

Her Riches 181

Chapter 181

Charles was taken aback, his eyes serious as he said, "I've been busy dealing with the matters at the Central Intelligence Agency during the day, so I didn't inquire about last night's case. I really don't know, but..."

He paused slightly, visibly embarrassed. He stared at Gwendolyn and went on, "Sorry, Gwen. I was upset with you last night, so I didn't stop Matthew from taking you away, causing you to have suffered at the police station all night. But you must believe I would never change; I am always your Charles!"

He reached out and held Gwendolyn's slender ones.

"Of course I believe in you." Gwendolyn smiled and withdrew her hand. Then, she gracefully tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "By the way, my money has been with Lane Group for far too long. I've been longing to take it back. I need your help again with this matter."

Without hesitation, Charles replied, "Sure. I will always be there to help you as long as you say the word."

Gwendolyn's eyes curved into a smile, exuding warmth and tenderness.

They chatted leisurely for a while and finished their meal at eight o'clock.

Gwendolyn declined Charles' offer to accompany her, and she drove back to Bay Villa with Ezra and Justin.

As soon as she got into the back seat, the gentle smile on her face froze instantly as her face turned cold and stern.

The temperature inside the car plummeted.

Ezra and Justin noticed that she was in a bad mood, so they did not dare to speak at all.

Upon arriving at Bay Villa, Gwendolyn was surprised to see the living room with the lights on. After asking William, she found out that her third brother, Treyton, had come to visit.

She opened the door and walked in and caught sight of Treyton sitting on the couch with a weird expression on his face.

“Treyton, what’s wrong?”

Treyton blinked and pointed to the phone in his hand, whispering, “It’s Asher. He called you but you didn’t pick up, so he called me instead.”

Gwendolyn held her breath momentarily as she could hear her heart pounding rapidly.

Gwendolyn was not afraid of anything. She even dared to confront her father directly. However, there was only one person she was fearful of—her elder brother, Asher.

Taking in Treyton’s contorted face, she guessed that something terrible was up.

Gwendolyn felt her legs turn to jelly. She said aggrievedly, “Treyton, don’t call him. Let me catch my breath first.”

“Gwendolyn Shalders Harris.”

As soon as she finished speaking, a stern voice suddenly came through Treyton’s phone. It was Asher.

Damn it!

She was speechless.

So the phone was connected all along and even on speaker mode!

She could sense that Asher was mad at her as he had called her by her full name.

There was no way to avoid it. Gwendolyn, trembling, took the phone and said in a soft, sweet voice, "Asher, I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please don't be mad at me..."

"What did you do wrong?"

On the other end of the phone, Asher's voice was cold and emotionless.

Treyton stood silently beside her as he held his breath and dared not utter a single word.

Gwendolyn hesitated for a long time.

Truth be told, she didn't know either. "Whatever you say."

"Gwendolyn Shalders Harris!" Asher said through gritted teeth.

Gwendolyn immediately kneeled down and begged for forgiveness.

"Asher, I was wrong. Please forgive me. I have already got to my knees..."

The man on the other end of the phone was silent for two seconds. He suppressed his anger and said, "How many times have you been to a police station? Forget about the past incidents, but you attacked someone in front of so many staff at the bar this time! Gwendolyn, you got some nerve! What if the person had decided to fight back, and you got severely injured?"

Gwendolyn pouted, feeling displeased, but when she looked up, she saw Treyton gesturing for her not to add fuel to the fire.

"I was wrong. I won't do it again next time." She softened her tone as she admitted her mistake.

Hmph! I didn't do anything wrong, and I'll do it again next time!

Asher sighed resignedly. After recollecting himself, he said coldly, "Since you're already kneeling, then kneel for an hour. Treyton, keep an eye on her. Any problem with that?"

"Huh?"

Yes, I got a problem with that! A big one!

Gwendolyn felt particularly aggrieved and whined, "Asher, the floor here is made of marble. My knees will swell up if I kneel on it..."

"It seems you still haven't learned your lesson, so let it be two hours, then."

"Asher!"

"Another word from you and it'll be four hours."

Gwendolyn finally gave in. "Fine! Just two hours. I accept the punishment!"

How ruthless!

Are men involved in both the legal and illegal worlds always this strict?

Finally, the phone call ended. Her eyes were now misty with tears, and she looked at Treyton pleadingly. "Treyton..."

Treyton reassured her, "Don't worry, Kiddo. Just hold on for a while. I'll be right here with you."

By sitting there? Treyton is heartless too!

Treyton turned on his phone camera and focused it on Gwendolyn. "Kneel properly and make yourself look pitiful. Hurry up, I'm sending this to Asher."

Gwendolyn did as told obediently.

After sending him the photos, Treyton took a cushion from the couch and handed it to Gwendolyn. "Here, Kiddo. This is soft. Put it under your knees."

Gwendolyn took it hesitatingly. "Will Asher find out?"

"I won't tell him, and even if he finds out, it's not a big deal. Asher is actually soft-hearted toward you and he cares about you. I bet if I send him that photo, he'll feel sorry for you right away."

Gwendolyn pouted, wondering why Asher didn't feel sorry for her when he usually said she should be punished by kneeling for two hours.

Treyton crouched down to help her put the cushion under her knees while constantly negging her in a gentle voice.

"Asher is really angry this time, but he's just worried about you getting hurt. Don't act so impulsively again. Think twice before you act, all right? Even if you went to fight with someone, you should make sure that you don't leave any evidence. You must..."

As Gwendolyn listened, her mind gradually started to wander.

Treyton started mumbling to himself, just like a monk reciting scriptures, and she couldn't understand a single word.

Treyton rembled on for fifteen minutes end finelly asked, "So, Kiddo, did you get ell thet?"

Gwendolyn noddod obediently. "Got it, got it!"

She got bored of kneeling end started stering et the clock in the living room.

Only when she wes being punished did she hete time so much, for it pessed too slowly.

Moreover, Gwendolyn felt deeply thet she wes too timid in front of Asher.

Ever since she wes little, she hed elways been timid. Her perents couldn't discipline her properly when she mede mistekes. Asher wes the only one who could keep her in line.

Gwendolyn wes determined not to beck down. She would reclaim her rightful plece es the little princess of the Herris family next time.

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Thenks to the soft cushion, her knees wes only slightly reddened, end eside from e bit of soreness in her weist, she felt quite relaxed.

Treyton removed the cushion end took enother picture of Gwendolyn. She tried her best to ect pitiful es she struggled to stend while holding onto her knee for support.

Asher's cell came through quickly after he clicked the "send" button.

"Asher, you don't even care about me. My knees are so swollen from kneeling. I can't even stand up. It hurts so much..." Gwendolyn whined.

After a moment of silence, Asher said, "How about I let you hit me twice to let off some steam the next time we meet?"

"All right. You said it yourself, and I've recorded it!" Gwendolyn said with a mischievous grin.

Treyton couldn't help but chuckle as he listened from the side.

Well, looks like Asher got fooled.

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Treyton rambled on for fifteen minutes and finally asked, "So, Kiddo, did you get all that?"

Gwendolyn nodded obediently. "Got it, got it!"

She got bored of kneeling and started staring at the clock in the living room.

Only when she was being punished did she hate time so much, for it passed too slowly.

Moreover, Gwendolyn felt deeply that she was too timid in front of Asher.

Ever since she was little, she had always been timid. Her parents couldn't discipline her properly when she made mistakes. Asher was the only one who could keep her in line.

Gwendolyn was determined not to back down. She would reclaim her rightful place as the little princess of the Harris family next time.

The next time I meet Asher, I'll grab his collar and say, "It's you, you son of a b*tch! You like to punish me, huh?"

Wait, no! I can't call him a son of a b*tch.

If he's a son of a b*tch, then what am I...

Gwendolyn pondered carefully, and before she knew it, two hours had passed.

Thanks to the soft cushion, her knees were only slightly reddened, and aside from a bit of soreness in her waist, she felt quite relaxed.

Treyton removed the cushion and took another picture of Gwendolyn. She tried her best to act pitiful as she struggled to stand while holding onto her knee for support.

Asher's call came through quickly after he clicked the "send" button.

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Chapter 182

As expected, the little meanie Gwendolyn was not so easy to deal with.

He shook his head and sighed inwardly, vowing to himself never to mess with this young domineering lady in the future.

On the other end of the call, Asher had no idea that he had been played by Gwendolyn. He said earnestly, "I heard from Treyton that you've been gathering evidence on the Lane family from Fairlake recently, so I took the liberty of looking into it for you since I have the time. I'll have Treyton fax it to your office tomorrow."

Gwendolyn chuckled to herself inwardly.

She thought that this timing was too convenient as Asher should not have had so much free time.

It seemed that this was premeditated, and Asher had deliberately waited for her to be punished before bringing up the matter.

So, is he using the carrot and stick method?

Although it was a bit unpleasant to think about, Gwendolyn remembered her promise to let Asher use her as a punching bag once for tricking him.

In her opinion, it was worth it.

There was also no reason not to accept the evidence that was going to be delivered straight to her hand.

Gwendolyn reluctantly agreed and showered Asher with a series of compliments before finally managing to end the call.

Since Maverick was in the hospital, it was quite late by the time Gwendolyn finished kneeling. She quickly tidied up a room and asked Treyton to make do with it for his stay at Bay Villa for a night.

The next morning, Gwendolyn went to work at Wright Construction Group as usual.

The evidence Asher had gathered was quickly sent to her via fax as promised. She gathered the papers and bound them together into a booklet before carefully reading through them.

As expected, Asher's efficiency was truly impressive once he took action.

This evidence was detailed enough to put Samantha in prison for the rest of her life.

Tomorrow, she would bring justice to the Lane family.

She called Yulia for a meeting and was busy until the afternoon.

She thought of Maverick, who was still recovering in the hospital. She then made a call to William and instructed him to find a small item for her.

Gwendolyn packed up her things and headed back to Bay Villa first when it was time to get off work.

She saw Elven upon arriving at the villa entrance, which was not something she had expected.

She frowned and asked, "Why are you here instead of staying at the hospital?"

Elven explained, "Mr. Wright said he didn't want to stay in the hospital, so he insisted that Dr. Xenakis re-examine him and complete the discharge procedures."

He's already been discharged from the hospital?

Gwendolyn fell silent for a moment. She had planned to visit Maverick at the hospital that evening.

Well, it seems that his injury has mostly healed since he can be discharged from the hospital.

As Gwendolyn was about to walk inside, Elven leaned in close to her and whispered, "Ms. Shalders, I think there's something odd about Mr. Wright this time."

"Even you think so, huh?" Looks like Maverick is really acting strange.

Gwendolyn frowned, an indescribable look in her eyes.

Elven nodded. "Mr. Wright went straight into his room as soon as he returned, and he hasn't come out since."

"I see. Okay."

Gwendolyn had a steely expression on her face as she walked straight into the villa and headed up to the second floor.

The door of Maverick's room was closed, but it was not locked.

Gwendolyn pushed the door open and entered the room. The bed was neatly made, showing no signs of anyone having laid on it.

Maverick was lying quietly on the lounge chair by the window, dressed in a luxurious dark suit. He was admiring the sunset outside the floor-to-ceiling window in a leisurely and relaxed demeanor, his eyes cool and composed.

Since it was late autumn, the sunlight that fell upon one's body would not feel warm.

Yet, the faint halo from the sunlight that graced his handsome, perfect side profile only served to make his face appear even more divine and aloof.

However, as she got closer, Gwendolyn noticed his thin lips were dark and chapped. His face was also extremely pale, as if he had no blood within him, which just proved that he was still unwell.

"Don't lie flat. It will put pressure on the wound on your back."

Maverick was lost in the beauty of the sunset, so he did not notice Gwendolyn approaching him until she was right at his feet.

"You're back."

He hurriedly propped himself up, trying to stand. "I was so engrossed that I lost track of time. You must be hungry, right? I'll go cook something right now."

"That's okay. If you're not feeling well, I'll let you take a day off today."

Gwendolyn held his shoulder, guiding him to sit back down.

Upon touching him, she realized how cold and icy his entire body was as if he had no warmth at all.

Gwendolyn furrowed her brows. "Why are you so cold? You don't look well. Is the wound on your back still hurting a lot?"

Maverick flashed a slight smile to reassure her. "It stopped hurting a while ago. I guess my hands and feet are cold because I've been lying down for too long, but I'm fine. I just need to rest for a couple of days, and I'll be good."

Gwendolyn simply didn't believe it.

He was speaking in a weak voice, his eyelashes trembling from time to time. She felt that he was always forcing himself to be strong.

"Sit down and let me take a look at your injury," she said and began to remove his suit jacket.

Maverick clutched his collar tightly, refusing to let go. "My injury is really not a big deal. It's almost healed, and it's wrapped in gauze anyway. Even if you take off my clothes, you won't be able to see it."

What he had said was true indeed.

Gwendolyn reluctantly let go.

Maverick's body lost support and staggered slightly. He quickly reached back to support himself on the recliner.

Noticing Gwendolyn staring at him, he curled the corner of his pale lips slightly, appearing somewhat languid. "It's rare to see you care about me like that. How nice."

Gwendolyn rolled her eyes at him.

However, considering that he did save her this time, she didn't ridicule or mock him. Instead, she said with a serious expression, "You know I don't like being indebted to others. Since you saved me this time, I'll grant you one request. What would you like?"

"Really? Any request will do?"

Maverick slightly lifted his head, making eye contact with her, a faint glimmer flashing in his dark pupils.

"Apart from remarriage and emotional demands, I will try my best to fulfill everything else you ask for. Just tell me."

Maverick just laughed, for she knew very well that those were all he wanted.

Forget it. I don't have much time left anyway.

"Okay, then. Just stand there and don't move."

Gwendolyn nodded and stood still.

Maverick removed his hand from the lounge chair, and he sat up straight. Gathering his courage, he slipped his hands through her trench coat, tightly encircling her slender waist. "Let me hold you for a moment. Just a moment will do."

Her body was warm, while his was icy cold.

With this embrace, he felt warmth even in his heart.

"Just that?"

Gwendolyn was slightly taken aback.

Is his request really that simple?

“Yeah...”

Gwendolyn stood still, her posture rigid and straight, allowing him to rest his head obediently on her stomach as his hands wrapped tightly around her waist.

However, after standing quietly for a while, she suddenly realized that her hands were hanging by her sides. She felt a bit awkward, not knowing where to place them.

Since it was his request, it wouldn't be nice not to hug him back.

So, instinctively, she reached out her arms toward his back.

Halfway through, she stopped again.

Her fingers stiffened for a moment when she recalled the injury on his back. Eventually, she chose to stroke his head instead.

His jet-black hair was short and neatly trimmed, soft and silky to the touch, making it a pleasure to run one's fingers through.

As Gwendolyn stroke his head, she gradually lost her mind.

She simply couldn't stop.

Maverick, who was being stroked on the head, furrowed his brows.

For some reason, he felt as if Gwendolyn was petting a dog.

He was unwilling to let go of Gwendolyn's embrace at first, but at that thought, he took the initiative to release her from his arms.

He laughed insincerely. "Okay. My demands have been met, and you don't owe me any favors."

Gwendolyn withdrew her hand from stroking his head.

After pondering for a while, she took out a delicate, small black and gold gift box from her trench coat pocket and handed it to him.

"This is the thank-you gift I wanted to give you."

Maverick looked up at her with a hint of suspicion. Was she just testing me when she asked me to make a request earlier to see if I'd be too greedy or ask for something excessive?

He took the gift box from Gwendolyn, his fingertips trembling as he untied the ribbon.

It was a syringe about the thickness of a pinky finger, quite similar to the special drug he was injected with.

Is this...

Maverick furrowed his brow, his dark eyes gazing at her with a mix of emotions.

Gwendolyn explained calmly, "The special drug I injected you with is called 023 special drug. This is the antidote for 023. It's painless, and after the injection, your body will quickly return to normal."

“W-Why...” Maverick bit his lower lip, suppressing the suffocating feeling in his heart. He took a deep breath and asked, “Didn’t we agree... to end the employment agreement only when the contract period is up? Or do you still... want to draw a clear line between us?”

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His heart ached intensely. The suffocation he felt in his chest made it almost impossible for him to catch his breath.

What should I do to win her back?

Gwendolyn turned her head, picked up a footstool next to the small couch in the room, and sat down facing him with a look of seriousness on her face.

“I’m giving you the antidote not because I’m trying to force you to terminate the agreement, but because I’ve noticed that you’ve been in constant pain lately. Due to the effects of the 023 special drug, your pain will only get more intense. Since you saved me this time, I want to help you relieve the severe pain as a way to repay you.”

Maverick stared at her intently. He did not respond.

Gwendolyn continued to explain, “About the employment agreement... Since we have already settled it last time and I still have your recorded promise, I won’t bring it up again.”

Does this mean she no longer has her initial guard up against me? Does this mean that everything I’ve done recently has brought me one step closer to her?

“Aren’t you afraid that after giving me the antidote, you won’t be able to beat me in a fight and I’ll bully and hurt you?”

Gwendolyn’s red lips curved into a seductive smile.

“Will you do that?”

Maverick's pale, thin lips curved slightly as he gave a decisive answer. "I won't."

Gwendolyn suddenly narrowed her eyes, a mischievous smirk appearing at the corner of her mouth. "Aren't you afraid that what I give you isn't the antidote for 023, but an even stronger and more torturous drug?"

"You won't do that."

Even if she were truly that ruthless, as long as it was her request, he would not hesitate to inject the drug.

"Yes, I won't. So, this is the real antidote, and it's in your hands now. Go ahead and inject it," Gwendolyn said in a casual tone.

Now?

Maverick glanced down at the box in his hand.

At that moment, he was almost pushing himself to the limit, feeling incredibly weak all over.

If he proceeded with the injection then, Gwendolyn, with her keen perception, would definitely notice that something was off with his body.

She did not like being indebted to others. If she knew that it wasn't sulfuric acid at the bar that night, but rather the S404 RNA virus, she would feel quite guilty.

Ultimately, guilt did not equate to love.

He neither spoke nor moved an inch.

“What’s the matter? Are you really afraid I’ll mess with you?”

Maverick shook his head. He said in a deep voice, albeit weakly, “Last time, I performed the injection myself, but this time... can you help me?”

He handed her the black-and-gold box, his tone faintly tinged with a hint of childishness.

Gwendolyn refused as she met his eyes.

He added, “Just this once.”

Gwendolyn took it. However, the man did not seem to have any intention of undressing. Instead, he leaned back and lay down on the rocking chair.

“What are you doing? Take off your clothes and give me your arm.”

Maverick tilted his head, exposing his neck that was as pale as paper. His Adam’s apple bobbed as he said, “Go ahead and pierce the jugular vein.”

Gwendolyn glanced at him and, without any hesitation, directly gave him what he wanted with a single needle. She did not hold back at all.

Administering medication through the jugular vein is quite painful.

Yet, Maverick merely furrowed his brow, showing no particular emotion.

The injection, with a syringe the thickness of a pinky finger, was completed in just ten seconds.

Gwendolyn casually tossed it into the bin. Then, she turned around only to find a motionless Maverick gazing at the sunset on the horizon.

He seemed languid and listless, lacking energy.

Gwendolyn had always felt that something was off about him. Just as she was about to continue questioning, Maverick spoke first. "Gwendolyn, if I die, will you remember me for the rest of your life?"

His voice was light and breezy, with a touch of nonchalance.

"No way." Gwendolyn raised her eyebrows and scoffed, "When you die, I'll quickly forget your existence and move on with my life. However, they say that misfortune lingers for a thousand years. You are a complete menace, so I don't think you will be dying anytime soon."

"You really are a... cold-hearted, wicked woman." Maverick chuckled softly, his tone of complaint laced with a hint of indulgence.

What was even more amusing was that he particularly adored her wickedness, her ruthlessness, and everything about her.

He had already fallen deeply for her. He could not extricate himself from her charm.

Gwendolyn did not deny his statement. "I never claimed to be kind-hearted."

Maverick just smiled. The grin lingered on his incredibly pale lips as his long, curly eyelashes trembled weakly.

The once dark eyes were now staring dimly at the horizon.

He certainly resembled a sickly person on his deathbed.

The more Gwendolyn observed him, the more peculiar she felt.

His condition was extremely poor.

It was only sulfuric acid. It would not harm the insides of the body. Moreover, she had given him the antidote for the 023 special drug.

“Could it be that the hospital you went to yesterday wasn’t very good and that they were unable to find out what’s wrong with your body? Come on, let’s go to the best hospital in Fairlake and get you checked again.”

She was just about to forcibly pull Maverick up when Justin knocked on the door and came in.

“Ms. Shalders, you didn’t answer your phone, so Mr. Newton came to get you in person. His car is parked right outside the villa. He said he’d like to take you out for dinner tonight.”

Gwendolyn hesitated for a moment but ultimately decided to take Maverick to the hospital first. “Come on, let’s go get a check-up,” she said.

Maverick raised his voice to stop her. “I’m fine. I just need a couple of days to rest. You go ahead and have dinner. Don’t keep him waiting too long.”

Gwendolyn frowned imperceptibly.

The last time Charles invited her to dinner, Maverick had put on quite a show in front of a large audience at the entrance of the police station, trying to win her favor by acting pitifully.

This time, not only did Maverick not stop her, but he even encouraged her to go out for dinner with Charles.

At the door, Justin asked cautiously, “Ms. Shalders, shall we go?”

Gwendolyn remained silent. Her eyebrows furrowed as she stared intently at Maverick.

Maverick did not look at her. He remained lying on the chair as he gazed at the horizon with a languid expression on his face, exuding an aloof aura that seemed to be warning others to keep their distance.

What's going on with him?

Gwendolyn was utterly puzzled, but at that moment, she really had some very important matters to attend to.

She asked again in a measured tone, "Maverick, tell me the truth. Are you sure you're all right?"

Maverick nodded gently, his expression calm. "I'm just tired. Once you leave, I'll take a nap. I'll be fine after I wake up."

Gwendolyn stared at him for a moment, then glanced at Charles' car parked outside the villa. She experienced an internal conflict, but in the end, she let out a sigh.

"All right, you go ahead and sleep. I'll have Elven and the others guard the villa so your rest will not be disturbed."

With that said, she turned around to leave.

Maverick suddenly reached out and grabbed her wrist, his dark eyes appeared serious and solemn as he said, "Gwendolyn, Charles is not a simple man. There may be secrets behind him that could be extremely detrimental to you. You must be cautious and on your guard around him in the future."

Without giving it much thought, Gwendolyn softly hummed in agreement and left the room.

The setting sun cast a gentle glow.

A gentle breeze stirred the delicate silk curtains, which occasionally brushed against the man reclining by the window.

Maverick lay motionlessly as he watched silently from the side as Gwendolyn got into Charles' car outside the villa, taking Ezra and Justin with her.

He stayed that way until the car had completely vanished from sight.

In pain, he gripped the handle. He could no longer suppress the suffocating ache in his chest. A sweet, metallic taste surged in his throat, and he quickly covered his mouth with his hand.

After a bout of heart-wrenching coughs, blood trickled down the side of his lips. A copious amount of blood gushed from his palm, seeping through his fingers and dripping onto the ground.

He lowered his gaze and examined the color of the blood in his palm.

It was a shade of blackish-red.

He was coughing up more blood. The color of the blood had also become darker.

This meant that the S404 RNA virus inside him had been fully triggered.

Maverick remembered when Yohannes Yancey from the war laboratory was developing the biological weapon, he had personally gone to observe the experiments. The animals of smaller sizes had died on the spot when the tests were conducted.

Even animals of larger sizes were unable to survive more than three days after they had been infected with the S404 RNA virus.

He counted the number of days since his infection.

Tonight marked his third day.

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He had asked Swain to hurry back to the training facility and find Yohannes, but Swain had yet to return.

Maverick knew his own body, and he probably wouldn't be able to hold on until Gwendolyn came home from dinner.

Is this really how I'm going to die?

He was unwilling to accept it, yet he was powerless to change it.

As of now, he did not even have the strength to write a farewell letter.

Earlier, that had been the first time Gwendolyn had hugged him since the divorce.

No, she wasn't hugging me. She was only patting my head.

Charles was right. In the end, Gwendolyn saw Maverick as nothing more than a pet.

She no longer loved him.

As Maverick pondered on this, his consciousness gradually grew hazy, and there were black spots in his vision.

"Gwendolyn..."

I'll give you my life, Gwendolyn, but can you give me your love in return?

Resigned to his fate, he closed his eyes and let his arms hang limply at his sides. He looked serene.

All was tranquil around him.

Apart from the curtains rustling in the breeze, the only other noise in the room was the sound of blood dripping from his fingertips onto the floor, one drop at a time.

In the car, Gwendolyn suddenly felt a sharp, intense pain in her heart.

She pressed a hand to her chest, her delicate face turning pale from the pain.

Charles noticed that something was off with her and quickly asked, "Gwen, what's wrong? Are you unwell?"

He leaned forward, wanting to help her.

Gwendolyn reached out to stop him. After taking a few deep breaths, she felt the pain gradually subside.

Why did I feel pain in my chest all of a sudden?

She had never had any heart-related illnesses, and the pain this time was inexplicably excruciating.

"I'm fine. I guess it's because I haven't been sleeping well for the last couple of days. Anyway, it'll all be over in a few days' time."

As she spoke, a faint, icy gleam flashed in her eyes.

Charles didn't notice her darkened gaze and continued to show his sympathy and concern.

However, Gwendolyn was not listening to him at all.

For some reason, she found herself thinking about how pale and sickly Maverick had looked before she left the house earlier.

He's been acting strange tonight.

Why did he ask me all those odd questions, such as whether I'd remember him if he died?

He sounded like a dying patient who could not accept his own fate.

The more Gwendolyn delved into her thoughts, the more uneasy she felt.

She recalled the way he had grabbed her by the wrist before she left the house earlier and the warning he had given her.

He had said, "Charles is not a simple man. There may be secrets behind him that could be extremely detrimental to you. You must be cautious and on your guard around him in the future."

In hindsight, Maverick's choice of words had seemed odd.

It was almost as if he had used the words "in the future" to exclude himself from any future events in Gwendolyn's life.

She thought about his trembling hands, his furrowed brows, the overwhelming sense of weakness that he couldn't hide, and the way he had said, "If I die..."

Gwendolyn's breath hitched, and she shouted at Charles' driver, "Pull over!"

"What's wrong, Gwen?" Charles asked.

Gwendolyn quickly unbuckled her seatbelt and opened the car door. "Something urgent came up. I'm afraid I won't be able to make it to the dinner tonight. Let's do it another time!"

“Gwen—”

Charles’ words were cut off when Gwendolyn slammed the car door shut.

Since she was in the Bay Hill villa area, there were no taxis waiting by the roadside. After getting out of Charles’ car, she had no choice but to turn around and run back home on foot.

Ezra and Justin caught up to her.

Charles’ car did not move even after Gwendolyn left; it simply stayed in the same spot.

He glanced into the rearview mirror and watched as Gwendolyn frantically ran back to Bay Villa. At that moment, his expression grew inscrutable.

Meanwhile, Gwendolyn had only just left Bay Villa when Nico once again confidently entered through the iron gates.

Elven, William, and Quinton emerged from the shadows when they saw him approaching.

Quinton rubbed his hands together excitedly. “Nico, you won a whole month’s worth of salary from me the last time. Today, I’m going to win it all back, with interest!”

Nico remained silent, his expression cold and serious. “I’m not here to play cards today.”

Quinton and the other two exchanged a confused look.

The next second, a few light thuds sounded through the air, and the three men immediately felt a sharp pain in the back of their necks. In an instant, their eyes rolled back into their heads, and they fell to the floor unconscious.

Nico looked at the three motionless figures on the ground impassively. As it turned out, tranquilizing them was much quicker and more efficient than cottoning up to them.

At that moment, Swain packed up his tranquilizer gun and stepped out from the shadows. "Nico, we can't just leave them lying here, can we? Where should we hide them for the time being?"

Nico glanced at the three unconscious men on the ground, cupped his hands around his lips, and whistled a bird-like tune.

He waited for a minute, but there was still no sound or movement within the villa, nor was there any sign of Maverick coming to open the door.

Nico sensed that something was off. "Never mind. Let's go and check on Boss first."

The security door of the villa was locked. Nico had wanted to kick it down, but he was worried he would not be able to explain himself to Gwendolyn after this. In the end, he and Swain climbed the pipes behind the villa to get to the second floor.

Nico opened the door to the second-floor bedroom only to find Maverick lying on the chaise lounge. The pool of crimson blood on the floor was particularly startling.

"Boss!" Nico and Swain cried out as they collapsed at Maverick's feet, their faces turning pale.

Nico quickly took out the suppressant from the cooler and steadily injected it into Maverick's neck.

Swain stood on one side as he stared at Maverick's bloodstained hands, the heartache he felt so acute that it brought tears to his eyes.

Two minutes after the suppressant had been injected, Maverick still showed no reaction whatsoever.

His entire body was ice-cold with no sign of life.

Nico's hand trembled as he carefully checked the pulse on Maverick's neck, but it had already stopped.

"Wake up! Boss, come on, don't fall asleep on us!" Nico roared as he patted Maverick's face, which was so pale it looked almost translucent under the lights.

Tears uncontrollably streamed down his face as he suddenly fell to his knees beside Maverick and sobbed miserably.

Were we too late?

Swain, who was distraught, sat on the ground and cried, wailing hysterically with all his might.

Nico's eyes were red, and he was getting more emotional with every passing second.

"Boss, please, I beg you! Please don't fall asleep! Wake up, because if you fall asleep, you'll never wake up again!"

Maverick lay peacefully on the chaise lounge. His brows were relaxed, and his eyelashes did not even flutter.

Nico was on the verge of breaking down as he desperately shook Maverick's arm. "I'm begging you, Boss! Please open your eyes and look at me! Swain brought the suppressant! You'll be fine! Don't die in front of us! Wake up!"

"Ms. Shalders hasn't even come back to you yet, and you're just going to give up like this? Aren't you afraid that she might marry Charles and be mistreated by him? And there's Sherman and Joaquin, too! There are so many powerful and influential men in Chanaea who could become your rivals, and you're just going to die like this before even fending them off?"

"She doesn't even know that you contracted the S404 RNA virus for her sake! You can't just die like this! Boss, I beg you. Please wake up!"

He cried until he almost choked, all the while shaking Maverick to wake him.

However, the man on the chaise lounge did not move at all, and his body was cold and lifeless.

Seeing this, Nico slid down to the ground, powerless and completely devastated as he leaned against Maverick's limp arm.

"Boss, you picked me up from the Chanaea border when I was just ten years old. My name, my skills, and everything I have is because of you. All these years, wherever you went on your missions, I followed you..." Nico trailed off. He pulled out a small knife from his pocket, his eyes fierce and his tone resolute as he continued, "My life is yours, and if you die, I'll die with you!"

With that, he pointed the tip of the knife at his own heart and, without hesitation, stabbed it in.

"Nico! Don't!" Swain yelled in despair.

Unexpectedly, no blood splattered.

The sharp tip of the knife stopped just two millimeters away from where it would have pierced Nico's heart.

Chapter 185

Nico belatedly looked up, only to find a pair of bloodstained hands with slender fingers tightly gripping his wrist.

Maverick had woken up.

That was not all. He had also recovered most of his strength after receiving the 023 antidote injection earlier.

He lay on the chaise lounge and turned his head to look at Nico. A faint smile curled on his bloodstained lips as he chuckled and said, "I'm not going down so easily, so pull yourself together."

“Boss!” Nico’s eyes flashed with shock and delight, but then he continued to cry, “You scared me to death! I really thought you were gone!”

Swain, who was considerably younger than Nico, had been scared witless, too.

At that moment, the two men burst into tears in front of Maverick, completely dispensing with their image. After a while, they started laughing with relief as tears continued to stream down their faces, making for a rather comical sight.

Maverick gently patted Nico’s shoulder, comforting him, “I was just exhausted. The S404 RNA virus caused my heart and pulse to go into temporary cessation, but I heard everything you said.”

“Then why didn’t you answer me?” Nico was furious and angrily pounded on Maverick’s arm.

Stupid boss! He made me cry like a baby! I completely humiliated myself!

Maverick furrowed his brows and let out a pained grunt.

“Sorry, sorry, I shouldn’t have hit you!” Nico looked distressed. To punish himself, he hit his own right arm with his left fist.

Maverick sat up and said, “All right, tell me what’s the deal with this suppressant.”

Nico wiped the tears from his face and turned to look at Swain.

Swain nodded, sniffed, and reported earnestly, “Professor Yancey was shocked to learn that you were infected with the S404 RNA virus. This suppressant cannot cure the disease, but it can temporarily inhibit the virus, thereby allowing the body to recover for a short period of time. The effects of the medication can last up to a week at most...”

One week. Maverick considered this. That means I can stay in Fairlake for another seven days at most.

Nico chimed in, "Boss, you must go back for treatment this time. Professor Yancey has already started working on the antidote, and they need you to return for blood tests. Don't you want to recover and have a long and happy future with Ms. Shalders?"

Maverick pursed his lips and made no reply.

He had promised Gwendolyn to disappear from her world after a year, and she still had evidence of this in her phone. To stay by her side forever was no easy endeavor, and it required some forethought.

He pondered on this and remembered the plan Swain had come up with the last time.

He was still deep in thought when he suddenly felt someone tugging on his clothes. He snapped out of his reverie and saw Nico pawing at his shirt.

"What are you doing?" Maverick demanded.

"Boss, the wound on your back can't be treated by ordinary medicine from any hospital dispensary. Professor Yancey has provided a healing ointment for S404 burns. The least you could do is let me apply it on your wound," Nico explained.

That makes sense.

Maverick did not hesitate to unbutton his shirt. He elegantly removed his dark suit jacket, then proceeded to shrug off his blouse to reveal his perfectly-chiseled physique.

Nestled between the defining lines of his muscular back was a palm-sized burn.

The wound was still a ghastly shade of red even though it had been three days since the viral infection. At this point, the wound had already festered, and the surrounding skin and flesh had begun to peel away. It looked grotesque.

Even someone as bloodthirsty and ruthless as Nico could not help inhaling sharply at the jarring sight of the wound.

He asked Swain to fetch a basin of hot water from the bathroom. Then, using a towel, he first wiped the bloodstains off Maverick's back, then used tweezers to remove the rotting flesh surrounding the wound.

Maverick broke out in a cold sweat, his veins bulging and his jaw tightly clenched.

Nico felt a pang of sympathy for the man and remembered the tranquilizer gun they had brought with them. "Boss, should I give you a sedative? This can hurt really bad."

"Don't worry. The 023 antidote is working. I can handle this much pain."

Nico had no choice but to grit his teeth and apply the ointment on Maverick's wound.

Swain, who was nearby, did not remain idle, either, and seized the opportunity to clean up the bloodstains on the floor.

However, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of several figures outside the villa gates who were running in their direction.

Swain paused his cleaning and took a proper look this time. Then, his eyes widened as he hastily cried, "Ms. Shalders is back! Ezra and Justin are with her, too!"

Maverick frowned. "So soon?"

Swain glanced out the window again. "She came back here on foot! I don't see Charles anywhere."

Pressed for time, Nico had no choice but to speed up in applying the ointment while Swain quickly cleaned up the scene.

Outside, Gwendolyn was just about to step through the iron gates of the garden.

Swain gasped dramatically as he remembered something. “Oh, no! The bodyguards are still lying in the garden! There’s no way we can cover this up...”

Gwendolyn ran all the way back from Bay Hill, her anxiety intensifying with every step she took.

She had stopped hating Maverick ever since he rescued her at Crane Bridge, and he no longer owed her anything.

Given that they were divorced, it was best for them to be estranged in the future. She would never consider remarrying him, let alone returning to the Wright family to endure their mistreatment.

However, that did not mean she was prepared to watch Maverick die.

Distressed, she made her way into the garden, only to stumble upon Elven and the others lying unconscious in the backyard.

Ezra and Justin were both astonished.

Has the villa been burgled?

Justin stepped forward to examine the scene, and through his keen observation, he noticed that all three of the unconscious men had a pinprick on their necks.

“Ms. Shalders, they were all knocked out by tranquilizers,” he concluded grimly.

Gwendolyn’s expression grew somber. Whoever did this had been able to make Elven and the other two put their guards down and lure them out of their hiding spots, thereafter knocking out all three of them at once. It could only be accomplished by someone they knew.

“Take the three of them to the living room first. Find a way to wake them up, then ask them what happened,” Gwendolyn said decisively.

After that, she quickly entered the villa, headed up to the second floor, and pushed open Maverick’s bedroom door.

She found Maverick sitting on the edge of the bed. He was wearing only a thin silk shirt that he was currently buttoning up.

When he saw her walk in, his eyes widened in surprise. He quickly fastened the last two buttons at his collar and asked, “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be having dinner with Charles right now?”

Gwendolyn tried to catch her breath. She was a little worn out from running all the way back home.

Once her breathing had grown steady, she made her way over to him, her heels clicking against the floor.

She came to a stop in front of Maverick and narrowed her eyes as she assessed him icily. She grabbed his chin and leaned in slightly, closing the distance between them.

Maverick’s ink-black eyes had regained their usual brilliance, and he looked up to meet her gaze.

She noticed the change in his appearance and frowned.

In just a little over ten minutes, his condition had seemingly improved significantly.

What did he do while I was gone?

Gwendolyn was close enough to him to detect a faint, metallic scent on him. It smelled like blood.

Even more peculiar was the dark red stain on the inside of his pale lips.

Gwendolyn brought the tip of her nose close to his lips and gently sniffed. As expected, there was a faint scent of blood.

Maverick looked at her face, which was mere inches away from his, and suddenly held his breath. Any closer and the tip of her nose would touch his lips.

If I were to take the opportunity to kiss her now...

He held that thought for a moment.

She might just beat me to death.

Just as he was lost in his thoughts, Gwendolyn's face gradually pulled away.

She straightened up and stared at him for a moment, then said gravely, "I smell blood on you. Did you cough up blood?"

This was a test as much as it was an interrogation.

Under the dim lights of the room, they held each other's gaze.

Maverick's expression remained unchanged as he gestured toward the trash can next to him. "No, I did not cough up blood. I did, however, just apply ointment to my back."

Gwendolyn followed his gaze and looked at the trash can. Indeed, there was a heap of bloodstained bandages that looked freshly removed.

How could he have possibly applied ointment on the center of his back without any help?

“Is that all?”

Maverick nodded obediently. “That’s all.”

He had been full of lies these days. Gwendolyn did not trust him at all.

She let go of his chin and quickly unfastened the metal buckle of the belt around his waist, then pulled his belt off in one swift motion.

Maverick’s eyes widened in surprise. “Gwendolyn?”

Chapter 186

Gwendolyn did not bother talking to him at all. She wrapped the belt around his hands and quickly tied them tightly.

Maverick instinctively wanted to break free, but he had used all his strength to withstand the pain when Nico applied the medicine earlier.

In the end, he could only obediently surrender.

Gwendolyn acted swiftly, pinning him down onto the bed with ease. She raised his hands above his head and held them firmly against the bed with one hand.

Then, she stood by the bedside.

Maverick’s ears turned slightly red as he asked in a low, husky voice, “Gwendolyn, what are you doing?”

This posture feels a bit strange... I bet those two scoundrels haven’t left yet, and they’re still hanging outside the window. My dignity!

Outside the window, Nico and Swain were indeed still hanging around. Hearing the commotion, the two secretly peeked inside.

Wow!

Both of them did not expect to see their boss get pinned down on the bed. The latter was completely subdued and unable to break free.

Moreover, the said boss was lying beneath.

Awesome! This trip is totally worth it!

The two were engrossed in watching the show when Maverick's dark eyes narrowed. He fiercely shot a sharp glare out the window.

Nico and Swain were instantly intimidated. They had no choice but to follow the command and climb along the window ledge to the nearby pipe. Then, they quietly slipped out through the back door.

Gwendolyn was examining the wound on Maverick's back inside the room.

The bandage had indeed been changed recently. Faint traces of blood could be seen seeping through.

However, she was not planning on letting him off the hook just yet. Gently lifting the edge of the bandage, she intended to look at the wound.

Maverick deliberately let out a groan as his facial features tensed up. "Gwendolyn, it hurts..."

Gwendolyn paused for a moment.

After hesitating for a few seconds, she withdrew her hand. "Who helped you wrap your bandages? When I came in, I saw Elven and the others passed out in the garden. What happened?"

"I bandaged myself." Maverick's expression remained unchanged. As he was forced to lie face down on the bed, he could only turn his head to the side to answer her questions. "Elven and the others passed out? I've been in the room the whole time, so I was unaware of this."

Gwendolyn looked at him coldly, raising her eyebrows, and smirked. "Oh, really?"

"Yes."

Heh, he's really full of lies. Not a single word of truth comes out of his mouth.

Gwendolyn pressed her knee harder against his lower back, skillfully exposing his lies.

"Before I left, you were so sick and frail that your fingers tremble when you lift your hand. I was only gone for about ten minutes, and now you're full of energy. You could even change your own bandages. Is this some kind of terminal lucidity?"

Maverick pursed his thin lips, remaining silent and motionless.

Gwendolyn continued, "My bodyguard was drugged and left unconscious in the yard. Yet, not only were you unharmed, but your condition even improved. It must have been your subordinate's doing, right? Do you think I would believe this has nothing to do with you? Or maybe you deliberately pretended to be weak and sick to deceive me before I left?"

She paused for a moment, her eyes cold and sharp. "Are you trying to trick or hide something from me? Think carefully before you speak."

Maverick gulped hard and fell silent.

He did hide something from her, but she would feel guilty after knowing the truth. She would not make things difficult for him anymore. However, given her temperament, she would help him find a cure for the virus. Moreover, she would also terminate the employment contract out of guilt.

If he told her that he lied, she would be furious as she once said she hated deception the most. The rift between them would only grow wider.

No matter how he answered, it would be unfavorable for him.

“Hmm?” After waiting for a while, Gwendolyn was met with silence, and her expression grew colder. She pinched the soft flesh on his lower back and asked, “Are you trying to figure out the best way to deceive me?”

Maverick was exposed but showed a blank expression. With a heavy tone, he began, “It’s Nico. I didn’t want the wound to leave a scar, so I asked him to bring a box of scar removal cream. It’s in the first drawer of the bedside table. As for the wound on my back, Nico helped me apply the ointment. My condition has improved a lot, thanks to your antidote. It has restored much of my strength.”

After listening, Gwendolyn intriguingly curved her lips into a smile.

“It’s just a box of scar removal cream. He could have given it to Elven to bring to you. As for your injury, why can’t Elven apply the medicine? He drugged my subordinates and trespassed into my villa just for this. Do you think I would believe that?”

Maverick’s expression remained calm and composed as he continued to explain, “He was indeed reckless in this matter. I’ll have him apologize to Elven and the others next time.”

Nico, who was leisurely leaving the villa area, suddenly felt his ears burning. Little did he know that someone had already placed the blame on him.

Gwendolyn chuckled. His answer was flawless, and his performance was quite convincing. This statement probably contains a mix of truth and falsehood.

However, he stubbornly refused to confess, leaving her no choice but to find an opportunity to investigate on her own later.

She leaned in slightly. Her red lips were close to his ear as she teased softly, "From what you're saying, not only did you hide it from me, but you also deceived me?"

What kind of divine-level comprehension is this?

Her gentle breath brushed against Maverick's ear, tickling him and causing his already burning ear tip to turn a deep shade of red as if they were about to bleed.

He buried his face in the blanket and answered in a muffled voice, "Yes, I accept the punishment."

Gwendolyn laughed. He admitted quite readily.

The floor-to-ceiling window was still open, and the cool evening breeze blew in.

Maverick was only wearing a thin layer of clothing. His hands, feet, and exposed back were all freezing cold.

Gwendolyn noticed this and gently put down his shirt. Then, she subconsciously lifted the blanket from the other side to cover his back.

Instead of hastily helping him untie the belt wrapped around his wrist, she continued to ask in a playful tone, "So, how do you want to be punished? Tell me. I'm all ears."

Maverick's ears turned even redder.

How can she expect me to say something so embarrassing and damaging to my pride? She's a torture to deal with.

He asked awkwardly, "What options do I have to choose from?"

"Let me think."

Gwendolyn sat on the edge of his bed. She folded her arms and playfully raised her eyebrows. “Now that the effects of the medicine have worn off, I assume you have no problem with your physical strength. Would you prefer to kneel in the garden all night or let Ezra whip you two hundred times? What’s your choice?”

Maverick gulped down hard.

Not only was his entire body cold, but his heart felt even colder.

She’s so merciless to me...

Gwendolyn grinned slyly. “Have you made up your mind?”

Maverick bit his thin lips. He pondered for a long time before asking gently, “Is there a third option? I choose the third one.”

“Of course there is.”

Gwendolyn had a look of understanding on her face but was grinning mischievously. “That is a combination of kneeling all night and getting whipped two hundred times— a combo of the first two options. You’ve made a wise choice.”

He breathed in sharply, and his heart ached.

Gwendolyn noticed his reaction and tried to suppress her laughter. She stood up and began to untie the belt around his wrists. “Let’s go to the garden.”

Maverick shifted his hands to the side, not allowing her to untie it.

“Gwendolyn, seeing how my wounds aren’t fully healed yet, can you give me a discount?” he asked gently in his deep voice.

Chapter 187

Discount? Is he begging for mercy?

Gwendolyn chuckled softly. He had been so tough in accepting his punishment just now, but he seemed to have backed down now. She had thought he was not afraid of pain.

She said nothing and untied the belt around his wrists.

Maverick wanted to avoid her, but she forcefully pinned his arms down, leaving him no choice but to bury his face in the blanket again, feeling defeated.

It seems she disagrees with a lighter punishment.

Just now, he had used all his strength to endure the pain of removing the rotten flesh from his wound, so his body felt weak and powerless now.

He might pass out if Ezra were to whip him two hundred times in the garden.

Gwendolyn would definitely sense something was off if he fainted. She might even take the opportunity to examine his wound. It had been three days since he was injured, and the injury caused by sulfuric acid was clearly different. With Gwendolyn's cleverness, there was no way he could hide it from her.

As he lay there thinking, Gwendolyn had already undone the belt for him.

She stood by the edge of the bed and tilted her head to observe his reaction with a mischievous smirk on her lips. "Shall we?"

Maverick did not budge an inch.

Gwendolyn did not expect him to move, so she turned around and was prepared to close the open window.

“Although my physical strength has recovered, my back still hurts, and I don’t have any strength...” Maverick said softly as he grabbed her wrist, thinking she was going to leave the room. This punishment is too heavy. I might not be able to endure it.

He took a deep breath and continued, “If you can’t give a discount, can you perhaps postpone the penalty until after autumn?”

He meant to wait until he recovered from his injuries before accepting the punishment.

Gwendolyn had just wanted to tease him. She did not really intend to punish him.

The wounds on his back were still bleeding, and it was all because of her that he got hurt in the first place. Although she had given him the antidote for the 023 special drug and repaid the favor, she was not so unreasonable as to be cruel to a patient.

She sat back down beside Maverick’s bed and asked him seriously, “Then, be honest with me. Why have you been in such poor condition these past two days? The 023 special drug will only intensify the feeling of pain from your burns, but it won’t have a significant impact on your body. What else are you hiding from me?”

Maverick thought for a moment and slowly sat up. His dark eyes were slightly lowered as he avoided meeting her eyes.

“I had a cold on the day I was splashed with sulphuric acid. Then, I spent the entire day cleaning the villa. That’s why I’ve been feeling weak and sickly these past two days. I have not been hiding anything from you.”

Gwendolyn sorted out her thoughts and realized this seemed to be quite a rational explanation.

He had suffered from a sulfuric acid burn at his weakest moment. After he used the antidote, his strength recovered quite a bit.

It made sense now.

“Fine, I’ll trust you just this once. I’ll keep the tab in mind. If you dare to deceive me next time, the punishment will be doubled.”

Maverick lowered his head slightly and let out a soft hum.

I only have seven days left. I fear there won’t be a next time.

Gwendolyn had no idea what was going on in his mind. She got up and walked to the window, closing it as she casually said, “I have some things to take care of in the next couple of days. You better stay put and not go out.”

“Okay.”

“Get some rest.”

Gwendolyn averted her gaze, turned around, and left his room. She closed the door and went straight downstairs to the living room.

Elven and the others were placed on the couch, gradually regaining consciousness. However, they still felt a bit groggy due to the large anesthetic dose.

Gwendolyn walked over to them, examined their condition, and chose to ask William, who seemed to be the most awake among them.

“William, who did you see before you fainted?”

William recalled his memories carefully. “Nico.”

It really was Nico. It seems Maverick didn’t lie about this matter.

However, she noticed William’s choice of words. “You’re even calling Nico by his name now. Seems like you’ve been getting along quite well with Maverick’s men lately.”

“Ms. Shalders, we...”

William looked terrified, yet he could not explain why.

Gwendolyn’s face was cold. She showed no intention of listening to his excuses.

“As my bodyguards, you not only let outsiders in without permission but also carelessly allowed yourselves to be drugged and rendered unconscious. This is utterly disgraceful. You will not receive your salary for two months and your year-end bonus. If this happens again, you’ll all be fired.”

The three people who regained consciousness were on the verge of tears.

As the sky gradually darkened, Gwendolyn, who had not had dinner, ordered some takeout. After finishing the meal, she returned to her room to rest.

She had a very important task to accomplish the next day.

That night, negative news about Lane Group suddenly flooded the internet. The outrageous content quickly caused a huge uproar online.

The Lanes only found out the next morning when they woke up.

Thus, the Lane residence was in a commotion that morning.

Samantha came across a news article online about a construction accident at a building site owned by Lane Group, which resulted in the deaths of several workers. At the time, the Lane family had used their connections to cover up the news because the compensation costs were quite high.

Consequently, Shirley had arranged for someone to visit the victims' families and issue death threats to keep them quiet.

After so much time had passed, it was surprising the matter was suddenly brought up last night.

Samantha's injury had mostly healed, and she stormed upstairs to find Shirley.

Just as she approached Shirley's room entrance, Samantha heard the sharp and clear sound of a slap coming from inside.

It was then followed by Shirley's furious roar.

"Louis! As the son-in-law of the Lane family, I've treated you well, haven't I? Yet, you've been using the Lane family's money for a mistress! She's even pregnant with your child! I wondered why you've been making frequent excuses not to be at home lately. It seems you've been taking care of your mistress! If the media hadn't caught you, you would keep it a secret from me forever, right?"

Louis covered his face and was clearly upset. "You? Treat me well? You show that nasty attitude to me every day just because the Lane family is a little rich. The Lane family looks down on me as a live-in son-in-law, and not a single one of you respects me, yet you have the nerve to say you have treated me well?"

Shirley was furious. "How dare you! Even if you have a grudge against the Lane family, it's not an excuse for your infidelity! I want a divorce! I want you to leave with nothing!"

"Fine! If you want to divorce, then do it. However, I won't walk away without nothing. I made mistakes, but you're not innocent either! Don't think I don't know that you've been in contact with your first love all this time. How far have you two gone? Did you book a hotel room together?"

Shirley's expression changed instantly. "So what? You were the one who cheated first, and now you think you're in the right? I'm going to kill you!"

The sound of objects being thrown and crashing filled the room, accompanied by a woman's piercing screams and the sound of slaps. It was incredibly chaotic.

Samantha stood right outside the door and could hear everything clearly. She sobbed uncontrollably but did not go in to intervene.

For many years, she had believed her family was happy and her parents were in harmony. She had thought the Lane family was indeed a model family recognized by society.

Unexpectedly, the truth turned out to be that Louis was secretly keeping a mistress who had even got pregnant, while Shirley was still entangled with her first love, unable to let go completely.

With the negative news about Lane Group breaking out all at once, the stock market plummeted overnight, resulting in heavy losses.

Is the Lane family going to end?

She collapsed onto the ground, unwilling to accept it.

That despicable woman, Gwendolyn, has always been so arrogant. With the Lane family's downfall, who knows what kind of twisted ways she'll come up with to torment me in the future? No! I can't just sit here and wait for the end!

With trembling hands, she took out her phone and was about to call the man who had previously helped her deal with Gwendolyn when a sudden commotion erupted in the hall.

Samantha slumped down by the railing on the second-floor corridor, turning her head to look down below.

It was Gwendolyn.

She was sitting on the main seat of the living room couch. Her expression was cold and arrogant, yet her delicate and beautiful face was still captivating.

Gwendolyn's chin was slightly raised when Samantha looked at her. She shifted her gaze sharply, and her red lips parted as she said arrogantly, "Ms. Lane, do you still like the gift I sent to the Lane family? There's also a small separate gift just for you. Would you like to take a look?"

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"It's you! How did you get in?"

Gwendolyn gracefully played with her nails and answered unhurriedly, "I had the security guard inform the butler and entered through the front gate."

The butler let her in?

How could the butler, who has worked with our family all these years, be bought off so quickly?

Samantha glared at the woman with murderous eyes.

Gwendolyn saw through her mind and added, "Even rats will abandon a sinking ship. Today is the day the Lane family falls, and he naturally knows what to do."

Furious, Samantha gritted her teeth and sprang up from the ground. "You wicked woman! You've gone too far! Do you think we'll crumble just because you harm us like that? You're dreaming!"

"Harm the Lane family?"

Gwendolyn sneered, "This can hardly be considered harm. I merely exposed the Lane family's dirty secrets to the world. Why would you fear those rumors if your family was truly innocent?"

"You!"

Samantha was infuriated, but she couldn't deny the truth. The Lane Group's troubles and the issues with Shirley and Louis were all brought upon themselves!

In the room behind her, the screams grew more intense and desperate.

"Ah! Louis! How dare you lay a hand on me? How dare you abuse me? I'll make sure you pay for this! Both you and your mistress should be executed!"

Then, the woman's screams rang out again. "Help! Louis is going to kill someone! Save me! Sammy, come and save me!"

Having been beaten up, Shirley also screamed until her voice turned hoarse.

Samantha was about to go downstairs to confront Gwendolyn when she realized something was amiss inside the room. She hurriedly entered to intervene.

However, it seemed her presence was futile as the commotion resumed quickly. The voices became increasingly chaotic.

Gwendolyn had brought only Ezra and Justin with her that day. So there weren't many of them.

The noise upstairs was unbearable. Gwendolyn raised an eyebrow and discreetly rubbed her ears. "You two, go up and try to calm them down and bring everyone downstairs."

"Understood."

Ezra and Justin quickly took action.

Justin knocked Louis unconscious with a single punch and forcefully carried him downstairs.

Those involved in the fight were all taken away. Shirley and Samantha followed behind as they headed downstairs.

Shirley's hair was disheveled. After all, the strength gap between a man and a woman was too big. Both her cheeks were swollen. Blood trickled from the corners of her mouth, and tear stains marked her face.

Samantha didn't fare any better as she entered. She received an unintended slap from Louis.

Gwendolyn instructed Ezra to bring a small sofa and place it across the coffee table. She then seated each of the three individuals on separate couches.

The Lane family's butlers and servants quietly gathered near the doorway, observing the spectacle.

They were surprised to see Gwendolyn seated in the central position, as if she were more like the owner than anyone from the Lane family, exerting absolute dominance.

She leaned back gently, resting against the back of the sofa, and cast a fleeting gaze at the three individuals across from her. With her slender and fair hand, she lightly applauded.

"How splendid it is to start my day with such a family drama."

Shirley's face swelled from the beating, causing her pain whenever she moved her mouth. As she tidied her appearance, she glared at Gwendolyn with resentment.

Samantha glared at Gwendolyn with an evil look and took the lead to speak. "Don't think the Lane family can be easily brought down! I won't let these matters go so easily! I'll get back at you for everything in the future! Don't get too smug too soon!"

Gwendolyn chuckled upon hearing Samantha's words. "Get back at me? Unfortunately, I'm afraid you won't have that opportunity."

Samantha was momentarily stunned by Gwendolyn's cold and arrogant gaze. She felt a hint of inexplicable unease.

"What do you mean?"

Gwendolyn glanced at Ezra but directed her words at Samantha. "Come, let's have a look at the gift I have prepared for you."

Ezra understood her meaning and stepped forward, placing a document on the table.

"Ms. Lane, this document contains evidence of your involvement in the kidnapping and attempted murder of Charmaine, a former trainee of the talent show. This one shows your embezzlement of eight billion and eight hundred million from Wright Construction Group's funds. Ms. Shalders is now the head of Wright Construction Group and has the authority to reclaim that money from you. And this document is..."

Ezra spent a solid five minutes meticulously recounting Samantha's clandestine deeds.

Samantha stared at the pile of papers in shock.

How did this wicked woman manage to uncover all my private matters in such a short time?

This is impossible!

Samantha rushed to the coffee table and tore the evidence into tiny pieces. It seemed like an outlet for her anger as she ripped the papers with force, her expression contorted with ferocity.

Gwendolyn calmly observed Samantha tearing the papers. She waited until Samantha had finished before speaking indifferently. "Ms. Lane, you seem to enjoy tearing things apart. I've prepared plenty of copies. You can tear them to your heart's content."

Justin swiftly retrieved a large box behind the sofa and heavily put it on the coffee table. He opened the box before everyone and grabbed a stack of papers, flinging them toward the Lane family trio.

Ezra joined in the fun and scattered the papers around. Before long, the spacious living room of the Lane residence was covered in scattered sheets, completely filling the floor.

Unable to utter a single word, Samantha was so angry that she felt like she would vomit.

Gwendolyn's eyes sparkled in amusement as she delivered the final blow in a gentle voice. "Come on, keep tearing. If you don't wear out your hands today, don't even think about walking out of this villa's door on your feet."

"You!"

Samantha had fallen into Gwendolyn's hands several times before. Her legs felt weak at Gwendolyn's words. Since Louis was still unconscious, she could only plead for help with Shirley. She then threw herself at Shirley's feet.

"Mom! You must save me! She's holding so much evidence against me. She won't let me off easily!"

Shirley, who had already wiped the blood off her mouth and tidied her hair that Louis had messed up, reluctantly regained her composed demeanor as a powerful career woman.

She gently touched Samantha's face and turned to glare fiercely at Gwendolyn.

"So what if you have these so-called pieces of evidence? Last time, you brought a gang of people, and the Lane family couldn't match you. But today, you've only brought two."

She smirked cunningly. "Since you're here, don't expect to leave the gates of the Lane residence easily!"

With that, she signaled the Lane family's bodyguards, and they swiftly descended from various parts of the villa. Soon, thirty bodyguards surrounded the people in the living room.

Since Gwendolyn barged in the previous time, Shirley has learned her lesson and deliberately hired a larger group of bodyguards.

Little did she know they would come in handy so soon.

Regardless of the recent plummet in Lane Group's stock prices and the substantial losses they incurred, as long as she was still around, the Lane family's connections in Fairlake would remain, and the Lane family would eventually rise again!

Shirley felt triumphant. "Last time, you smashed my luxury car and injured Sammy with a knife. Since you've come uninvited today, I'll start by stabbing you a hundred times! Attack!"

The Lane family's bodyguards immediately surged forward.

Ezra and Justin swiftly positioned themselves in front of Gwendolyn to protect her.

Gwendolyn chuckled lightly and coldly locked eyes with Shirley. "Mrs. Lane, do you really think that I came unprepared?" With that, she raised her hand and clapped twice.

Previously surrounded by housekeepers, the entrance suddenly cleared a path as if by its own accord.

Shirley and Samantha had a sinking feeling and turned their gaze toward the entrance.

A handsome man dressed in solemn military attire walked in. He emanated a strong presence and overwhelming aura.

Behind him, a group of police officers swiftly mobilized, surrounding the entire hall.

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Upon seeing Charles enter with his men, Shirley immediately slumped into the chair.

She had heard from acquaintances at the police station that Charles was planning to leave Fairlake, so why hadn't he left yet?

With him around, that day was going to be tough for her.

The Lane family's bodyguards quickly lost their confidence when faced with the police officers brandishing stun batons.

Samantha sat on the ground, feeling utterly defeated.

However, as Charles entered, his gaze remained fixed on Gwendolyn.

Maintaining an upright and composed posture, he walked over to sit beside Gwendolyn.

The latter unconsciously furrowed her brows but quickly concealed any underlying emotions. She then redirected her attention to Shirley and Samantha across from her.

"Samantha, I don't feel like wasting any more time on this. The police station will handle the crimes you and the Lane family committed. You will repay every penny of the money you owe me with interest. If the funds are insufficient, you'll have to sell properties or mortgage Lane Group."

Shirley and Samantha felt resigned, but under Charles' pressure, they remained silent and played dumb.

Gwendolyn gently smoothed her skirt and looked at Charles beside her, her eyes filled with tenderness.

“Charles, I’m feeling slightly tired, so I’ll leave the rest to you. By the way, Samantha has a penchant for tearing paper. How about letting her tear all the papers in the hallway into shreds before taking them

back to the police station? What do you think?”

Charles raised his gaze, his deep and gentle blue eyes meeting hers.

“All right, I’ll do as you say, but...”

He paused for a moment and gently took hold of Gwendolyn’s hand before continuing, “I’ve done you such a big favor, yet you stood me up last night. It’s time to make up to me, don’t you think?”

Gwendolyn smiled, her eyes filled with warmth and her voice velvety. “Of course, to make it up to you, why don’t you come to Bay Villa tonight after you finish work? I’ll personally cook you a meal. How does that sound?”

Charles was pleasantly surprised.

On second thought, he remembered that annoying person in her villa. “But there’s someone in your villa who I’d rather not see.”

“That’s not a big deal.”

Gwendolyn shrugged indifferently. “He’s just my servant. We’ll have a few drinks together in the evening, and I’ll have him stand by to pour your drinks. How about that?”

Charles looked at her calm expression, his eyes filled with indulgence. Then, he smiled and replied, “All right, whatever you say.”

“I’ll head back now and wait for you tonight.”

She withdrew her hand from Charles' palm and turned to look at Justin. "Stay here and see if Charles needs any further assistance. No slacking off."

"Yes, Ms. Shalders."

After giving her instructions, Gwendolyn shifted her gaze away, turned around, and left Bay Villa, leaving the stage to Charles and the police officers.

It wasn't until she got into the car that her expression gradually turned cold.

She opened the wet wipes in her bag and cleaned her hands.

With the Lane family matter resolved and still having some time on her hands, she made a trip to Angle to check on the recent progress of Joaquin's and Jennifer's shoots.

She stayed busy until the afternoon, then returned to Bay Villa two hours earlier than expected.

Upon her return, she found Maverick squatting on the ground, cleaning the floor.

With the special drug in his body already wearing off, he found these household chores much easier to handle.

Noticing Gwendolyn's early return, Maverick felt somewhat curious. "You're back so early today. It's only mid-afternoon. I suppose you're not ready for dinner yet?"

Gwendolyn nodded gently and stood motionless at the door.

Maverick instinctively set aside his task, washed his hands, and walked over to help her fetch the slippers from the shoe cabinet and neatly place them before her.

He then assisted her in removing her coat and hung it on the coat rack.

After completing these tasks, he resumed cleaning the floor.

Instead of heading upstairs, Gwendolyn sat on the sofa and silently observed Maverick as he mopped the floor.

After a few minutes, she finally spoke. "Put aside what you're doing and come here."

"All right."

Maverick washed his hands again before walking over to her respectfully. He then knelt on one knee beside her and slowly crouched down.

Gwendolyn was pleased with his unwavering obedience.

Gripping his chin, she closely observed his facial expressions.

Without the special drug, his complexion had lost the sickly pallor it previously had, and his dark eyes appeared more lively.

Although his features remained remarkably handsome, they now held a sharper edge, making him appear less vulnerable.

Gwendolyn grinned playfully. "I still prefer your state when under the influence of the special drug. Now you look more unruly yet not so easily bullied. How about..."

She paused, her lips curving mischievously. "How about I inject another dose of the special drug and continue tormenting you for a few more days until I grow tired of it before giving you the antidote?"

Maverick's breath hitched, and his dark eyes flickered with surprise.

Is she for real?

The injection of 023 special drug was excruciatingly painful, compounded by the fact that his back still bore wounds that would intensify the agony multiple times over.

Such torment could be lethal.

Bitterness tinged his words. "If your happiness is built upon my suffering, as long as it's your command and as long as you can believe that I am sincere now, I will obey unconditionally."

"Really?"

Gwendolyn lifted his chin an inch higher, forcing him to meet her gaze.

Maverick locked his gaze onto her starry eyes and nodded firmly.

Seeing him being earnest, Gwendolyn couldn't help but laugh. She released her grip on his chin. "Just teasing you. I'm not that twisted and sadistic."

Maverick lowered his gaze, remaining silent.

After the momentary jest, Gwendolyn adopted a solemn expression and shifted the conversation to business. "Your subordinates seem formidable, especially Nico. If they were to fight with trained military elites, what would be their chances of winning?"

"If it's a direct confrontation, it's hard to say. But given their capabilities, especially Nico, engaging in a fight would only prolong the encounter. The likelihood of losing is not significant."

Gwendolyn let out a soft hum and lowered her head in contemplation.

"Why do you suddenly ask about this?"

Gwendolyn evaded the question. "Charles will be coming to the villa for dinner tonight."

Maverick remained silent, his brows furrowing almost instinctively and his gaze dimming instantly.

Noticing his reaction, Gwendolyn leaned closer to his ear and whispered a few words.

In the evening, Gwendolyn stood at the entrance of Bay Villa at approximately when Charles had previously mentioned he would arrive and waited for him.

Charles arrived in a military vehicle, accompanied by only two of his closest subordinates.

As Charles stepped out of the car and looked up, he couldn't conceal his delight upon seeing Gwendolyn exquisitely dressed and coming out to greet him.

"Gwen, you look stunning tonight. Even though we just met during the day, it feels like it's been half a month, and I've already missed you."

"Oh, now you're learning to become a smooth talker?"

Gwendolyn gave him a playful glare and continued, "It's been quite a day. How did things go with the Lane family?"

"Lane Group has declared bankruptcy and will be auctioned off. As for the money the Lane family swindled from Wright Construction Group, I'll make sure they pay it all back. However, it's a substantial amount and will take some time. As for Samantha, she received a life sentence. I know you probably prefer to see her suffer a fate worse than death."

Gwendolyn only smiled and remained silent.

Side by side, they walked through the garden.

As they entered the villa's living room, Charles leaned close to her ear and said intimately, "Jasmine wanted to come along tonight, but I didn't bring her because I wanted our time together undisturbed..."

His words abruptly halted.

Charles noticed Maverick standing in the stairwell, the latter's intense gaze cold and menacing, fixed upon him.

Charles' expression turned grim as well.

The eyes of the two men met from a distance. Instantly, sparks flew, and an air of hostility filled the room.

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The confrontation lasted for several minutes.

Caught in the middle, Gwendolyn glanced from one man to the other.

As the 023 special drug had lost its effect on Maverick, he now looked more imposing than Charles. His eyes gleamed with a chilling and merciless intensity.

Gwendolyn did not know what to say.

They were already eyeing each other with so much hostility in the beginning that she was not sure how the night would end.

She cleared her throat loudly, drawing their attention to her.

Gwendolyn then gestured for Charles to look in the direction of the dining room. "Charles, I've prepared all this food, and I've been waiting for you. I've also prepared two bottles of red wine. It's been a long time since we've had a drink together. Let's all drink and be merry tonight."

"Okay."

Charles shifted his focus from Maverick to Gwendolyn. He looked at her affectionately as they walked into the dining room together.

"Gwen, your culinary skills are amazing. These dishes smell so good. I wasn't that hungry earlier, but now my appetite has been whetted."

"I'm happy as long as you like them."

Maverick stood in the stairwell, observing their interaction keenly.

Even though Gwendolyn had already told him about her plan that night, he was still caught off-guard when he saw her smiling happily at Charles and speaking to him in such a gentle manner.

He felt a pang of heartache.

When would Gwendolyn treat him the way she was treating Charles?

Both of them were chatting and laughing in the dining room, oblivious to the awkward expression on Maverick's face.

At the dining table, Gwendolyn pursed her lips and smiled. She took the bottle of red wine that had been decanted and was about to pour some for Charles.

Charles extended his hand, making a gesture to stop her. "Gwen, you have a servant here. You don't have to do this yourself."

Gwendolyn's expression momentarily froze, but she quickly regained her composure.

She put down the red wine and looked in the direction of the staircase.

"Maverick, come here."

Charles' lips curled up slightly with a satisfied look. He was sitting in an upright position as if he had cultivated this habit over the years. His eyes were fixed on Maverick, waiting for the latter to go over and serve them the wine.

Seeing Maverick walk toward them, he turned to look at Gwendolyn. There was a hint of surprise in his voice when he said, "Gwen, there's some dirt on your face. I'll help you wipe it off."

Gwendolyn sat in her chair, not moving.

With an affectionate gaze, Charles extended his hands in a gentle and deliberate motion toward Gwendolyn's face.

Before they could come in contact with her face, another pair of hands grasped Charles' wrists tightly.

Maverick's face darkened, and he uttered through gritted teeth, "Mr. Newton, mind your manners. Keep your hands to yourself."

Charles looked up and sneered, "I shall do whatever I wish. Mind your own business."

Charles enunciated the last few words clearly and was about to shake off Maverick's hands in disgust.

Maverick tightened his grip and stared at Charles. The former's eyes bore a malevolent and piercing intensity, radiating a palpable sense of malice.

Charles tried to break free, but his efforts were in vain. He started to look annoyed.

“Gwen, is this how a servant treats his employer? He’s so arrogant. Such a defiant servant ought to be taught a lesson.”

Gwendolyn was about to speak when Maverick snorted coldly. “My employer is Gwendolyn. Who do you think you are?”

The two men locked eyes. Their hands were entangled, their muscles tensing.

There was mounting tension in the room.

Gwendolyn sighed as she held her forehead.

It seemed that there would always be an intense battle between men whenever Maverick was present.

She coughed heavily again, giving Maverick a warning look.

“That’s enough. Let go.”

Hearing this, Maverick released his grip.

However, he did not move and stood between Gwendolyn and Charles. His glare was fixed on Charles, capturing his every movement like a vigilant surveillance camera.

Charles took out a tissue and wiped his sleeves. He then spoke with a hint of annoyance. “Gwen, it seems like we won’t be able to enjoy our meal tonight as long as someone is around.”

Gwendolyn understood what Charles meant and looked sternly at Maverick. “Mr. Newton is my guest. You’ve offended him the moment you got here. Are you trying to make me angry? I think I have been too lenient with you. Have you forgotten who your employer is?”

She turned toward the outside of the villa and called out, "William, Quinton, come in."

William and Quinton quickly walked into the living room and stood at attention.

Gwendolyn appeared indifferent as she disregarded Maverick without even glancing in his direction. "Bring him to the basement to do some soul-searching. Do not release him without my orders."

William and Quinton looked at each other and hesitated.

Maverick frowned, his face looking extremely cold. He spoke up with a hurt voice. "Are you punishing me because of him?"

Gwendolyn turned to look at him with a sneer on her face.

"What do you think? Charles and I are childhood friends, and I have always admired him since I was little. I used to hold a grudge against him, but now I've come to terms with it. Let bygones be bygones. After all, he still has a special place in my heart. I gave you a chance to terminate our employment

contract, but you stubbornly refused to leave. If you can't stand the way things are here, get lost. Do you think you still mean anything to me?"

Her harsh words cut through him like a sharp knife.

Maverick was so hurt that it took his breath away.

Despite knowing her plan, hearing her speak those hurtful words still caused him great pain and a sense of deep injustice.

He knew that Gwendolyn no longer had feelings for him.

Was Gwendolyn intentionally using Charles to tell Maverick the truth in a roundabout way?

Maverick's eyes were bloodshot. He choked up as he uttered, "I know I've made many mistakes in the past, but aren't you even a little moved by what I've done for you all this while?"

Gwendolyn kept quiet.

She noticed that Maverick was slowly tearing up. His gaze revealed a sense of vulnerability and emotional pain.

A sudden jolt reverberated through her heart.

Maverick's acting skills were indeed worthy of an Academy Award for Best Actor since he could make his tears flow on demand.

He looked so sorrowful that she was momentarily stunned.

She withdrew her gaze, and her face remained impassive.

"In the beginning, I was softhearted toward you because you were injured on my account. Your attitude has gotten worse now, and you even offended Charles. William, Quinton, lock him up immediately."

Since their employer had repeated her orders, William and Quinton reluctantly went up to grab Maverick.

Maverick forcefully flung their hands away. "I won't tolerate this punishment. I'll leave since you don't want me to stay."

He turned around and walked out of the villa without looking back. His eyes were bloodshot, blazed with anger.

William and Quinton were startled. "Ms. Shalders, what do we do now?"

“Let him go.”

“Yes.”

William and Quinton knew better than to linger in the dining room and quickly took their leave. Gwendolyn and Charles were now alone.

Relieved that Maverick had left, Charles poured some wine for Gwendolyn.

“Gwen, I’m so happy that you defended me.”

As Gwendolyn cast her gaze upon Charles, her icy demeanor melted away. She smiled warmly at him.

“Of course. How can he compare to you? Charles, you are the most important person to me. Come, let’s forget about this and drink up.”

Both of them then raised their wine glasses with a clink.

Gwendolyn downed the wine in her glass without any hesitation.

Swirling the wine in his glass, Charles inhaled the rich aroma of the wine. However, he did not take a single sip of the wine.

He looked at the wine in his glass, and the corner of his lips curled up.

“I remember that you were so smitten by him and you seemed so intimate with each other when we were playing games at the bar. I was very heartbroken then.”

Pausing for a moment, Charles' tone became more serious. "This time, he was injured because of you. You should have treated him even better than before, yet you scolded him so harshly because of me today. Why is that so?"

Gwendolyn looked a bit surprised.

Charles' smile deepened, looking as if he was amused. "Are you putting up an act in front of me?"