

Chapter 65 Different Treatments

"Kimberly, I've missed you so much!"

A warm feeling spread through Kimberly's chest as she embraced the young girl clinging to her. She gently patted her back, smiling. "I've missed you too."

The girl embracing Kimberly was Gia Holden, the only daughter of Christian. Gia had recently turned eighteen, five years Kimberly's junior. Known for her vibrant and outgoing nature, Gia had always looked up to Kimberly with unwavering admiration.

Gia finally released Kimberly but kept her arms looped around the latter's neck, her bright eyes gleaming as she pouted. "You've finally decided to come back. It's been over a year since I last saw you! Ever since you joined the Walsh family, it's been nearly impossible to see you."

Gia had been studying away from home, only returning to Javille for her summer and winter breaks. She had attempted to meet up with Kimberly several times, but unforeseen circumstances had always led Kimberly to cancel, leaving Gia feeling neglected and upset.

Kimberly felt a pang of guilt towards her younger cousin. With an apologetic smile, she lightly pinched Gia's cheek, her tone heartfelt, saying, "I'm sorry, Gia. That was my fault. From now on, whenever you're back, I'll make sure I'm here for you."

"Really?"

Hope sparkled in Gia's eyes, her smile widening. "If you're serious, then I'll apply to a university right here in Javille. We can hang out all the time!"

Kimberly paused, momentarily surprised, then remembered it was Gia's year to choose a university. Her expression softened, her gaze earnest as she responded, "Alright, I promise I won't let you down this time."

"That's wonderful!" Gia burst out joyfully.

She held Kimberly's face in her hands and planted a boisterous kiss on her cheek before releasing her, then linked arms with her mother, Letitia

Holden. Joy was written all over Gia's face.

"Mom, I've decided. I'm going to study here in Javille. I want to stay close to Kimberly!"

"You silly girl."

Letitia gave her daughter a playful glare, her smile warm as she turned to Kimberly. "We were just talking about which university Gia should attend before you got here. She claimed Javille was too dull and was adamant about going to a university in the far north, to someplace cold and remote.

Back in the day, that's where people were sent into exile! Her father and I were against it, but she wouldn't heed our advice. It's great that you're back. Gia has always taken your advice to heart. See? A single suggestion from you, and she's already reconsidering."

Gia made a face. "Mom! Why do you have to spill the beans the moment Kimberly arrives? I'm choosing to stay because I want to be near her!"

"So, you're keen to stay close to Kimberly but not your own parents, are you?"

Observing the playful exchange between mother and daughter, Kimberly experienced mixed feelings. She smiled, but her heart throbbed with sadness.

Back when her own parents were alive, Kimberly had been much like Gia, free-spirited and spontaneous. Her parents had always been supportive, never stifling her enthusiasm and lavishing her with unconditional love, much like Gia's parents were doing now.

Kimberly felt a pang of envy. At least Gia still had her parents with her.

As laughter filled the air, others observed from the sidelines, lost in thought. Christian wore a soft smile. Meanwhile, William and his wife, Theodosia, exchanged knowing glances, their strained smiles concealing their discomfort.

"Mom."

Interrupting the couple's silent communication, a boy with a rebellious look sat down next to them, pulling at his mother's sleeve. His eyes brimming with curiosity, he inquired, "Is she my older cousin?"

Theodosia paused, then nodded at her son with a smile. "Yes, that's your cousin Kimberly. Why don't you go say hello, Colin?"

The boy appeared somewhat reserved, pressing his lips together before he stood up and walked over to Kimberly. His eyes sparkled as he gazed up at her.

It's natural to be attracted to beauty, and Colin, who had just returned from overseas, had never encountered such a stunning woman before. Realizing she was his cousin, he felt a surge of excitement.

"It's great to meet you, Kimberly. I'm Colin Holden."

Kimberly shifted her attention to Colin standing beside her. Her response to him, unlike the affectionate manner she had with Gia, was markedly cool and detached. "Hi, Colin," she replied briskly.

After this brief greeting, Kimberly quickly refocused on her conversation with Gia.

She didn't dwell on the disparity in her reactions. Remembering how Colin's parents had once conspired with Declan to betray the Holden Group in her past life, including corporate espionage, Kimberly found it impossible to feel any warmth towards Colin.

The role of Colin's parents in the downfall of the Holden Group was still a vivid memory for Kimberly as she interacted with him.

Colin looked taken aback. He clearly perceived Kimberly's cold demeanor, which was unmistakable. Maybe it was youthful indignation, but he felt increasingly aggrieved.

That was not fair!

"Kimberly, you..."

Before he could continue, Kimberly reached into her bag and pulled out a small, ornate box. Opening it, she revealed a delicate white jade bracelet, which she then gracefully placed on Gia's wrist, looking at her affectionately.

"Do you like it?"

Gia's eyes lit up, her fingers lightly touching the bracelet as she gazed at Kimberly. "Is this for me?"

Kimberly responded with a smile and a nod, "It's for your coming-of-age, after your exams. You're turning eighteen next month, right? And there's a birthday gift waiting for you then too. You can look forward to it."

"Kimberly, I love you so much!" Gia exclaimed, overjoyed, and hugged

Kimberly tightly, snuggling against her like a delighted puppy.

Kimberly's heart warmed at her cousin's enthusiasm. Gia's happiness was contagious, and it brought her joy.

The bracelet wasn't particularly expensive. Kimberly had simply bought it because it caught her eye while shopping, not anticipating its significance tonight.

Determined, Kimberly decided to pick out an even more special gift for Gia's birthday next month.

Meanwhile, Colin watched, his feelings tinged with envy. He reached out and tugged at Kimberly's sleeve rather abruptly. When Kimberly turned to him, puzzled, he extended his hand expectantly.

"Kimberly. Where's my gift?"

Kimberly's expression turned cold as she regarded him, her eyes questioning why she should give him anything.

Colin caught the implication in her look and felt even more aggrieved. He protested, his voice filled with complaint, "I'm only a month younger than Gia! Why does she get a gift, but I don't?"

"Sorry, I didn't have one ready for you," Kimberly responded tersely.

Colin's eyes welled up with tears. Just as he was about to speak, Gia raised her head from Kimberly's embrace and flashed him a smug, teasing grin that was full of taunts.

That was the last straw for Colin. In a burst of frustration, he grabbed Kimberly's wrist harshly and pulled her toward the door. "If you haven't got one, then go buy it now! And if you don't, don't bother returning!"