

## Fractured Affection 21

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“Sylvia, you’re the apple of our eyes. Return to the Fowler mansion. You belong there. Let’s live like we did before.”

How dare he assume I’d ever crawl back to that gilded prison.

Years ago, their parents had hinted at wanting me as their daughter-in-law. Between two perfect sons, I’d pick one.

For fifteen years, I’d loved them—quietly, desperately. On my twentieth birthday, I’d mustered courage to confess. But for Charlotte, they’d doused me with ice water.

I wouldn’t make that mistake again.

I shook my head firmly. “No. I won’t choose either of you.”

“Adam, Noah, if I forgive you, I would be betraying the old me who suffered sleepless nights.”

“I would be betraying the pain I endured.”

“If you truly regret it, don’t disturb my peaceful life again.”

I turned to leave. Noah wanted to follow, but Adam stopped him.

They’d always assumed wealth could erase wounds. That Sylvia would forgive any cruelty for silk sheets and chauffeurs. They never imagined she’d prefer a cramped apartment where laughter echoed over mahogany silence.

They had truly broken her heart.

At home, I found my parents and brother sitting on the sofa. They all stood when I entered. “Sylvia, are you alright?” my brother asked anxiously.

I shook my head silently. I knew I couldn’t hide it any longer.

“Well, actually... I’m not your biological daughter.”

I didn’t hide anything, recounting my life with the Fowlers, what Adam and Noah had done to me, and

my

rebirth into this body. I didn't know if they could accept such a fantastical story, but I felt they had a right to know the truth.

An awkward silence fell over the living room. No one spoke.

I realized this was too much for them—too radical, and no one could inhabit their loved one's body.

My voice trembled. "I'm sorry. I'll move out for a while."

accept that a stranger's soul

As I was about to go upstairs, my mother grabbed my arm. Her eyes, though not bright, were full of compassion. "No, Sylvia, we're not chasing you away. We feel sorry for you. We don't know what

you have encountered, but you must have been through a painful time. Your father and I noticed it before. Our daughter never treated us this well. She yelled at us, you... you're the child we prayed for."

hated our

poverty. But

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"Perhaps it is fate. If you don't mind, please stay," my father said with compassion.

Menu

"No matter what you've been through, I swear that we will treat you well," my brother promised solemnly.

Over the past two weeks, I had felt their genuine kindness. My parents died in a car accident when I was young; I had no other family. My new parents and brother gave me a home, filling the void left by the loss of my family.

My eyes welled up with tears. I sniffed. "You guys are the best thing that has ever happened to me. This home is nice and warm. I'm really lucky that I can be your daughter. Thank you for taking

me in."

My parents and brother also burst into tears. We hugged, weeping together.

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In the end, it was my mother who wiped her eyes first. “Why are we crying? We should be happy that Sylvia is staying. It’s New Year’s—no bad omens. Sylvia, what do you want to eat? I’ll cook.”

“Anything you make, Mom,” I replied gratefully.

Her face lit up. “Good! Go get some rest. You two men—help me in the kitchen!”

My father and brother, like eunuchs in an ancient drama, replied “Yes, ma’am” and went to the kitchen.

Soon, the sound of oil sizzling and delicious aromas filled the air, punctuated by my mother’s occasional scolding. This was life—messy, fragrant, alive.

I smiled contentedly, silently thanking the system for giving me such a perfect, happy family. After that day, Adam and Noah never appeared in front of me again. But I could feel them watching over me, unseen.

A well-known music company approached me, offering me a contract, despite my lack of experience. It must be Adam and Noah’s compensation.

They had truly regretted their actions, consuming codeine themselves. But it didn’t affect everyone the same way. It worked only on me. Their voices were unharmed.

I saw videos from them but pretended not to notice.

A month and a half later, with the help of the music company, I released my first single, “New Life.” The song celebrated my rebirth and the freedom ahead.

The song exploded in popularity within three hours. The music company played a part, but the song was truly good. I wrote the lyrics, and the music was composed by a top producer.

I didn’t believe Adam and Noah hadn’t helped me behind the scenes. But I pretended not to know.

On the day the song exploded, I took my parents and brother to a high-end restaurant in the city center to celebrate my smooth entry into the music industry.

After a few glasses of wine, I felt a little dizzy. Standing by the window to sober up, I saw a Rolls-Royce park downstairs. Adam was driving, and Noah was in the passenger seat.

They exchanged knowing glances but didn't disturb the cozy atmosphere. Perhaps this was the best outcome for everyone. I couldn't forget the past and return to them, and they couldn't force me back to the Fowler family.

But the peace didn't last. A month and a half later, I received a call from Adam. His voice was frantic. "Sylvia, Charlotte has disappeared."

I never imagined she would escape the Fowler family.

I frowned, sensing trouble. She was at the end of her rope; I wouldn't be surprised if she did something drastic. I was most worried that she would hurt my family.

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Menu

I didn't want to lose my hard-won happiness. Adam obviously anticipated this. He comforted me, "It's okay. I've had my men protect your parents and brother."

"They'll be fine, but be careful yourself. My bodyguards are protecting you, but..."

He didn't finish, but I understood. Charlotte might resort to desperate measures.

I paused. "Okay, thank you."

Hearing my polite and distant thanks, Adam was stunned. His voice was strained and bitter. "Do you have to be so distant? It's Noah's birthday in a fortnight. He wants you to attend. Sylvia, will

you come?"

His voice was tense and uncertain, fearing my rejection.

I always knew Adam was proud. This was probably the first time he'd been so humble. I couldn't refuse; he was protecting my family.

"Okay."