

My Beloved Has Risen from Death's Embrace Novel

CHAPTER 161

Posted by **AdminJ**, 1660 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

"Of course not!" Xanthea extended her invitation, "How about I treat you to lunch today? I've already made a reservation."

"Sounds good," he agreed with a smile, stunning April, who stood nearby.

Just moments before, she had eagerly introduced herself to him and asked for his assistance in rehearsal and to join her for lunch, only to be refused. Now, he was going out of his way to help Xanthea, pulling out the chair, explaining the nuances of action scenes, and even accepting her lunch invitation. This blatant favoritism made her feel like a fool!

Why though? Just because Xanthea was the lead actress?

anyone.

Benjamin had worked with numerous top-tier celebrities and never showed special treatment to them. There were even rumors he had snubbed a Best Actress. So why was he now showing such favoritism towards Xanthea, a newcomer?

April's gaze slowly shifted to Xanthea's striking beauty.

"Actually, I have a gift for you!"

As if suddenly remembering, Xanthea pulled a light coffee-colored gift box from her bag and pushed it towards him.

"A gift?" Benjamin looked surprised.

"Yes, I really liked the crystal ball you gave me last time, so I picked out something you might like as well; consider it as a belated welcome gift. Go ahead, open it."

A gift? Movie King had given her a gift!

Those familiar with Benjamin knew he never had personal dealings with co-stars, let alone any intimate interactions, like exchanging gifts.

It seemed like Xanthea was exactly as Isabella had described, someone wild! Clutching her hands, April turned and walked away to a secluded spot and quietly called Isabella.

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From the other end, amidst noise, Isabella's impatient voice came through, "Hello? Is there anything you want to say? Make it quick; I'm busy!"

"Isabella, you asked me to keep an eye on Xanthea in the crew, and I've definitely noticed something off about her!"

"Oh?"

Upon hearing Xanthea's name, Isabella, losing interest in the photo shoot for the magazine, stepped aside to inquire more curiously, "Off? What do you mean?"

"She and Benjamin just met, and he's already treating her really well, helping her with acting, inviting her to lunch, and I heard he even gave her a gift.

You've worked with Benjamin before and know he never gets **this** close to colleagues. There's got to be something fishy going on!"

"Ugh." Isabella rolled her eyes dismissively, "I thought you'd discovered something big, acting so agitated. It's no big deal; Xanthea just has a way of making men fall at her feet, willingly doing things for her."

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She had seen it all before, and she had no choice but to acknowledge the truth.

After all, just that face alone could attract thousands of followers; even the company's CEO had fallen for her, not to mention Benjamin.

April tried to subtly convey her thoughts, but they were bluntly exposed by her friend, leaving her speechless.

But she didn't believe it was the Movie King who initiated things. Having been in the entertainment industry for years, he had seen all types of women. Could he really fall for Xanthea just because she was beautiful? Surely, Xanthea must have used some tricks to seduce him!

"Enough!" Isabella said; she was clearly annoyed as she ended the call. "I asked you to keep an eye on Xanthea to see if she's slacking or acting like a diva and to gather dirt on her, not to report on how popular she is with the boys!"

April looked over, only to see Benjamin opening a gift **box**; his eyes revealed a captivating smile, one she hadn't seen even through a screen, and it made her eyes burn with jealousy

They hadn't even started working together, and things were already heating up. At this rate, their relationship would surely progress quickly!

With so many celebrities and big names admiring the Movie King, who usually ignored them, why should Xanthea, a mere newcomer, get him?

If their relationship were exposed now, wouldn't millions of fans and netizens tear Xanthea apart?

Perhaps, this could nip the budding threat in the cradle.

Thinking of this, she took out her camera and captured a moment of them exchanging meaningful glances.

"Scene three, take one—mall shootout, action!"

The clapperboard sounded, and Xanthea, dressed in a sleek and black outfit, descended smoothly from the top of the building, like a ray of dawn slicing through the long night.

Gangsters, who were filled the various floors of the mall, fired at her as soon as they spotted her. Amid the hail of bullets and the smoke of gunfire, she moved like a graceful butterfly, dodging and weaving as she pulled out a flashbang and a row of chillingly sharp silver needles from her utility belt.

With a fierce burst of white light that temporarily blinded and deafened everyone, Phoenix took the opportunity to scatter the silver needles.

Her movements were agile and precise, and her fallen cap revealed a cascade of beautiful hair and an astonishingly gorgeous face.

The camera loomed in for a close-up of her eyes—mischievous yet seductive, an intricate mix of emotions; yet upon closer inspection, they were utterly devoid of warmth.

She released the last two needles, knocking down her adversaries.

"Cut"

Kevin's voice rang out, and everyone on set came back to reality; they were all amazed and

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complimentary of the action scene,

Xanthea was both stunning and fierce!

Her perfect proportions, her breathtaking beauty visible from every angle, and her sharp movements combined with that playful yet seductive gaze, were a visual and emotional spectacle that captivated everyone present.

“Fantastic, just fantastic!”

Kevin excitedly stood up from behind the camera to applaud her. “Xan, I thought your first action scene might be challenging, but you nailed it in one take, flawlessly. Absolutely incredible!”

“Thank you for the compliment, Director!”

Xanthea unhooked her harness, transitioning from the fierce and enigmatic Phoenix back to her lively and sunny self; such transformation caused Benjamin, who was still lost in the scene, to momentarily daze before he too broke into a smile; his eyes were brimming with deep affection as he watched her.

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“**She’s** just stunning.”

“Xan!”

“Benjamin?”

Xanthea heard his call and glanced at the time. It was almost lunchtime.

“Are you done shooting? Let’s grab some lunch.”

“Sure, I’ve been waiting for you.”

Benjamin noticed the slight sweat on her forehead and offered her a handkerchief, "Tired? Wipe your

sweat."

"No,

I've got

my own."

Xanthea pulled out her handkerchief, and carelessly wiped her face. Benjamin caught a glimpse of the logo on it was that a men's handkerchief?

"Xan, I saw your performance just now, unexpectedly brilliant. I didn't realize you were such a natural talent. I've been in the industry for ages and haven't seen many like you. I bet this show will be a hit once it airs!"

If it were anything else, Xanthea might have been modest, but Realm of Illusions was not just going to be a hit—it was going to be a sensation, a household name!

"You have a good eye!"

She smiled and gave him a thumbs-up. Benjamin laughed.

They were about to get into the car when Xanthea's phone rang.

She looked at the screen at an unfamiliar number that somehow seemed vaguely familiar. "Excuse me, I need to take this call.

"Go ahead."

"Hello?"

Xanthea stepped aside, and as soon as the call connected, she heard Cedric's voice, "Ms. Nightshade, this is Cedric."

So it was him!

She remembered his business card, so that's why the number looked familiar

"Cedric? How did you get my cell number?"

"Ms. Nightshade, let's not focus on that. I have something to discuss with you." Cedric hesitated, then resolved, "Are you free for lunch today? Can we meet?"

Xanthea glanced at Beramin and shook her head, "I'm booked for lunch, and I have scenes to shoot in the afternoon. Whatever it is, you can tell me over the phone."

"It's not something I can explain quickly over the phone."

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"Then text me, or maybe we can meet another day?"

"No!" Cedric immediately refused, sounding quite anxious, "Ms. Nightshade, can't you spare even a little time today? It's about the President."

"Orion?"

Raising her eyebrows, Xanthea paused for a moment.

Cedric thought she would refuse outright or hang up when she heard 'President. Just as he was about to add that it was important, he heard her say, "Alright, send me the address. I'll come now."

Now?

He paused, looking surprised. Hadn't Ms. Nightshade said she was already booked?

Xanthea ended the call and, looking slightly embarrassed, walked back to Benjamin. "Something came up. and need to step out for a bit. Looks like I can't join you for lunch, so sorry for bailing on you again." "Is it something important?"

"Mhm," Xanthea nodded, "very important of disappointment, Benjamin smiled generously, "If it's important, you should go take care of it. Don't

take care of it. Don't worry about me."

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Xanthea apologized profusely, "I'm so sorry, how about I send you the diner's address and you can go with Jason?"

"No need."

Ben shook his head, "If it's not with you, it's not the same. I'll just grab something quick at the studio. But remember, you owe me one now. Don't forget to make it up to me next time."

"Absolutely!" Xanthea laughed, "I've got to run now."

"Goodbye."

Ben watched her retreating figure; his smile slowly faded as she walked away.

She had been on the phone just now, and it seemed like she said Orion?

Orion Lockwood, chairman of the Twin Towers and the elusive power behind Starlight Media, owned an extensive business empire that spread across the country and he was also the youngest tycoon listed in the international Forbes rankings.

The last time they planned to have lunch, Xanthea left midway, supposedly to meet him, and that fancy LANDSCAPE handkerchief she carried matched his style too,

Jason watched Xanthea's hurried departure and wondered aloud, "Ben, Ms. Nightshade has stood you up twice now. What or who could possibly be more important than you?"

In the industry, countless celebrities lined up to dine with Ben, only to be declined. Yet, he had warmly invited her twice and both times she had declined the invitations!

If it weren't for Ben's feelings for her, Jason would think she was incredibly ungrateful!

Ben turned away, "A formidable competitor."

A formidable competitor?

Ben was the heir to the Jones family fortune, the sole successor of the Jones Group, a celebrated actor who had swept all major awards in the entertainment industry, and had millions of followers on Twitter. Who could possibly rival him?

At the Twin Towers café.

“Ms. Nightshade, over here!”

Cedric, sitting by the window, saw Xanthea and quickly stood to wave her over.

Xanthea scanned the café, making sure he was alone, then asked, “If we’re meeting at your company’s building, why isn’t Orion here?”

“Ms. Nightshade, please, have some coffee first.”

Cedric pushed a cappuccino towards her and sighed after a few seconds.

“The boss is sick.”

“What?” Xanthea paused while setting down her purse, “Sick?”

“Yes, he’s been running a fever for three days now, a severe one, and he hasn’t told anyone or taken any

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medication. He’s been busier than ever at work, acting like a tireless robot. Sometimes, he might go an entire day without eating, and he never sleeps regularly.”

“Last night, around three in the morning, he suddenly called me to bring some documents over. When I arrived, I discovered he had been working all night. Out of curiosity, I wanted to see when he would leave for home. I saw his office light stay on until dawn. I don’t even know if he slept at all.”

“Why would he do that?” Xanthea was stunned, “Is the Lockwood Group in trouble?”

“No, the operations are running smoothly.”

“Then he must be out of his mind!” she raised her voice unconsciously, “He had such a high fever, yet he did not take medication, nor take rest, and still worked like crazy; does he not want to live?!”

Looking at her intensely concerned expression, Cedric was somewhat puzzled, “Ms. Nightshade, do you care about the boss too?”

Cedric shook his head as if he had asked a foolish question.

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Since returning from Everglade, the CEO had become like this. What else could be the reason?

He had done everything possible to make Ms. Nightshade happy, and to keep her by his side for even a second longer. He perfected every detail concerning her.

But what about Ms. Nightshade? A mere word from Matthew had whisked her away, and when she left, she didn't even give the CEO a glance or a goodbye.

The CEO must have been heartbroken, and it was taking a toll on his health. He buried himself in relentless work to numb the pain,

At first, he thought if the CEO got hit hard by this, letting go of Ms. Nightshade might actually be a good thing.

Everything was off.

But as days passed, he realized something

The CEO's relentless work, despite his illness, wasn't about forgetting Ms. Nightshade, it seemed more like he was driving himself to an early grave.

He had severely underestimated Ms. Nightshade's place in the CEO's heart.

At some point, Ms. Nightshade had moved from being the CEO's long-time secret crush to his lifeline.

Now that the CEO was 'sick', he might truly be in danger without her, which is why he had decided to seek

her out today.

"Does it matter if I care about him? What matters is why he's destroying his health like this. As his assistant, why aren't you encouraging him to rest and take his medication? If your words don't work, you could at least inform his family or friends!"

"It's no use."

Cedric shook his head, **and** Xanthea looked puzzled, “No use?”

“Ms. Nightshade.”

Cedric looked up at her, and grabbed the briefcase beside him, “Are you still upset about that day at the Realm of Illusions audition when the CEO rejected you on the spot?”

Xanthea frowned, unsure why he suddenly brought this up.

Cedric continued, “Do you know why the Realm of Illusions script ended up with Oli-hee Média?”

“Yes, Orion told me. The board didn’t approve the project’s proposal and risk assessment, so he sold it to my uncle for double the price. My uncle knew how much I loved the script, so he bought it.”

“Is that what the CEO told you?” Cedric chuckled, “Ms. Nightshade, you didn’t believe that, did you?”

Xanthea’s frown deepened, “What do you mean?”

“The CEO holds 90% of the shares in the Lockwood Group and has absolute authority in the boardroom. It’s not just about a script; even the multi-billion-dollar acquisition case that stirred up last year was under his direct command. No one dares to speak against him, nor question his decisions.”

As he spoke, he pulled out a document from his briefcase and placed it in front of her.

“The Realm of Illusions script was transferred to Oli hea Media for free by the CEO, and I handled it

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myself, so I kept a copy of the contract.”

“What?”

Xanthea looked at him in disbelief; then she picked up the contract from the table and slowly flipped through it. The deeper she read, the more her doubts grew.

The script was transferred for free to Oli–hea Media by Orion? How could that be? And why? But it was there in black and white, complete with the seals of Starlight Media and Oli–hea Media.

“My uncle clearly said he bought it from Orion for two million dollars, and Orion confirmed it. How can this be?”

Cedric watched the disbelief in her eyes, “Ms. Nightshade, if you still don’t believe it, you can call Mr. -Lopez.”

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Xanthea immediately pulled out her phone and dialed Oliver’s **number**.

“Hello? Xan, about the shoot today with Director Smith, he-”

“Uncle!” Xanthea cut him off with an urgent voice. “Was the rights to ‘Realm of Illusions’ transferred to you by Orion for free?”

Oliver paused for a few seconds before slowly responding. “You found it out?”

Xanthea’s pupils constricted momentarily.

It was true, then. The contract was real.

“Why, Uncle?”

“Xan, I told you the other day; Mr. Lockwood really appreciated your performance. The mishap during the audition was just a misunderstanding, but you were too upset to listen or forgive him. So Mr. Lockwood proposed using the guise of a ‘high–value transfer to give ‘Realm of Illusions’ back to you, and I agreed.

Don’t be mad at me for deceiving you, sweetie. I knew that deep down you still wanted that script. And honestly, if Mr. Lockwood had just handed ‘Realm of Illusions’ over to you right then, would you **have** accepted it?

No, she wouldn’t have.

She had been too blinded by anger. If one second he had told her she was out, and the next he tried to hand her 'Realm of Illusions', she would have thought it was another trick.

"So, you see Mr. Lockwood actually understands you quite well, even better than I do, and I think he's **been** good to you, especially since that time on The Masked Singer. Maybe it's because you helped him out during the Gemstone Gala.

Anyway, now that the misunderstanding is cleared up, I feel a weight has been lifted off my shoulders

otherwise I'd always feel indebted to him."

Oliver rambled on, but Xanthea couldn't focus on his words; she fixed her gaze on Cedric with confusion, "If he intended to **give** me the script from the beginning, why did he eliminate me at the audition?"

"Ms. Nightshade, did you forget what happened that day?"

"During the final part of your obstacle course performance, your motorcycle suddenly malfunctioned and veered off the track, crashing into a barrier and causing an explosion. It was such a commotion that everyone thought you were gone, that you had died." His voice grew intense, "Only Mr. Lockwood didn't think twice before running into the flames, but when he got there, all he saw was ashes, not even a trace of you, Ms. Nightshade."

At that moment.

"His world collapsed."

"I've never seen such an expression on his face."

After he finished, Xanthea's mind quickly flashed back to the day she surfaced from the water, and saw Orion at the shore.

He stood by the lakeside, staring at the burnt-out motorcycle at the end of the track; his eyes remained

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void and lifeless, until he heard the sound of water and turned to see her.

When he saw her, he smiled the way he did beside her gravestone in the cemetery, which was so unreal and desperate. He plunged into the lake and held her so tightly that she almost couldn't breathe; he cried out "Xan" instead of the usual distant "Ms. Nightshade."

"The president was terrified, Xan. 'Realm of Illusions' contains many dangerous scenes and stunts. He feared that you'd encounter another accident like during the audition, which is why he had to eliminate you. But seeing you upset afterwards, he still went out of his way to ensure the script reached you, and he even arranged for the top stunt and safety coordinators in the industry for your production."

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It wasn't that he had chosen Isabella over her, but that he was concerned about her safety.

No wonder, no wonder he immediately applied ointment to her wounds as soon as they left the beach, no wonder he had paid such a high price to obtain the "Realm of Illusions" but sold it to her uncle for just \$2 million.

All this time, she had misunderstood him.

Cedric handed her a tablet and played a video for her.

"And that day when he 'kidnapped' you to Everglade, it wasn't because he didn't want to let you out of the car, but rather he was afraid that if you got out abruptly, you might run into those crazy obsessed fans again.

This is the surveillance footage from Glory Avenue that he had someone pull up. It recorded the *whole* ordeal with the fans causing trouble. The police have already identified them and dealt with them accordingly. Originally, they were supposed to apologize publicly to you and the whole community online, but since they are minors, we just recorded this video instead."

Watching one fan after another bowing sincerely in apology on the video, Xanthea felt, a wave of regret and remorse flood her heart.

All this time, without her knowing, Orion had done so much for her, just like in a past life.

But what about her?

Because of the audition, she had misunderstood him, disliked him, smashed his medication bottle, called him hypocritical and a pretender, **and** in every meeting afterwards, she hadn't shown him any kindness.

Cedric asked, "Ms. Nightshade, after seeing all this, do you still resent Mr. Lockwood?"

Xanthea shook her head; her amber eyes misted with warm tears.

No, not at all.

She had never truly resented him; she was just angry.

He had avenged her enemies, shielded her from thugs, and pulled her from the depths of the lake; how could she possibly resent him?

It was just that she had been betrayed by someone she dearly loved in a past life, which left a shadow over her heart; It made her like a startled bird, always afraid that the friends she valued and trusted most might suddenly turn against her, afraid that she was once again engaging in a one-sided affection.

But Orion was nothing like them..

With so many discrepancies and contradictions in front of her, why did she still doubt, still not believe, and still do so many things that hurt him!

How could she be so foolish that she was unable to see clearly in a past life and still not seeing clearly in this life, and treated her benefactor like an enemy!

Xanthea clenched her fists in regret, so much so that her nails dug into her skin.

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"There's one more thing I haven't told you," Cedric said, watching her.

"That night at Marlowe Manor when you passed out outside, it was Mr. Lockwood who carried you back."

"He stayed by your side all night. At dawn, he even went to make breakfast for you, knowing you like sweet things. He managed to get some Everglade blueberries, and while preparing, he injured his hands. But,

Nightshade, you didn't even glance at it before leaving with Matthew. On the way back to the city, Mr. Lockwood fell ill."

"What?!"

Xanthea stared at him in shock.

So, he was sick because of her?

She knew how terrible she could be when drunk; taking care of her all night without a wink of sleep, and still making breakfast at dawn, was he crazy?

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Xanthea thought back to that morning at Marlowe Manor, when everyone was trying their best to convince her to stay, but she didn't really pay attention to their pleas, because her mind was consumed with her plan for revenge; Why hadn't she stayed?

Perhaps if she had, she might have noticed something was off with him, might have been able to prevent this illness from taking hold.

"Ms. Nightshade, the reason I'm bringing this up today is because I believe you hold a very important place in the CEO's heart. Could you perhaps try to talk some sense into him? Tomorrow, he's scheduled to travel to Veridian for three months. It's a long and grueling trip, and I'm really worried his health won't hold

up."

"What!"

Xanthea stood up abruptly, "He's going abroad?!"

With his current health, was this a suicide mission?

"Where is he now? I need to find him!"

"I don't know."

Cedric shook his head, "The boss has been drowning in work these past few days, barely stopping for a break. He just drove off alone not long ago, didn't even let me accompany him, so I had a moment to meet with you, Ms. Nightshade."

"Can't you reach his phone?"

"It's turned off. Maybe he wanted some time alone, or perhaps he was just too exhausted and needed to rest."

But that didn't seem likely.

Cedric remembered the look on Orion's face as he left; he was like an addict who has been desperately trying to control and numb himself, finally breaking down and recklessly seeking out his addiction.

It was that look that had frightened him into reaching out to Ms. Nightshade.

"Rest?" Xanthea pressed, "Where does he usually stay at night then?"

"He's been at Sunset Hills Estates the last couple of nights, and he stayed in his office last night; today it's anyone's guess. He might go back to the old family home, to his private villa, or to an apartment near the office. The boss has too many properties really, but there's a good chance he might return to Sunset Hills Estates.

Ever since Olihea Media announced that you would be playing Phoenix, he's pretty much been living at Sunset Hills Estates."

Sunset Hills Estates? At 3001?

Wasn't that right next door to the place she rented in the western areas of Crestwood?

Since the last time she moved, she hadn't stayed there, but when her underwear ended up on his balcony, she had indeed seen him there.

"Ms. Nightshade, you needn't worry too much. The boss should be back soon, and once he is, I'll make

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sure to get the full story and let you know."

"Alright!"

“Oh, and,” Cedric started, packing up his briefcase with a pleading look, “the boss has been doing all these things quietly because he doesn’t want to burden you, Ms. Nightshade. Could you please keep our meeting today, including all that we’ve discussed, just between us?”

“Sure.” Xanthea nodded, “Cedric, I really appreciate this.”

In her past life, she didn’t discover all that Orion had done for her until her dying day. Before that, he was just a stranger to her. This time, if it weren’t for Cedric sharing this, they might still be less than strangers.

“Then, I’ll leave the matter of stopping the boss from his trip in your hands, Ms. Nightshade. It’s getting late, and I should head back now!”

Cedric started to gather his things and as he stood up, he was stopped by Xanthea’s call, “Wait!”

“Ms. Nightshade, is there anything else?”

“I want to know, does Orion have any particular hobbies or things he really likes?”

“You.”

“What?”

Cedric almost blurted it reflexively, then stuttered after realizing what he said, “You, uh, figure it out yourself.”

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Xanthea looked perplexed. “Why didn’t **you** just tell me directly?”

“Although I’ve known him for a while, we haven’t spent much time together. He always seems so aloof and indifferent, like he’s not really interested in anything. I can’t figure out what he likes. Since you’re his

assistant, you must know everything about him!”

The CEO indeed didn’t seem to have any particular interests, except for one person, whom he treasured obsessively.

Perhaps, loving her had exhausted all his energy.

The CEO always keeps his personal feelings separate from work, so I don't know much. But rather than what he likes, I think what he needs is more important. Given his current condition, what he really needs is probably sleep. Only proper rest can help him recover faster."

"Sleep?" Xanthea was puzzled. "Is there anything I can do? I mean, I can't just join him in bed, can I?"

"Actually, you can!"

Cedric suddenly had his eyes light up at the suggestion, which confused Xanthea.

"No, Ms. Nightshade, don't get me wrong. I just remembered the last time on the plane, you fell asleep next to him, and soon after, he fell asleep too."

"It's really amazing. The CEO has had severe insomnia, and he can't sleep well in unfamiliar environments or if there are strangers around. But somehow, he falls asleep when he sees you. It's like magic."

Xanthea was stunned. Was her presence really that soothing?

At the Glory Building, the set of "Realm of Illusions."

In the editing room, Kevin was swiftly reviewing the footage from the morning's shoot. When it was the turn of Phoenix—Xanthea's character—he slowed down the playback, admiring every expression and movement she made. Suddenly, a tall shadow fell across the large monitor, accompanied by barely audible, steady footsteps.

Feeling curious, Kevin turned around and immediately smiled upon seeing the man. "Ah, Mr. Lockwood? What brings you here today?"

The man stood at the doorway, having his gaze intensely fixed on the girl on the screen, he was seemingly lost in thought.

Kevin noticed his interest and proudly said, "Mr. Lockwood, you really have an eye for talent! Xanthea is a natural at playing Phoenix. I was worried that her vibrant personality and delicate appearance might not suit the role. But in front of the camera, she transforms completely, bringing the character to life impressively. For her first role, her performance is extraordinary. She's destined for great things." Orion watched the girl on the screen, who looked both alluring **and** commanding, so different from her usual self. His hand clenched slightly, as if trying to grasp something just out of reach,

Though she was right there, just a screen away, she seemed more distant than ever—so far that not even her shadow seemed willing to stay in his world.

“Where’s Xanthea?”

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His voice was low and husky. Kevin looked disappointed. “Oh, Mr. Lockwood, you came to see Xan? Unlucky timing. She just took the afternoon off, didn’t say where she was going, just mentioned it was something important. She probably won’t be back today.”

Orion had his eyes narrowed, hiding a bitter smirk.

“Send me that video segment.”

“Sure, right away!”

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Sunset Hills Estates, 3002

In the kitchen, Xanthea gently lifted the lid off the slow cooker, and a rich, tantalizing aroma immediately filled the air. Scooping up a spoonful of soup, she tasted it and smiled contentedly, “Mmm, delicious!”

Her cooking mentor was right—there are no bad dishes, only inattentive cooks.

This was definitely the best soup she had ever made!

Ding-

A text message alert sounded. She checked her phone and saw a message from Cedric

.

[Ms. Nightshade, Mr. Lockwood is coming back to Sunset Hills Estates tonight.]

Orion was coming here?

Perfect, she guessed right!

A few minutes later, Xanthea, carrying a pot of soup, stood in front of 3001 and gathered her courage ring the doorbell.

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She had been misunderstanding him, resenting him, and had done many things that hurt him, even causing him to fall ill. He must despise her now. No matter what he said, even if it was harsh or hurtful, as long as he forgave her, she didn't mind.

*Ding Dong-

Ding Dong-

Ding Dong+

The doorbell rang three times. Just as Xanthea thought he might not have returned yet, the door clicked open.

“Orion, you're back!”

As soon as Xanthea saw him, a radiant smile bloomed on her beautiful face, and her eyes sparkled with light.

Orion opened the door, only to be unexpectedly greeted by the beaming girl outside. A spark ignited in his somber eyes, lighting up the gloom that had shadowed them for days.

“I made you a pot of...”

Xanthea started, holding up the soup enticingly, but before she could finish, the door slammed shut.

The slamming door harshly swept away her bright smile, and made her hair flutter with the force. She stood frozen, then panic and confusion flashed through her eyes.

It was over!!

Orion was really **angry**, didn't even want to see her!

“Orion? Orion!”

She freed her hands and was about to knock on his door.

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The next second, the door opened again, but this time only a narrow crack, barely revealing half of his tall, imposing figure and his face covered with a white mask.

“Ms. Nightshade, is there something you need?”

Xanthea was lost for words. He closed the door just to put on a mask?

“Yes!”

She **nodded** solemnly, not yet disclosing her concern, but her nimble body swiftly squeezed through the narrow door gap, slipping under his arm.

It was better to get inside first, so as to avoid being shut out again!

She entered like a lively ray of sunshine, radiant and overwhelming, dispelling the chill and dazzlingly brightening the room.

Once inside, Xanthea set down the slow cooker, lifted the lid, and the rich, hearty aroma of the soup filled the room. She ladled a full bowl of soup, placed it on the table, and looked up at him with great anticipation.

“Orion, this is the soup I painstakingly researched all afternoon. I tried several methods and spent nearly four hours perfecting it. Come taste it and see if it suits your palate!”

Orion looked at her, who had her lips curved, and had dimples shallow; her eyes and brows were all adorned with bright smiles, just like that day at Lakeside Manor when she playfully tugged at his clothes asking to be picked up. Confusion swirled in his dim eyes—was the fever making him hallucinate?

He tightened his grip on the metal door handle until his veins stood out and his knuckles turned pale; his eyes narrowed as he focused intently on her.