and sobbed loudly. “I'm not young anymore. How could you ask me to go and apologize to a young tramp like her? It's too embarrassing for me.”

They had been married for a few decades.

Although Raphael was angry, he felt his heart ache when he saw Kate this upset. He calmed down a bit and uttered in a softer tone, “I don't think Dixon can remedy this situation. However, there's no harm in you asking him for help.”

Wiping her tears, Kate grabbed her bag. With red, watery eyes, she stated, “I'll go and meet him now.”

“I'll go with you, Mom,” Lochlan remarked worriedly.

He quickly grabbed the car keys and chased after Kate.

At Bayview Villa, Ashlyn leisurely sat in front of an easel, painting a landscape.

Although she had not painted for a while, her skill was still very outstanding.

Under the starry night sky was a vast green pasture. In the middle of that grassy field stood a little girl in red.

She looked very lonely, although only her back could be seen.

Ashlyn painted for a long time.

She only stopped when she was tired.

After tidying up her paintbrushes and other equipment, Ashlyn left the room.

By the door, she spotted Harrison and Anderson. "Boss!" they chorused.

"How did it go?"

Ashlyn stared at their identical faces coldly. They were so similar, even in their height.

"Please check this out, Boss." Harrison passed a phone to her. On the screen were the trending headlines of the day.

A few of the headlines were about the Fraser family.

Ashlyn smirked coolly. With a piercing gaze, she uttered, "Let's see if Mrs. Fraser can still be this arrogant when the Fraser family stocks have plummeted."

"You've avenged Ms. Charlotte, Boss," Anderson chirped with a joyful smile. "Mrs. Fraser is disgusting. She's just like cow dung."

"That's an insult to cow dung," Harrison stated. "She is so scandalous. I wouldn't guarantee if I could go through all her past scandals within three days."

Harrison scrolled through the comments regarding Kate on Twitter. Most of them were berating her.

Because of what had happened at the piano competition, Charlotte had gained some fans.

Although she did not have many fans, the ones she had were all very vocal about her situation on Twitter.

Just then, Ashlyn's phone rang.

She looked at her phone and raised an eyebrow before answering it.

"Mr. Haddock, what do you want?"

At that moment, Dixon was in the president's office in Haddock Group. His expression was as cold as ice as he sat on his leather chair.

However, there was a hint of mirth in his tone. It contrasted eerily against his expression.

"Ms. Berry, could you let this go for my sake? My aunt was in the wrong this time. She regrets her actions. How about you forgive her?"

"I don't know who your aunt is, Mr. Haddock." Ashlyn smiled deeply. "What did she do to offend me?"

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"I'm sure you know what I'm talking about, Ms. Berry. It's about the Fraser family. They've asked for my help, so I can't just stand by and watch. What is it that you want to bargain for?" Dixon's voice turned icy.

"I'm not trying to bargain for anything here. I'm just doing it to pay Mrs. Fraser back. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

"Ashlyn!" Dixon took a deep breath when he heard her uncooperative reply. "How about this? Fraser Corporation will call a press conference to apologize to you publicly tomorrow."

"What a kind offer, Mr. Haddock. Thank you. How's the movie that you and Fraser Corporation invested in going? Have you found a new lead actress? I can recommend a few actresses to you." Ashlyn's icy voice sounded through the phone.

Dixon's feminine face turned sinister as hostility flashed across his eyes. Gritting his teeth, he answered, "That is none of your concern, Ms. Berry. The shooting of that movie will go well."

Slam!

A loud sound echoed in the room as he threw his phone on the floor in anger. It broke into pieces instantly.

Then he glared at Kate viciously. "Don't mess with Ashlyn in the future without my permission."

"Dixon, why did you agree to hold a press conference?" Kate frowned in frustration.

"This incident is a big mess. The only way to resolve it is to hold a press conference and apologize to all the parties involved. Do you think this issue will magically subside?" Dixon responded coldly. "If you want to resuscitate Fraser Corporation, you can't be a coward."

Lochlan nodded. "Listen to Dixon, Mom. He's right."

Kate had no choice but to accept.

Dixon's expression was unreadable as he added, "If Fraser Corporation recovers from this, I would like you to help me with something, Lochlan."

Upon hearing that, Lochlan froze. "Dixon, I'm supposed to be a firefighter here. How can I help you?"

"It has something to do with you, too. Do you want revenge against Ashlyn?" Dixon asked in a manipulative way.

"I thought you said we shouldn't mess with her..." Kate mumbled timidly.

"Aunt, don't be so afraid. There are many ways to seek revenge. You can get your revenge without having to reveal yourself. Why don't you understand that?"

Dixon stared at Kate like a serpent staring at its prey.

Then he leaned close to Lochlan to whisper in the latter's ear.

Lochlan's expression changed. "Umm... I don't think that's a good idea."

Contempt flashed across Dixon's eyes, but it quickly reverted to his usual look. "Think about Fraser Corporation. Think about our movie. You have to fight back, Lochlan."

On their way home, Kate could not help but ask Lochlan, "What did Dixon whisper to you?"

Looking annoyed, Lochlan replied, "You'll know in a few days' time."

He felt frustrated when he thought of Charlotte and Joseph standing together. That was a scene that he would not want to see.

His grip on the steering wheel weakened; Dixon's words had greatly affected him.

Lochlan tried not to think about it and focused on driving instead.

In the Warhol residence, Olivia had been glued to her phone, monitoring the whole issue regarding the Fraser family.

She could not believe her eyes.

Ashlyn caused such damage to a big company in just a day. Their reputation is ruined, and their stocks are dropping in value. How did she do it? Most importantly, she can even keep this issue in the headlines.

Cold sweat broke out behind Olivia's back.

Would the Warhol family have been dragged into this if I had acted even more arrogantly when I met Mrs. Field and Charlotte that day?

Letting out a sigh, she turned off her phone.

Then she sat on the couch and stared into the space dazedly.

From that day onward, Olivia became extra careful with her words and actions.

She was no longer as arrogant as she used to be. Instead, she became polite and treated everyone with respect.

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Not only were the people around her shocked, but so were her own parents.

When asked what the cause of her transformation was, she could not bring herself to explain it to them.

Her thoughts instantly drifted to Hera Chapman, the woman who had been blacklisted by the fashion industry.

For some reason, she had a hunch that Ashlyn was also the mastermind behind Hera's misfortune.

In the meantime, Naomi lay on the hospital bed, her physique gradually shrinking.

She had lost a lot of weight due to her extremely poor appetite.

Thus, the doctor had no choice but to start her on intravenous vitamin therapy. Otherwise, she would break apart if she continued like this.

Blair stayed by her bed, peeling an apple for her.

After peeling, the young man cut the apple into small slices before placing them on a plate and putting it in front of her.

He wrote some words on a piece of paper: Naomi, have some food.

"Blair... Do you think Lucas and Ashlyn will reconcile?" asked Naomi stubbornly. She was afraid that her day would come before they got back together.

What if I don't wake up one morning? I'm scared!

Blair scribbled another line of words on the paper. It read: What nonsense are you talking about? They'll definitely reconcile.

However, a lump began to form in his throat despite writing those words.

How did my bright sister suddenly become so frail and fragile? That wretched mysterious person! Why did they want to harm Ashlyn? In the end, they caused Naomi great misery instead! No matter who got hurt by the poison, my heart aches for either of them. I would rather be the one to suffer in their stead!

He sat there for a long time, keeping Naomi company. Only after the young girl fell asleep did he get up and exit the ward.

His lonely figure leaned against the icy wall and eventually slumped to the ground.

With bended knees, he fell to the floor as a sob escaped his lips.

Right at this moment, a hand as pale as porcelain reached out and patted him on his shoulder. Subsequently, someone squatted in front of him, pulling him into their embrace.

Ashlyn's soothing voice rang out beside his ear. "You're her older brother. How can you break down so easily? Your brother is busy, so you're the only pillar of support for your family. You're fine..."

Hearing her soft voice, the young man instinctively looked up at the woman in front of him.

Her beautiful countenance was just before his, yet her gaze was as gentle as a mother's.

His heart ached once more. "Ashlyn, it hurts so badly..."

"Men shouldn't cry so easily. I'll surely find a way to save Naomi. How could I possibly watch as she..." Ashlyn's hoarse voice trailed off, her bloodshot eyes reflecting her concern for the matter.

"Ashlyn..." Blair slowly lifted his head to look at her.

Her face exuded an enchanting glimmer as he stared at her under the bright lights of the corridor, which was somehow calming to him.

Blair's lips quivered as he began to speak. His voice was low with a tinge of youthfulness. "I want to—"

Suddenly, the sound of rushed footsteps resounded in the corridor. The duo looked in the direction of the sound in astonishment. "Ashlyn Berry!" shouted a middle-aged woman.

With a fierce roar, the woman hastily walked in front of Ashlyn and lifted her hand, ready to give the latter a slap.

With his lightning-quick reflexes, Blair gripped the woman's wrist and pushed her back, causing her to stagger backward a few steps.

Thankfully, the man behind her managed to catch her. Otherwise, she would have fallen to the ground.

“Blair? Do you even respect your parents anymore?” The woman's voice was shrill and ear-piercing.

Blair was taken aback.

He looked at the woman, who was dressed in a graceful, tight-fitting gown. A pearl necklace adorned her neck, making her exude an air of elegance and nobility.

Nevertheless, there was a vicious, cold glint in her eyes that struck fear in those who met her gaze.

The young man opened his mouth to speak. “Madam...”

Slap!

A hard slap landed on Blair's face.

His head tilted to one side, and his slapped cheek turned red.

“You bastard! What right do you have to speak to her like that?” Franklin elegantly accepted a handkerchief handed to him by a subordinate. The former's face was dark as the night as he glared at Blair.

Behind the tall middle-aged man stood two neat rows of men in black. Each of them was formidable and immovable as they stood expressionlessly, awaiting their employer's orders.

“Dad...” Blair's eyes reddened as he stared at Franklin incredulously.

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“This woman caused your sister to go deaf, yet you're protecting her? What in the world are you doing?” With a wave of Franklin's hand, dozens of men in black rushed forward and surrounded Blair and Ashlyn.

Livia walked in front of Ashlyn and raised the latter's chin with her forefinger.

With a cocky smile, she uttered, “Ms. Berry, you made my daughter go deaf, and you caused the death of my eldest daughter. Since this is the case... An eye for an eye, what say you? Lucas may not have the heart to even pluck a single strand of hair off your head, but not us.”

“The whole world knows that I didn't kill Claire; it was Carmen.” Confronted by Livia, Ashlyn did not budge a single inch. Instead, she merely eyed Livia coldly.

The middle-aged woman smiled as she gently caressed Ashlyn's hair. In a hushed voice, she stated "So what? In my eyes, you're the one who killed her, and you're the one who made my little girl go deaf!"

Sizing Ashlyn up as if she were an object, Livia questioned, "Ashlyn Berry, how do you plan on paying the cost of your sin?"

Blair could not watch on any longer. As he grimaced, he remarked in a low voice, "Madam, someone else spiked Naomi's drink!"

"But the drink was meant for Ashlyn! Blair, you need to get your facts right. That drug was intended for Ashlyn, to begin with! Instead, your sister drank it, so isn't it Ashlyn's fault? Also, I'm your mother. Is this how you speak to your own mother? Blair Nolan, where are your manners?" remarked Livia in an icy tone.

She had completely made use of her status as the madam of the Nolan family.

"You..." Blair muttered in a raspy voice. His chest hurt from the rage burning inside him.

You're not my mother!

"You can humiliate me, but please don't humiliate Ashlyn. Madam, I beg of you..." Tears began to well up in Blair's eyes. He overcame the fear of speaking up against Franklin and Livia—something he was born with. It felt as though he was swallowing shards of glass as he spoke.

"Get lost!" Livia pushed the lanky young man away. Then she turned to the men in black encircling Ashlyn and ordered, "Get her!"

With a sneer, she hissed, "If I don't teach this b*tch a lesson today, she'll think that the Nolan kids don't have parents to protect them. Who is she to bully our children?"

Blair could feel his heart being torn to shreds. He never thought that the day would come when Livia's merciless tactics would cause him such great pain.

Ashlyn is so nice to me and Naomi! Why is she twisting the truth?

Such was the might of the lady of the Nolan house.

Not only was her status in the household well-established, but she also had the authority to do as she pleased in the larger Nolan family. This was all the more so when it came to the Nolans' experiment and research center, where she held an enormous amount of connections and power.

Right now, even if the entire Nolan family was not allowed to enter their research center overseas, she would not let the other Nolan family members take advantage of the situation.

Blair experienced her prowess firsthand. I would never be able to train myself to be as cruel and heartless as this couple in my entire lifetime!

Regardless, even if he had to endure brutal punishment, he could not stand idly and watch as Ashlyn suffered.

Just as the men in black rushed toward Ashlyn, Blair made a move.

His skinny silhouette weaved through the crowd, and he utilized both his knuckles to forcefully punch two men in their backs.

Bang!

The two burly men in black instantly flew and hit the wall at the other end of the corridor.

All that could be heard were their pained wails.

Seeing that, Franklin frowned. He eyed Blair with a cold gaze like that of the devil's.

Thunderstruck, Livia stood rooted to the spot as she stared at the nimble young man.

Blair was quite surprised at the great strength that he possessed as well.

Recently, he had been practicing the martial art skills that Ashlyn had taught him. After he got off work, he would go to Ashlyn's training camp and practice for a while before heading home.

It shocked him that he actually managed to improve so much within such a short time span.

Franklin's subordinates were all experts in martial art. After all, he did not allow those who worked for him to be idle even for a single minute.

Glancing at Ashlyn in disbelief, Blair mumbled, "Ashlyn..."

"Blair, these people are just punching bags for you to toy around with now. They should be a piece of cake for you." The beautiful woman stood just a few steps away from Blair. She stared at him from a distance as if she were but an outsider.

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Despite being surrounded by so many men in black, Ashlyn did not cower in fear. There was not a hint of weakness in her expressionless face.

Her encouraging gaze sparked a warmth in Blair's heart. He kicked away two men who were rushing

toward him and leaped into the air coolly, exuding a powerful aura as if he could take on all the men in the world.

It was utterly beyond Franklin's anticipation that this place would become Blair's battlefield and that his subordinates would end up as Blair's combat dummies.

The young man's movements were agile, and his actions were extremely well-thought-out. One could see that he had been trained by an expert at first glance; he was no random fighter who picked up some skills on the streets.

Franklin knew best how Blair used to be—the latter was simply a failure of a child who would wreak havoc wherever he went.

Yet, he's shielding Ashlyn with his life now. And with such remarkable martial skills at that! What happened to him while I was away?

While the couple was still in shock, Ashlyn grinned and commented, “Mr. Nolan and Mrs. Nolan, I have to thank you for giving Blair the opportunity to engage in real combat. Otherwise, he wouldn't have grown so fast.”

Livia stared at Ashlyn coldly. Just as the latter raised her brows to look back at her, the elegant middle-aged woman suddenly lifted her hands to tear her gown at the waist, revealing her long, fair legs and a pair of black safety shorts.

Within the blink of an eye, she leaped into the fray, light as a feather. Her palm was clenched into a paw as she rushed toward Blair.

Since the young man was still wet behind the ears, he could not dodge her attack, thus suffering a blow to the chest from Livia.

He spat out a mouthful of blood, staining his white tee.

Ashlyn stepped forward and supported Blair, who kept staggering backward.

“Are you all right?”

“I'm fine...” said Blair, his face pale as a sheet as he shook his head.

Ashlyn narrowed her eyes, concealing the icy glint that just flashed by.

The next second, her beautiful figure materialized in front of Livia.

Ashlyn moved as quick as lightning. Before Livia and Franklin even noticed it, the young woman had already appeared in front of Livia. Viciously, she aimed at the latter's chest with her palm.

Livia did not expect Ashlyn to have such swift movements.

“Mrs. Nolan, you have such impressive skills! Surely, it would shake the entire world if news spread about the madam of the Nolan family being an expert in martial art,” remarked Ashlyn in a cold voice.

Gritting her teeth, Livia evaded the gust of wind released from Ashlyn's palm strike. She wanted to retaliate but could only barely defend herself under Ashlyn's incessant attacks.

This b*tch! She's actually so good at martial art! I thought she only knew a move or two.

Just as the two ladies were fighting tooth and nail, Ashlyn landed a strong hit on Livia, causing the latter to fly into the air.

Seeing that, Franklin stretched out his arms and caught his wife just before she fell to the ground.

Blood was trickling from the corner of Livia's lips, and she felt a burning pain in her chest.

“Ashlyn Berry, don't even think about being part of our family for the rest of your life!”

“Sorry, but I've already been part of your family, and I do not find anything particularly appealing about it!”

The slim young woman stood at her spot and retracted her palm. “I did nothing wrong; I didn't kill Claire Nolan, and that's that! No one is allowed to frame me for something that I didn't do.”

“Your words don't count!” bellowed Livia in a stern voice.

Lifting her brows, Ashlyn replied, “Neither do yours! Also, I taught martial art to my disciple, and I trained him myself. Even if you two are his parents, you're not allowed to scold or humiliate him as you please! You'll have to seek permission from me first if you want to lay a hand on him.”

“You'll regret this, Ashlyn!”

Franklin peered at Ashlyn and Blair, who was standing behind her, with a cold gaze. “I'm teaching my son. This is none of your business!”

“He's my disciple. You'll have to go through me first!” There was a hint of impatience in Ashlyn's expression.

She did not want to go on arguing with such an unreasonable couple. Talking to people like them was a useless waste of time.

Hence, she supported Blair to his feet, wanting to get him treated at the nearest nurses' station.

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Livia was going to instruct the men in black to stop Ashlyn and Blair from leaving, but Franklin shook his head.

“There's no need to.”

His eyes gleamed dangerously as they closely trailed after Ashlyn and Blair, who were leaving the scene. “Let's go inside the ward.”

At that, he carried Livia in his arms and walked toward Naomi's ward.

The two rows of men in black stood guard outside the door. The young girl inside the room could not hear anything at all.

It was only when they arrived right in front of her that Naomi lifted her eyes.

“Dad... Madam? Why are you here?”

Naomi looked at the couple in shock.

Feeling a temper building up within her, Livia struggled and got out of Franklin's arms.

Slap!

A loud slap resounded in the ward.

Livia had slapped Naomi forcefully across the latter's face.

The young girl looked at Livia in humiliation but obstinately refused to allow her tears to come out.

Since young, I've always known that I'm the precious daughter of the Nolan family on the surface, but Madam only ever cared about her own two biological daughters. Blair and I—we're no more than dogs in their eyes only because we were born of Dad's servant.

“You wretched thing! If it weren't for our family, would you have been able to study abroad? We've raised you for so many years; it's time for you to return the favor.”

Pinching Naomi's chin, Livia commanded, “You must keep Mr. Zimmerman company tonight. Otherwise, I'll have your head!”

Naomi's eyes widened, and she shook her head in fear. Although she could not hear what Livia was

saying, she had a gut feeling that it was not good news.

With a lump in her throat, she muttered, “Madam, I can't hear... I can't hear anything.”

Trembling, she passed a piece of paper and a pen to Livia.

Looking at Naomi with a hint of mockery, the latter took the pen and paper and started writing down what she had said.

When Naomi read what was written on the paper, her face turned ashen from shock.

“You're just a deaf girl now. Seeing as you might still be of some use to us, go and accompany Mr. Zimmerman at night! He promised to invest three hundred million in our lab. Now, it's time for you to support your father's career.”

“N-No, I don't want to...” Naomi's chest heaved as she grabbed the corner of Franklin's shirt. With teary eyes, she glanced up at her father's stern face. “Dad, please... D-Don't make me go with Mr. Zimmerman. I'm earning money with my films; I'll give all the profits to you. I beg of you...”

Livia swiftly scribbled on the paper again. It wrote: Even if you don't want to, you have to! Did you think you can just sit and enjoy our family's luxury after we've taken care of you for so many years? It's time for your dad and me to collect your debt! You're deaf now—what other purpose can you serve? It's good enough that someone even wants you! You're nothing but trash!

Franklin coldly pushed away Naomi's hands, causing the girl to stumble onto her bed. Her heart froze over with helplessness as though someone had poured a bucket of iced water over her head in the summer.

So, these are my parents... They're willing to push me into the pits of hell with their own hands for the sake of money.

“Lucas has money,” Naomi mumbled. “It's just three hundred million. Can't Lucas fork that sums out?”

Livia smugly wrote on the paper again: Mr. Zimmerman is extremely interested in our research, so we became business partners. Why would we use our own family's money when we can use someone else's money? Isn't it great to keep our money in our own pockets? Did you think your brother would fork out money for you, anyway? Did you think that you're worth three hundred million? You're just trash! Why would he spend money on you?

Naomi thought she had indeed been too naïve.

What am I? I'm just his half-sister. Lucas has taken more than enough care of me over the past few years.

“That's right... We're half-siblings, after all. It's good enough that he accepts me as his sister.”

Naomi could feel a thousand knives piercing her heart. The pain was so immense that she could hardly breathe.

Once more, Livia held Naomi's face by the chin. With a probing stare, she lifted the piece of paper in her hand for Naomi to read. It wrote: You're wrong. He's not even your father's son. He has absolutely no blood connection with you whatsoever. Only your lovely face is still good for something!

I-I'm not related to Lucas by blood?

“N-No, that's impossible! How could Lucas not be my brother? You're lying! How could we not be siblings?” exclaimed Naomi.