

Fractured Affection

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The ambulance took me to the hospital, where the doctor dressed my wounds. I didn't receive a single apologetic call from Adam or Noah. Instead, Charlotte's social media updates kept flooding in.

From the photos Charlotte posted, I saw Adam and Noah had taken her to the biggest Temple in town to pray. They tied red strings to a hundred-year-old tree, supposedly for blessings of happiness and safety.

"I didn't believe in Buddhism before, but these two men insisted it worked, so I just tried it for

them."

Her manager commented underneath, "Get to the top soon and eliminate that bitch."

That "bitch" was undoubtedly me.

Seeing this, I didn't react. My mind drifted back to the past. That temple was a secret base for Adam, Noah, and me. They'd brought me to this prayer site since childhood whenever I fell ill.

"Sylvia, we don't know if this place holds magic," Adam once said, "but we'll try anything for you."

Now they'd taken Charlotte there too.

I snapped back to reality, letting out a sarcastic laugh. Thankfully, I only had two more days left.

Adam and Noah returned the next morning. Their eyes flickered with guilt at my bandaged head.

Noah offered me a takeout box. "Hey, Sylvia, I brought you soup dumplings. Your favorite. They are still hot."

Only three dumplings remained. They were only sold in sets of ten, and I remembered that neither of them liked dumplings. The only explanation was that Charlotte had eaten the rest.

I merely glanced at them before quietly sipping my porridge. “No, thanks. I don’t like them anymore.”

Adam questioned, “Since when?”

“Since now.”

My reply brought silence to the living room. Noah awkwardly chuckled, trying to start a conversation. Even Adam, forced nods.

I sensed something was amiss. “What’s up?”

Adam and Noah exchanged glances, each wanting the other to speak. Finally, Adam said, “Sylvia, Charlotte has a cold and her voice is shot. Can you perform her anthem at tonight’s gala?” Charlotte’s hit song was one I recorded during college. Before I could release it, Adam made me give it to Charlotte. Charlotte wasn’t the original singer, of course, she couldn’t sing it.

I stared at Adam and Noah for a long time, then calmly asked, “Do you know that song means?” It was a song I wrote to commemorate my parents. It was filled with my longing for them, a

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message telling them I would survive for them. Every time I sang it, I cried. I would remember the image of my parents being crushed to a pulp in the car accident, tearing open the already healed wounds in my heart.

Yet now, Adam was forcing me to sing this song to further Charlotte’s career.

Without pressing them for an answer, I suppressed the rising pain in my chest. “That’s the second thing, right?”

Adam, who was about to explain, blurted out, “Yes.”

Noah didn’t know what to say. “Sylvia, after this, Adam and I will take you to the Maldives, what do you think? You’ve always wanted to...”

“No.”

I left the villa and took a taxi to the venue.

As I reached Charlotte's dressing room, I heard her talking to her manager.

"Charlotte, the Fowlers are so nice to you. They gave you the closing performance spot."
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"Those two idiots are crazy about me. They would feed Sylvia to wolves if I asked. Did you see her bandages? Hilarious."