

Kissed AOM 1641

Chapter 1641

Lilin then continued, "My father has always felt guilty toward Sophia because he was abroad when her mother was ill and couldn't return in time before she passed away. He's been riddled with this feeling of regret and wants to make amends for his neglect, but Sophia is a greedy little wench who exploits her father's love and feelings of indebtedness to manipulate him into doing her bidding. I hope you'll succeed in your quest for revenge! Sophia needs to suffer the consequences of her actions. Evil people should never be allowed to prevail!"

Corinne looked at Lilin with admiration. She felt that the young girl had a strong sense of justice and a desire to stand up for the truth.

"Are you two done chatting?" Zachary's impatient, stern voice interrupted the conversation between the two girls.

Corinne cocked an eyebrow at him. "Not yet! I'm getting along pretty well with this young lady, and I'd like to chat with her a bit more before I leave."

Zachary frowned. "You're going to be the death of me!"

His concerned expression made Corinne feel a fuzzy warmth. She then realized that he was not in the best of condition and was thus unable to stay angry at him. "Okay, okay. I'll go now!"

She stood up and glanced at the two identical little boys next to each other. "What about you two? Would you like to switch back now?"

Bryan immediately stood up and said, "Yeah, Mommy! I want to go home with you! I miss you. I miss Joey, and I miss Christine, too! I also miss Great Grandpa, Great Grandma, and Aunt Francine." Meanwhile, Benjamin tugged on Corinne's clothes, seemingly hesitant to leave. "I..."

Zachary massaged his temples when he saw Benjamin's conflicted emotions. "Does this mean you don't want to come home?"

Benjamin pursed his lips. "No... I miss you, Daddy. But I don't like Sophia, and I don't like that home."

Zachary nodded and understood his son's feelings. "Well, you've spent enough time with Mommy, and it's about time your brother goes back home. We'll make the switch today, and I'll bring you to Mommy another time."

Benjamin nodded obediently and exchanged places with Bryan.

Corinne reached out and patted the boy's head. "Wait here! You need to change your clothes in the restroom!"

Benjamin and Bryan finally noticed that they were wearing different sets of clothes.

Corinne led the children and said, "I'll bring them to the bathroom and get them to change their clothes. I'll return Benjamin to you later."

Zachary sighed in relief when she finally decided to leave instead of taking any further risks. "Go ahead."

As Corinne led Benjamin and Bryan to the bathroom, Lilin stared curiously at Zachary with widened eyes.

After Corinne left with the two boys, Jeremy sensed Lilin's intent gaze and frowned. "What's wrong?"

"Have you regained your memory?"

Zachary was taken aback. "Why do you ask?"

"Why are you so concerned about the woman who saved Mom's life if you haven't?" Lilin asked. "You don't even remember her!"

Chapter 1642

Zachary smiled faintly. "I might not remember her, but a person's instinct doesn't lie. She...captivated me."

Lilin did not quite understand it, but she said, "That's because you have good taste. Even though you don't remember her, you've never once fallen in love with that vile Sophia. I respect you for that!" Zachary pursed his lips and said, "Thank you for your kind words. It won't be long before Sophia returns with your parents, so I must trouble you not to reveal what happened here." Lilin nodded. "Don't worry! I'm on your side!"

Adam and his wife, Melinda, made their way upstairs to find the VIP room that Lilin mentioned. As soon as they arrived, however, all they saw was the wait staff clearing away the used plates and cutlery from a meal that just concluded.

The wait staff explained that the guests in the VIP room had finished their meal and left. Adam and Melinda could not help but feel disappointed, thinking that Lilin's claims might have some grain of truth. Even if it might be a case of mistaken identity, they had hoped to at least catch a glimpse of the woman that Lilin had been talking about. Alas, they seemed to have missed the window of opportunity. Sophia sighed in disappointment after coming up with them to check the situation. "Whoever is here has already left. Lilin must be playing some kind of prank on us by sending us up here to check!" Melinda shook her head. "No. Lilin might have a temper, but she'll never tell lies on purpose."

Sophia frowned and said, "I don't think you should dote on Lilin so much, Aunt Melinda. If you protect her when she's lying, it'll snowball into even bigger lies when she grows up. She's going to get in trouble, and it'll be too late for you to discipline her by then!"

Melinda wanted to refute Sophia's targeted attacks on Lilin, but her words would never get through to Sophia because of her status as Sophia's stepmother. In the end, she decided not to waste her breath. "That's enough," Adam said with a frown. "We have no business being here since the guests in this room have left."

Sophia flung her hands in frustration. "Ugh! This is such a waste of time!"

Adam embraced Melinda's shoulders while they were going up, but he walked down with his hands behind his back. It was clear he was not feeling too pleased. Sophia glanced subtly at Melinda before following her father down smugly.

Melinda stood alone for a moment and turned to look at the empty room. She knew that her daughter Lilin would never lie, so she wondered if their benefactor had dined there earlier but left in a hurry out of a desire to remain anonymous.

She was about to descend the stairs when her phone rang. When she took it out and looked at her screen, she noticed that it was a call from her best friend in Molomia. She answered the call while heading downstairs, saying, "Is something the matter, Em? Shouldn't you be asleep right now? It's pretty late over there in Molomia."

The gentle yet slightly cold voice said, "I can't sleep. I needed someone to talk to."

Worry began to creep into Melinda's voice as she asked, "What happened?"

The woman remained silent for a few seconds before finally answering, "My son... I think my son found me."

Melinda was somewhat shocked to hear that. "How?!"

"Through one of my students," the woman answered. "He recognized me from my notes and had my student arrange a meeting."

Chapter 1643

"Have you met him yet?" Melinda asked.

"No, not yet."

The concerned Melinda frowned. "Well, why don't you meet him, then? He's found you anyway. I know you've always been thinking about him."

The woman's voice sank slightly. "I don't know how to face him, and I don't want to hear him talk about anything remotely related to that family. He's doing well, and I'm content with the occasional see updates about him in the financial news."

"If you truly felt that way," Melinda said, "you'd be sleeping soundly right now instead of calling me to talk about it. Deep down, you know that it's not just your son who's been searching for you. Your son's father must be the same, too. He still cares about you, and doesn't a part of you still think about him?"

The woman's tone turned bitter. "Does he? If he did, he wouldn't have gotten married at the drop of a hat. Don't sugarcoat this, Melinda."

Melinda responded, "But I heard that their marriage is on paper only. A few years ago, the woman was sent to their summer resort to live alone. She won't be allowed to return for the rest of her life." The woman fell silent but eventually answered, "I've moved on from them."

Melinda understood that it would be a futile exercise to continue discussing it over the phone. "Okay. I won't talk about it anymore. I'll come over once Adam settles everything here. We can talk about it in person."

"Has Lilin completed her homework?" the woman shifted the topic.

"She only managed to complete one painting from the homework you've assigned to her. She's been a bit temperamental lately, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't worried."

The woman assured her, "Don't worry. Lilin is a good child. She'll never disappoint you as she grows up. It's your husband's eldest daughter that you should be more careful of." Melinda was stunned for a moment and was taken aback when her best friend identified her main concern. She felt touched and comforted at the same time. "I know. I'll be careful."

"I told you that being a stepmother is no easy feat, but you insisted on marrying a man who constantly goes around killing people. And for what? Love? Sigh!"

"Weren't you the same back then?"

Both friends sighed simultaneously before hanging up.

Love truly was the bane of every woman's existence.

When the call ended, Melinda looked around and realized that neither Adam nor Sophia was around. She immediately hurried down in search of them.

Sophia and Adam returned to the dining table and found Zachary eating with Lilin. The seat 'Benjamin' occupied remained empty.

"Why are you alone with Lilin? Where's Benjamin?" Sophia inquired.

Zachary replied calmly, "He went to the bathroom."

He was hoping Sophia would not notice any discrepancy if Benjamin came back after a change of clothes.

Sophia found it a little odd because Zachary had always been quite concerned about Benjamin's safety. Before this, he insisted on accompanying the boy to the bathroom and only felt at ease if 'Benjamin' was accompanied by Lilin.

She wondered to herself, 'Why would he allow Benjamin to go to the bathroom on his own? Is he no longer worried that Benjamin might run off again?'

"Why does Benjamin need to use the bathroom so much today? Does his stomach hurt?" Sophia asked.

Zachary responded, "He probably drank too much juice."

Sophia looked at the empty glass of juice near 'Benjamin's' seat and found his explanation reasonable.

As they were in the midst of the conversation, Adam returned to the table with a sullen expression.

Chapter 1644

Zachary glanced at Adam's face and shifted the conversation subtly. "What happened? Weren't you able to meet the savior?"

Sophia had just taken her seat when she glared at Lilin. The little girl was eating without a care in the world, which only upset Sophia. "Who were we supposed to meet when no one was upstairs? The person had finished their meal and left! I think Lilin is just pranking us because she has nothing better to do."

Lilin was taken aback by that accusation. She frowned at Sophia's insinuations before glancing at Zachary.

Zachary's face seemed calm, but he was full of admiration for Lilin's craftiness. He realized that she had already cleared the VIP room in advance, which would explain why she could sit there so confidently! Sophia's accusation led Adam to suspect that Lilin was intentionally pranking them. He grumbled sternly, "When did you learn to play tricks on us?"

Lilin considered retorting but caught a hint from Zachary's gaze. After a moment's thought, she changed her response and said, "I was just trying to shake you up a little because you always side with Sophia! Is that so wrong?"

"You did it on purpose, then!" Adam frowned.

Lilin retorted, "Hmph. You only believe Sophia and you never believe me! Does it matter whether I'm telling the truth? You'll just treat it as a lie anyway!"

Before Adam could respond, Melinda overheard the conversation as she returned to the table and got angry. "Stand up, Lilin!"

Lilin stood up instinctively after hearing her mother's stern tone and turned cautiously. "Mom..."

Melinda found her daughter's actions shameful, yet she did not want to scold her in front of the others. She wanted to lecture her in private, so she said, "Come to the restroom with me."

Knowing that Melinda was genuinely furious, Lilin obediently followed her mother to the bathroom.

Given that Corinne had yet to bring the children out of the bathroom, Zachary's expression carried a hint of worry as he watched Melinda leave with Lilin.

Sophia noticed the concern in Zachary's expression, so she served him and said, "Don't worry about Lilin. Aunt Melinda has a gentle temper, and she won't be too harsh on her. Lilin needs to understand she was wrong for ruining the mood and making Dad upset."

Zachary narrowed his eyes and nodded before taking a sip from his glass. It was the same glass that Corinne had drunk from earlier, and he sipped the water from the exact spot Corinne's lips had been. Meanwhile, the passengers inside an extended MPV outside the restaurant were staring in shock at the table inside the restaurant. They all had a perfect view of the man in the wheelchair through the restaurant window.

Francine was the first to lose control. Tears began to well up after her initial shock subsided. She was prepared to jump out of the car and barge into the restaurant. "That's... That's Jeremy! He's alive!" Aaron and Sunny had to hold her back.

"Calm down!"

"This is no time to be acting rashly."

Corinne had earlier instructed them to foot the bill as quickly as possible and leave the restaurant discreetly, though she did not explain why. She also urged them to go out from the back door and avoid the main entrance.

Chapter 1645

After they exited the restaurant, they gathered in Lucas' car while waiting for Corinne to come back with Bryan. That was when they spotted Jeremy dining on the first floor.

Francine was anything but calm. She had resigned herself to the idea that her brother was gone forever, so seeing him in the flesh felt so surreal that she felt as if she had to touch him to truly believe his existence.

"You're all seeing it too, right? That's Jeremy! Jeremy is back! Let go of me! I'm going to ask him where he's been in the past three years!" Francine struggled to break free of their hold.

Xante adjusted her spectacles and spoke rationally, "Yes, we're seeing the same thing as you are. However, I suggest that you look at who's sitting across from him before you charge in blindly." Francine thus looked over and noticed a woman sitting opposite Jeremy. It was none other than Sophia, and her presence only served to intensify Francine's anger.

"Hmph! I knew it had to be Sophia! She hid my brother for three years! That b*tch! I'm going to go in and give her a piece of my mind!"

Though Annie was just as excited to see Jeremy again, she was fortunately more composed than Francine and tried to persuade her against it. "Calm down, Francine! Corinne probably sent us a message and told us to leave because she saw Uncle Jeremy, too! Let's wait for her to come out before figuring out our next move. Haven't you noticed he's sitting in a wheelchair instead of a regular chair?"

Francine noticed that from the beginning, and that was precisely the reason for her urgency earlier. She could not fathom how a healthy man would end up in a wheelchair. She was convinced that Sophia had done something to harm Jeremy just so Sophia could keep him to herself. No other woman was as cunning and evil as Sophia, and Francine was itching to get down from the car to confront Sophia. Lucas, however, intervened sternly, "That's enough! Quiet down!"

Francine went silent after sensing how serious Lucas was. She looked at him with tearful frustration and said, "My brother's survival might not matter to you because you were never on good terms with him, but it matters to me!"

Lucas responded coldly, "You're right. I don't care what happens to your brother, but I care about Corinne's happiness. Since we've located him, I won't allow him to disappear again. Right now, we need to wait for Corinne to come to us so we can understand the situation better. But if you insist on charging in and bringing chaos to this already chaotic situation, then be my guest."

Francine finally calmed down and wiped away her tears after hearing Lucas' statement. Though it was still difficult for her to control her emotions, she was at least able to stop herself from acting too rashly.

Upon observing Lucas' reaction, Xante curiously asked, "I get the feeling that you were long aware of Jeremy's reappearance, Mister Lucas."

Lucas remained silent and did not deny it.

Xante frowned and asked, "Does Corinne know about him, too?"

"Yes." Lucas nodded. "They've already met."

The revelation surprised everyone.

Annie asked in confusion, "If that's the case, why hasn't Uncle Jeremy gone home with Corinne? Could he have...fallen in love with Sophia?"

Chapter 1646

Annie's question weighed in everyone's minds.

Lucas frowned and revealed, "Jeremy lost his memory and has been under Sophia's control for years. He's being fed some unknown medication that led him to lose all ability in his leg muscles. Adam is willing to do anything for his daughter, so Jeremy is cautious about breaking free from Sophia's grasp unless and until he regains his physical strength."

That revelation made Francine clench her fists. Her desire to end Sophia's life intensified even more.

Back in the restaurant, Melinda held Lilin firmly and brought her to the restroom. "Why did you lie to me and your father today?" she sternly lectured.

Lilin had a complex mix of emotions as she had been put in a tight spot. She did not lie, and she was unable to absolve herself of the blame by revealing the truth either. After all, it would jeopardize Zachary's future with Corinne.

Melinda's anger grew upon seeing Lilin's silence. "I'm asking you a question, Lilin! Why aren't you answering me?"

Lilin pursed her lips and replied hesitantly, "Mom, I... I can't answer."

Melinda became increasingly disappointed. "What do you mean by that? If you lied, you need to explain why you did it. Haven't I always taught you to be an honest person? How could you lie and trick us?" Lilin felt that she had been misunderstood but struggled to explain everything to Melinda. "I... I didn't lie."

"Didn't you?" Melinda frowned. "Then why would you tell your father that you lied? Which is the truth and which is the lie, Lilin? Tell me right now!"

Lilin began to reply but stopped herself and opted to stay silent instead.

Melinda was unsure which statement to believe, knowing only that Lilin had learned a bad habit. She decided to teach her daughter a lesson and ordered sternly, "Stretch out your hand if you're not going to admit your mistake!"

Lilin could only do as told and extend her hand.

Melinda was always very gentle with Lilin and never raised a hand against her daughter. However, she felt that Lilin needed to be disciplined or she might get into the habit of lying. Melinda gritted her teeth and delivered a ruthless smack to Lilin's hand.

Lilin was never one to cry, so she gritted her teeth and endured the searing pain.

Her daughter's reluctance to admit her mistake prompted Melinda to raise her hand once more. However, her actions were abruptly halted when a voice intervened.

"Please don't hit her again, ma'am! Your daughter wasn't lying."

Melinda halted her actions mid-air and turned to see Corinne leading two children out of a toilet cubicle. She did not recognize Corinne, but she recognized the two children who were with Corinne. More accurately, she knew one of them as Benjamin. The other was an unknown child who was the spitting image of Benjamin.

'What is going on here?' she wondered in bewilderment.

Chapter 1647

Melinda felt that the young woman was very familiar, so she questioned Corinne, "Who are you?"

Corinne led the two children over and smiled at Melinda. "To be honest, I didn't want to interfere when you punish your daughter, but I just couldn't bring myself to let you continue when I heard that you wrongly accused your daughter of lying."

Corinne's timely appearance allowed Lilin to find some form of solace in her predicament. "Miss Savior...I... I didn't tell anyone about you or Zachary."

Corinne lowered her head and glanced gently at Lilin. "I know. You've done well, but you shouldn't get yourself into a misunderstanding with your mother because of us."

Melinda was puzzled, but she immediately deduced Corinne's identity when Lilin addressed Corinne as 'Miss Savior'. That young woman had to have been the savior that Lilin mentioned the same young woman who donated blood to save her life several years ago. However, she still did not understand why Corinne brought Benjamin to hide in the bathroom and why there were two 'Benjamins' with Corinne. "Who are you? Why is Benjamin here with you?" Melinda asked as she looked at Corinne.

Lilin pouted and tugged at the corner of Melinda's clothing. "She's the savior who donated her blood to save your life! She's also Zachary's first wife and Benjamin's biological mother! If Sophia hadn't forced Zachary to stay with her, Miss Savior here would've had a happy family! Can't you see she gave birth to twins?"

Lilin continued, "I didn't tell you the truth earlier because Zachary didn't want Dad and Sophia to know that he knows the truth. He's worried that Dad would do something bad to her and their children because of Sophia! Zachary has already been through so much, and so did your savior! Please don't tell Dad about this, okay?"

Melinda was left stunned by Lilin's revelation, and her gaze shifted to the two identical children beside Corinne. 'How could it have been such a coincidence?' she wondered. 'Who would've thought that the kind-hearted girl who saved me is the first wife of Sophia's beloved man?'

Though the situation was simply incredulous, Melinda chose to believe her daughter because of the two identical children standing before her. After she came to digest what was happening, she looked at Corinne awkwardly and did not know what to say.

After all, what could she say? Her husband and stepdaughter tore apart her savior's once-happy family.

Corinne remained calm. Though she harbored ill will toward Adam, she felt some sort of connection with his wife and could not bring herself to hate her. She led Benjamin

forward and said, "Please take Benjamin back for me, ma'am. I'm in no position to bring him there."

Melinda snapped to her senses and nodded cooperatively, even though she could not quite understand what was going on. "I... I will."

Corinne smiled and said, "Thank you. Sorry for dragging you into this, but could you please keep it a secret that you met me here? Like your daughter said, we don't want your husband and your stepdaughter to suspect anything for now. I'd like to save Benjamin and my husband from them."

"I'm sorry." Melinda frowned apologetically. "It's all because of my husband that you can't be with your husband and children. I don't know what else to say, but you can rest assured that I'm going to help you. I'm doing this because you saved my life even when you were pregnant."

Corinne nodded. "Thank you for your understanding."

Chapter 1648

After reassuring Corinne she would not relay what happened in the restroom to Adam and Sophia, Melinda prepared to go back to the table with Lilin and the real Benjamin.

As Melinda turned to look at Corinne before leaving, they locked gazes once more and felt that Corinne was somehow eerily familiar to her. Melinda had to stop for a moment and stare at Corinne for a moment.

Corinne was a little puzzled by Melinda's gaze and asked, "What's the matter, ma'am? Is something on my face?"

Melinda regained her composure and shook her head apologetically. "No. It's nothing," she said before leading the two children out of the bathroom.

The peculiar look in Melinda's eyes left Corinne feeling a little unnerved. It was their first time meeting each other, so she found it odd that Melinda would look at her as if she was someone Melinda knew.

As Melinda, Lilin, and Benjamin left the restroom together, Bryan hugged Corinne's thigh and said, "I'm so glad I can finally go home with you, Mommy!"

Corinne gazed down at Bryan and reached out to tap his little nose. "Are you sure you're that happy to go home with me? I thought you enjoyed your time with your father these past few days."

Bryan pursed his lips and said, "Hmm... Honestly, Mommy, I do like staying with Daddy, but it's really annoying that Sophia is watching him all the time."

"Does that mean you're only coming home with me because Sophia is annoying? Would you prefer to stay with Daddy instead of Mommy if Sophia wasn't around?"

Bryan shook his head vigorously. "No! You're more important than anything. I just wish that Sophia would just disappear so you can be with Daddy! Then I'll have Daddy and Mommy! We could all be together!" Corinne ruffled Bryan's hair and said, "Well, isn't that a lively imagination?"

Bryan hugged her tightly and said, "Stop pretending, Mommy. I know you like Daddy a lot too. You'll bring him back home to us even if I don't ask you to! Am I right, Mommy?" Corinne could not help but smile at perceptiveness.

She knew she could not leave with Bryan because the restroom door was too close to Sophia's table. There was a chance they would be spotted if they left too soon. Corinne felt that it would be safer to leave after Adam and his family finished their meal.

Back at the dining table, Melinda took her seat after returning with Lilin and Benjamin. Sophia looked carefully at Benjamin to see if there was anything out of the ordinary. She only shifted her attention to a teary Lilin after confirming that everything was in order.

Lilin's reddened eyes seemed to suggest she had cried and that Melinda must have reprimanded her severely. Sophia put on a somewhat sympathetic smile and said, "Have you finally realized your mistakes after Aunt Melinda taught you a lesson?"

Chapter 1649

Lilin intended to heed her mother's advice to speak less and avoid engaging in arguments with Sophia, but Sophia's persistent provocations became increasingly irritating. She glared at Sophia and curtly replied, "Mind your damn business!"

Sophia's expression stiffened, and she refrained from responding to Lilin. Instead, she pursed her lips and looked at Melinda, saying, "Is this how you raise your daughter? She's not afraid of you and doesn't even listen to you because you've been overly indulgent with her. I think it would be best to let Dad take charge of teaching her a lesson. It'll probably be more effective."

Melinda always tried to treat Sophia as her own daughter, hoping to be a positive influence on Sophia and encourage Sophia to accept her as a stepmother. However, her years of effort all proved unsuccessful. Sophia never treated her with respect and only pretended to be polite to her in front of Adam. Melinda could tolerate Sophia's attitude toward her, but she could not stand to see Sophia targeting Lilin continuously.

Time and again, Melinda attempted to foster a good relationship between the two half-sisters. She even made a point to teach Lilin to always respect her elder half-sister. In light of everything that happened, Melinda felt that there was no reason for her to waste her energy on that anymore. While she could accept that the half-sisters would never get along, she could not bear to see Lilin being wronged just after she had accused her daughter wrongly.

"What are you trying to say, Sophia? Will you only be satisfied if your father gives Lilin a beating?"

Sophia had grown accustomed to Melinda's politeness, and that sudden change in attitude took her by surprise. She replied innocently, "I didn't mean that! I'm just saying that Dad's punishment might be more effective on her because she isn't too soft on her. I never said I wanted him to hit her."

When Lilin saw that her mother had sided with her, she regained some confidence and rolled her eyes at Sophia. "Just admit it. You'll only be happy if Dad gives me a beating. You've been trying to drive a wedge in our relationship with Dad right from the beginning. You're wrong on one thing, though. I respect my mother very much, and I'll always listen to her even though I might not always agree with her. Don't try and threaten me using Dad's name. I'm not afraid of him!"

Sophia feigned exasperation and said, "Do you have to think so poorly of me, Lilin? I wonder who taught you to assume such negative things about other people at such a young age." She tried to imply that someone was secretly influencing Lilin's perception of her, and the only adult in Lilin's life who could do that was Melinda.

Melinda's expression sank as she picked up on the insinuation. She lost her patience and replied sternly, "I love your father, and I've always tried to treat you as my own daughter because of that. It's a shame you've never been willing to at least try and accept me. Frankly, I don't blame you for that because I know I can never be a replacement for your mother."

She then continued, "That being said, I treat you with a lot of respect. We might not be able to have a mother-daughter relationship with each other, but I still hope we can at least get along as a family. It's unfortunate that you've shown a complete lack of willingness to extend the same courtesy to myself and Lilin. All you do is hint at your father that Lilin and I are terrible people. I genuinely don't understand what we've done to deserve this."

Finally, Melinda said, "I'm your stepmother, not a homewrecker who destroyed your family. I met your father after your mother passed away, and Lilin's presence doesn't change the fact that you'll inherit all your father's assets. Why do you hate us so much?"

Chapter 1650

Sophia frowned. "What are you talking about, Aunt Melinda? When have I hated you and Lilin? Did you just make that up out of thin air? You make it sound like it's all sunshine and roses when you say you treated me like your daughter for the sake of my father. If that's how you treat your daughter, why didn't you make the same ludicrous assumptions about Lilin?"

Sophia then twisted her words. "I suggested out of the goodness of my heart that you should raise Lilin well while she's still young. She must be stopped from developing bad habits and an unruly temper. Does this translate to me hating you? If I genuinely hated you, I wouldn't be sitting here eating with you! Dad can't force me to sit through all this!"

Melinda frowned when she saw Sophia fighting back tears. Though she knew Sophia was just pretending to cry, she chose to remain silent as it might seem too confrontational, especially with her status as Sophia's elder.

Lilin, on the other hand, had no reservations at all. She had witnessed Sophia bullying her mother repeatedly from a young age, and her patience was already wearing thin. She might hate crying, but she could still put on an act if she wanted!

Before long, Lilin broke into tears, too. "There's no end to it, is there, Sophia? Why are you crying when none of what my mom said was out of line? I'm the one who should be

crying! You kept going on about how my mom didn't raise me well, that I have a bad temper and picked up bad habits. Your words hurt me!"

Turning the tables on Sophia proved to be an effective strategy. When Sophia saw that Lilin's sobs drowned out her own, she suddenly found it difficult for her to continue crying. She shot a disdainful glare at Lilin and turned to face a sour-faced Adam with tearful eyes. "Did you see that, Dad? Lilin and Aunt Melinda misunderstood me again..."

Adam frowned at Sophia and glanced sternly toward Lilin. "Stop crying right this instant! We're in a restaurant. You'll be a nuisance to the other patrons if you keep crying!"

Lilin was surprised by her father's sternness and cried even louder as a result.

Frustrated, Adam muttered, "You're such a "

"Such a what?" Melinda interrupted, casting aside her usual gentle demeanor. "Do you need to raise your voice with Lilin?"

Melinda rarely lost her temper like that, which left Adam somewhat stunned. "Why are you getting angry with me? I barely said anything to her! Is it wrong for me to scold her? Lilin is becoming more and more unruly because you've been too indulgent with her!"

Melinda retorted, "You're out of line!"

Adam's eyes widened. He thought he misheard Melinda. "What did you say? Have you lost your mind today?"

Melinda was at the height of her irritation and snapped back, "It's not just today. I must've lost my mind since the day I chose to marry you!"

"Enough!" Adam roared. "Stop making a scene!"