

Seduced 111

Chapter 111

It was cold. Everyone breathed out white mist, but Felix's face was as red as an apple. His eyes wandered to Matthew and lingered on me. Then, he looked away as he said, "You were young. I didn't want you to be distracted from your studies. If you need those letters back, I can give them to you."

Matthew immediately retorted, "Felix, you're the biggest prick ever. You took more things than just the letters. You know it's true."

Felix barked back, and they got into an argument. It escalated quickly, causing the other guys to jump in to mediate the conflict.

I was appalled. Felix confiscated the love letters others had written for me? He didn't like

me. Why did he take those things? There was no way he kept them for fun.

The commotion grew louder and louder, so much so that passersby at great distance turned around to look at us. The day started with a fight. Was this what my birthday would turn out

to be?

"More things? So you didn't just take my love letters? What's wrong with you, Felix? You have no right to touch my things!" I shouted.

If Mom hadn't raised me to be a civilized and educated woman, I would've already slapped. Felix's face until it was nothing but red finger marks. I was so mad. I couldn't believe that

Felix did that!

During my senior year in high school, I received a lot of love letters. But I never opened them because all I could think of was Felix. I wasn't interested in any other guys.

However, that didn't mean he could intercept my love letters. He kept those things from me and violated my privacy.

Right when I was glaring at Felix, Colin had already parked the car and rushed over. He asked me why I was getting all worked up. I relayed everything to him, and he gave Felix a look of disappointment.

Then, he gave me a smile. "Alright, birthday girl, today is your big day. Let's forget about the past. We'll handle it tomorrow, okay? Look! Everyone is here to celebrate your birthday with you."

"Colin's right, Lulu. Don't let a prick affect your mood."

"Yes, he's not worth your time. Come. Let's play." Zara came to drag me by my shoulder. But

I put my foot down. I glared at Felix angrily. He owed me an explanation!

The rest tried to dissuade me by telling me that I should let bygones be bygones. Some chastised Matthew for bringing up an unsavory past during my birthday. It ruined the high school reunion for everyone.

Matthew noticed his mistake and began apologizing to me. I was mad at him too. Even if Felix and he were not on the greatest terms, they shouldn't have fought on my birthday. I used to think that Matthew was a kind guy. But now? Not so much.

"There, there, Lulu. We can settle it back home. Everyone's here for your birthday. Come, give us a smile," consoled Colin as he wrapped his arm around my shoulder.

"Okay." I didn't want to let Colin or my friends down, so I lied.

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I vowed internally to settle the beef with Felix once we went back. As for Matthew, his inconsiderate act made me realize that it wasn't worth keeping him as a friend.

The guys in the group managed to hype us up, and the women were all excited and giddy. Soon enough, we forgot what happened and enjoyed ourselves on the rides.

The entrance to the haunted house was right under an old willow tree. There was a bottomless well there that read "You're doomed!"

The staffer gathered us and explained the rules. He reassured us that the haunted mansion was all about an immersive experience and that all ghosts were played by employees. They looked scary, but they would never abduct us.

The group then descended into the well in a cheery mood. When I went down, Felix and Colin were waiting for me.

"Follow me. No need to be afraid." Colin held my hand and led me down the middle tunnel.

It was my first time in a haunted house. My ears picked up howling winds and harrowing cries. They sent chills down my spine. Suddenly, someone in front screamed and shouted, "Go away!" I shuddered and hugged myself to calm myself down.

When I tried to get a bearing on my environment, something dropped down from above. It was mere inches away from my face. The flickering light revealed its terrifying aspect—it was a corpse whose tongue was bleeding. Something was wiggling out of the two holes where eyes should be.

I screamed uncontrollably upon seeing the hideous creature. My fight-or-flight response was triggered.

Colin hugged me and whispered next to my ears, "It's fake. Relax."

Right. The staff member told us that the ghosts were fake. Besides, Colin was with me. What was there to be afraid of? I mustered all my courage and followed behind him. For some reason, I felt that someone was tailing me. I tried to lose the stalker but failed.

I turned around many times to confront whoever was stalking me. But it was too dark t wouldn't be able to see a thing even if someone was right in front of me, especially not someone who was intentionally staying out of my view. I didn't know who or what was following me.

"What's wrong?"

"Someone's following me."

"I'm here. I'm strong. No ghosts will approach you."

As soon as Colin said that, I felt something cold grabbing my ankle. I yelped and kicked my feet to lose the foreign object. By sheer luck, my feet produced a loud thud before I realized

what I had done.

Someone groaned, "Ow, this is going to hurt."

Oops. I accidentally hurt a staff member. What should I do?

Colin knew that I had accidentally kicked a staff, so he dragged me and fled together. I couldn't see anything, but there was the whipping sound of wind. My stalker was still behind me. His footsteps matched mine.

Suddenly, greenish lights appeared once more, illuminating the flame-eyed ghost who had a dead mouse in its jaw. Its hands had sharp nails, and they were trying to strangle me.

I squealed. I couldn't dodge the ghost's attack in time, so I hopped on Colin's back. "Run! There's a monster!"

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I squealed. I couldn't dodge the ghost's attack in time, so I hopped on Colin's back. "Run! There's a monster!"

Colin laughed. He carried me and made a beeline for the exit. I clung to Colin's neck desperately and shouted into Colin's ears. Silently, Colin dashed past all sorts of scary creatures until we reached the light at the end of the tunnel.

"We're out now. Perhaps you should come down now?" Colin slapped some sense into my brain.

I was still horrified, so I refused to let go of Colin's neck. "No! No!"

Then, I heard a burst of laughter. I opened my eyes and saw that everyone was laughing at me. Abashed, I climbed down Colin's back. Somehow, my timid expression made everyone laugh out loud.

However, I felt comfortable with everyone here, so I wasn't too embarrassed. I eventually joined them and laughed at my own cowardice too. I was a chicken, wasn't I?

As I turned around, I realized that Felix was standing behind Colin with a long face. He looked like he had just come out of the haunted house too. Wait, was he the stalker behind me just now? Hmph. He invited himself to the haunted house. Who in the right mind would do that?

After the group rested for a while, we went to play a murder mystery role-playing game. We arrived quite late, so all the exciting plots had been taken away. There was only Sleeping Beauty left, to everyone's dismay.

While Sleeping Beauty was a role-playing game, it was geared toward children. We had hoped to solve a murder mystery or a haunting case. Some of the group members slumped to the ground and refused to carry out a childish script. I must admit I was disappointed too.

I looked at my phone. It was already 10:00 am. Perhaps we should grab something to eat and call it a day? >

“Come on, we’re already here. We might as well do it. Besides, isn’t it our dream to be a princess? Whoever wants to play it, raise your hand!” Zara was the first to raise her hand. Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

Her rally awakened the inner child within everyone. We all agreed to carry out the script. The boys, however, were reluctant. Only one of them could be the prince. The rest had to be

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knights or chefs. Someone also had to play the short and chubby king.

But Jade then reminded the guys how heroic it was to be a knight on a steed, equipped with swords. A knight’s duty was to protect the princess. Only a strong man could be a knight. Shouldn’t a man aspire to protect his loved ones?

Just like that, the fighting spirit within the guys was rekindled. They, too, agreed to role- play.

There were supposed to be ten characters in the script. But since we outnumbered the characters available, the staff members had to improvise.

The owner of the social game was a lean man in his 20s. He wore medieval battle armor and approached us with an air of antiquity.

“That’s not a problem. We’ll just add more knights. Let me get the costume and props for

you.”

That solved the predicament we faced. Then, it was time for us to draw our character cards. Everyone had heard of Sleeping Beauty. It was a simple story. Most characters, including the princess and the queen, did not have a lot of dialogue. The witch, however, had more screen

time.

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In the end, Zara got the queen and Jade got the witch. I was the last one to draw and was surprised to see that I'd be playing the role of the princess.

Felix had it worse, though. He was supposed to portray the boy laborer who was bullied. Poor thing. I wondered who would play the chef, then. They could give Felix a good smack!

Meanwhile, Colin peered at me affectionately before the glass window. He was several years my senior. He wouldn't be playing such a childish game if it were not for my birthday. This kind of game was far beneath his sophisticated demeanor.

"Colin, which character did you get?" I wanted to check his character card. Felix stood in front of me, seemingly trying to tell me something. But I ignored him and rushed to Colin's

side.

Colin's fingers unfurled as he showed me the crumpled paper. The word "prince" was

written on top. I blushed. At the end of the fairytale, the prince would wake the princess with a kiss. They then lived happily ever after.

In other words, Colin and I had to kiss. Gosh. A kissing scene? This was too much.

"Colin, it's just a role-playing game. We don't have to kiss, do we?" I probed gingerly. That'd be my first kiss. I didn't want to lose my first kiss during a role-playing game.

Colin grabbed my chin and lifted my scarlet face. Playfully, he asked in a husky voice, "But do you want us to kiss, Lulu?"

If voices could kill, his would be a lethal weapon. I swatted his hand away and rubbed my warm cheeks. "We'll fake a kiss, okay?"

The game began very soon, and everyone got into position. I only had two scenes to play out -one when I was put into slumber by the spindle and another when I was woken up by the prince's kiss.

After the first act, I lay on the bed and waited for the prince to arrive. Perhaps something was amiss during the story as I waited and waited but Colin never appeared. I slowly got more and more anxious.

But the room was so cozy. I could catch a faint whiff of roses in the air. Warm sunlight cascaded over my head. I lost myself in the comfortable embrace and fell asleep. Suddenly, my nose picked up a familiar, woody cologne. My eyes fluttered open, and I saw a handsome face before me.

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"Ah!" I screamed and got up instinctively. My lips accidentally touched Colin's.

Silence seized the room. All I could hear was my beating heart and the ringing in my mind. I.

Just. Kissed. Colin.

I fell back to the bed. Colin straightened his back and looked away. His crimson earlobes were perceivable from behind. He was blushing.

My cheeks turned warm. It felt awkward. "You were too close to me!" I protested out of

embarrassment.

“You told me to fake the kissing scene. I was trying to find the perfect angle. You woke up suddenly, and before I could adjust myself, you kissed me. I...”

Was Colin—a tall, handsome man—implying that I forced myself on him? Oh, gosh! My face turned even redder than before. My ears were buzzing from all the emotions.

“Sorry, Colin. My bad. I actually fell asleep.”

I kissed Colin! Could the ground open up and swallow me whole already?

“Well, it’s my first kiss, Lulu.” Despite my apology, Colin continued to act all victimized as if he were a wronged lady.

How annoying!

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It was just an innocent mistake. I didn’t fuss over it, so how dare Colin make a big deal out of it? Besides, it was just a kiss. I didn’t do anything else.

“So what? It was my first kiss too. Get up now. They’ll come in soon.”

As soon as I finished the sentence, a voice blasted out from the speaker. “The prince has

awakened the princess. In the next scene, the prince will carry the princess out of the palace.

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What? How did the operator know we were about to change to the next scene? Were they watching through the cameras? Oh, no. This was embarrassing.

Colin turned around and extended his hands toward me. I rolled to the other side of the bed

and uttered, "Heh, no need to carry me, Colin. I can walk."

"According to the script, the princess should be carried in the prince's arms. Failure to do so will lose you the game," the voice continued.

They could hear whatever conversation we had? Did that mean everyone knew that I accidentally kissed Colin? What the heck? Where was the privacy?

I could feel my cheeks turning red again. Now I needed to be carried by a prince? What a

hassle! I shouldn't have picked this script.

Should I let Colin carry me? Should I say yes? Dad stopped carrying me in his arms when I began to remember things. Should I say no? But I'd be the person to ruin the game for everyone. To be carried or not to be carried? That was a dilemma.

I was comfortable around Colin, but being carried or kissed by him was a bit too much. Just when I struggled to come up with an answer, Colin leaned in and said in his magnetic, husky voice, "It's just a game, Lulu."

But that was easier said than done! It was a game, but getting carried in someone's arms was so embarrassing.

In the end, the selflessness in me won. I didn't want all of us to lose in this role-playing game, so I let Colin carry me. Right when Colin wrapped his arms around my neck, a mischievous thought appeared in my mind.

I was five foot five feet and weighed around 110 pounds. Colin wouldn't be able to carry me. When that happened, we wouldn't be disqualified, would we?

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However, I felt the world around me spin for a brief moment. The next thing I knew, I was in Colin's arms. Colin had a broad shoulder. I could smell the crisp, woody fragrance on him. His cotton shirt brushed against my cheek. It felt comfortable.

Outside the palace, the king and the queen stood by the entrance and shot me a naughty grin. Next to them, the chef, Matthew, was about to slap the laborer, Felix.

While we tried to re-enact the story, slapping someone might hurt their pride. It was best if we just glossed the details over. Furthermore, we all knew that Matthew and Felix fought earlier on. If Matthew slapped Felix for real, it'd be something personal. It wouldn't be role-playing anymore.

We were all very close and got along very well. No one should hold grudges, right? Colin saw the awkward moment between Matthew and Felix. His impassive face made it hard for me to decipher what he was thinking.

"The prince woke the princess with a kiss. Thus ends the story."

Everyone jumped and cheered. Matthew didn't slap Felix at all, and that improved my impression of him. I put my mind to ease and looked at my wristwatch. It was already a quarter to noon. We should grab lunch.

Colin told me that there was a good restaurant opposite the amusement park. He had already made a reservation, so the group departed happily.

We enjoyed the food greatly and stuffed ourselves full. Jade gave me a voice-activated music box as a gift; Zara weaved me a red checkered scarf; Matthew gave me a paperweight he had made himself. I wasn't sure what it was made of, but it exuded a faint pleasant scent.

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When it was Felix's turn, he took out a red velvet box from his bag. It felt heavy. Thinking that it was jewelry, I wanted to say no. But my speculation was proven wrong when I opened it. It was a portrait of me.

In the drawing, I was sitting on a bench, hugging the school bag on my lap. I was looking at something gleefully, and there were sparkles in my eyes.

Felix must have drawn a younger version of me watching him play basketball. Those who didn't know began chattering. They complimented Felix's drawing and said it looked exactly like a younger me.

But I was confused. What was Felix doing? He wasn't himself lately. Had he gone crazy from missing Lilac too much? I wanted us to go our separate ways, yet he kept doing things that sent me the wrong signals.

I would have been flattered to receive a portrait someone drew for me. But if it came from Felix, I found it repulsive. I used to look up to him, but he trampled on my feelings. Now that I had given up on him, he brought up our past.

He was doing all these things that disoriented me. What did he want? Not having an answer was frustrating.

Just when I wondered if I should return the portrait, Colin grabbed it and put it back into the red velvet box. He then chucked it into the pocket of his coat. "What a beautiful drawing. I'll keep it for Luna. This is my present for you. Open it."

Colin gave me another square, magenta velvet box with a small pink bow

“Wow! What a beautiful box. An artist sure has a better taste. What’s in it? Show us.” Other than Felix, everyone urged me to open the present impatiently.

I glanced at Colin. He smiled, encouraging me to check the contents of the box. I unboxed the present and found a pink diamond bracelet in the middle. Violet daisies were strung together by a thin chain. Its craftsmanship was delicate and elegant. I loved it.

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“Do you like it?” Colin’s sultry voice appeared next to my ears

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“I love it. But I can’t possibly accept this expensive gift.” I had always fancied simple yet feminine accessories. The bracelet ticked all my boxes. Among all the presents I had received, it was my favorite one.

“It’s not that expensive. The diamonds are fake. But I did design the bracelet myself. I’m

glad you like it.”

Colin designed a bracelet for me!

Zara put the bracelet on top of my wrist and brandished it around. “It looks so good on you,

Lulu.”

My fair skin somehow highlighted the color of the bracelet. I shook my wrist, and those fake diamonds glimmered under the light.

“But...”

“But what? Do you want me to put it on for you?” asked Colin gently.

“Okay.”

His warm fingertips brushed against my skin, eliciting a tingly sensation. I could feel something leaping in my heart. Zara was sitting next to me. She had a look of amusement when she saw the bracelet. And instead of eating, her eyes went back and forth between Colin and me. It was giving me the creeps.

“Eat. Aren’t you hungry?” I nudged Zara.

She wrapped her arms around my shoulder and asked, “Do you know what giving out a bracelet as a present means?” 1

It had another meaning? I shook my head. “No.”

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Zara wrapped her arms around my shoulder and asked mysteriously, “Do you know what giving out a bracelet as a present means?”

It had another meaning? I shook my head. “No.”

“You’re so naive,” criticized Zara, as if not knowing what a bracelet meant was a cardinal sin.

“What does it mean?”

“It means he wants to tie the knot with you. I think Colin wants to be more than just your friend.”

I was putting food in my mouth, but what Zara said took me completely by surprise. I ended up swallowing without chewing. I wheezed and coughed out loud.

“What the heck? It’s Colin we’re talking about.” I corrected Zara’s misconception with my puffy cheeks that were red from coughing.

Zara rolled her eyes at my naivete and said, “You’ll see in the future.”

Colin was into me? But how could that be? When we finished lunch, it was already around 2: 00 pm. We parted ways reluctantly but still in high spirits. We all agreed to hang out another day.

After everyone had left, I saw Matthew smoking against his sports car. He was waiting for me. When I was in high school, I was told that he was rich. It seemed that he was successful now. The Mercedes-Benz behind was a telltale sign.

“Stop staring at him. Let’s go back.” Colin, who was standing next to me, glared at Matthew.

I replied with a smile, “Give me a second. I think Matthew wants to talk to me.”

“He’s up to no good, I’m telling you.” Colin pouted like a child who was denied candies. I

found it rather cute.

I gave Colin a nudge so that he could wait for me inside the car. Then, I approached Matthew. He had been observing my interaction with Colin in secret. When he noticed that I was heading toward him, he stepped on his cigarette and straightened his back and shirt.

I could hear Colin sneer behind me. Turning around, I saw Colin's disgruntlement. He looked like a father who had to let his daughter go out with another kid. I gave Colin a smile, and that managed to ease the tension on his face.

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+16 BONUS

"Lulu, I had so many things to tell you, but my emotions got the better of me when I saw Felix. I'm sorry that I ruined your birthday."

"It's okay. It's all in the past anyway. We're still friends."

"Luna," Matthew called out my name earnestly. There were a lot of emotions in his eyes, far too many for me to read his feelings. "I'm leaving, and I'm not coming back."

"I've had a crush on you for many years, yet you never look in my direction. I guess we're not meant to be. In high school, I wrote a total of 11 love letters to you, but you replied to none of them. Back then, everyone said I was fat and refused to be my friend."

"But you were different. You smiled at me and approached me. I put my feelings into words and asked Felix to deliver the letters to you. But I never got any response from you, not even a rejection. It was as if you didn't acknowledge them at all."

"I thought you were being nice. You didn't want to hurt my feelings, which was why you didn't reject me. You simply ignored those letters. I only found out during this winter break that Felix had withheld my letters from you. He said I wasn't worthy of you, that you were way beyond my league."

“We all knew that you liked Felix back then. I also knew that I’d never be good enough for you. But I couldn’t help myself. I liked you so much that numbers turned into your face, so I mustered my courage and wrote more love letters to you.”

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I was shocked. The chubby, always-smiling boy who was shorter than me had had a crush on me for many years?

Matthew smirked, delighted to see the disbelief on my face. He ruffled my hair gently. “I was very mad when I found out. There were times when I wanted to confront Felix. But it was so many years ago. Why bring it back now, I thought.

“I was away these few years, and even when I returned, I hardly talked to the people in the group. I only learned yesterday and you and Felix weren’t together. Before I came here, I told myself to keep a level head.

“But whatever I told myself was swiftly discarded when I saw Felix. I couldn’t hold myself back. If you weren’t there, I would’ve punched him.”

“I don’t like violence.” I didn’t know what to say. These few words were the only ones I could come up with. It was difficult to talk about someone I had a crush on for years with

someone who had a crush on me for years.

“Look, Lulu. I wouldn’t have been so mad if he had treated you right and made you happy. But he hurt you for a woman like Lilac. It doesn’t sit right with me. It’s a shame that I didn’t

punch him.”

Oh, that was why.

I lifted my head to look at the tall man before me. He was gazing at me. The anger in his eyes faded away, replaced by calmness. "Sorry, Matthew. I didn't know you had a crush on me. I didn't mean to ignore you."

"It's okay. I stayed to clear things up with you, not to upset you. I'm leaving tomorrow, and we might hardly see each other again. You're the only one I care about in Southpool tubs, I wish you happiness Felix isn't worth your time. You'll find someone who will do you right."

"You too, Matthew. There are plenty of fish in the ocean. One day, you'll meet a woman who loves you back. Be well." I croaked in the end as tears gushed out of my eyes.

Matthew and I went to the same high school. I had always regarded him as a good friend. Little did I know, he had a crush on me for years I might not be able to reciprocate his feelings even if I were to read his letters now, but I could cherish them. His thoughts and sentiments had not gone to waste.

The chubby boy in my memory had turned into a tall, handsome man. Time had altered his

looks but not his soul. Regardless if we would ever reunite in the future, in my mind, Matthew would always be my good friend—the chubby boy with tousled hair.

"You cried for me. That is the best thing that could happen to me. Alright now. Stop crying. I'd wipe the tears on your cheek, but Colin is glaring at me, so I can't do anything. Take care, Luna."

"Farewell, Matt." I waved Matthew goodbye with teary eyes..

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"Farewell, Matt." I waved Matthew goodbye with teary eyes. We might not see each other anymore, but I'd never forget about him.

Matthew froze mid-opening the car door. He then turned around and asked, "Lulu, will we meet again?"

His voice was shaky. The sadness in his eyes threatened to flood over. The afternoon sun shone on his face, and I caught glimpses of wet spots in the corner of his eyes.

“Of course, we’ll meet again. Who am I kidding?” Matthew cheered, opened the car door, and hopped in. He rolled down the car window and waved me goodbye before fleeing to the

horizon.

He was crying.

I looked in Matthew’s direction. Somehow, I had a hunch that we would meet again. Even if we did not see each other again, I’d forever remember that there was once a chubby boy who wrote 11 love letters to me. He had once devoted his love to me.

“Let’s go back. Pining over him won’t make him return.” Colin came begrudgingly and dragged my arm.

He was not more than ten steps away from Matthew and me. Indubitably, he had heard the entire conversation. Still, Matthew and I were having our moments. Did Colin have to be this jealous? Sheesh.

“Come already. Your mom asked me to bring you back,” yelled Felix as he leaned out of the

window.

I followed Colin to his car. Right when I wanted to open the door to the front passenger seat, Felix climbed from the back seat and hoarded the space. Colin asked him to return to the back seat, but Felix ignored his instruction. I was too lazy to deal with Felix, so I entered the

back seat.

As we slowly exited the car park, I thought about what I had learned today as I peered at the blurred buildings outside. “Felix, what made you think that you could intercept the love letters for me? All 11 of them.”

“Like I said, you were young. I didn’t want you to be distracted from your studies.”

“But that was my private life. You didn’t have a say in it!” I shouted so loudly that my throat hurt. I had to cough a bit to soothe the itchiness in my throat. Colin saw me heaving through

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the rearview mirror and chuckled.

“Geez, you can have them if you want.”

“I hate you.” Was Felix an idiot? I still couldn’t return Matthew’s feelings even if Felix returned my letters. “If I kill you and say I’m sorry, will you forgive me?”

“I’ll be dead. What does it matter if I forgive you or not?”

Urgh, that Felix! The dashing guy I used to have a crush on had become a cheeky jerk! I was so mad that my hands grabbed whatever was within my reach to smack Felix. It must be quite heavy because Felix groaned in pain.

“Stop it. I’m bleeding,” Felix yanked the object off my hand and hollered.

Colin checked on Felix and stopped the car. I saw that there was a cut on Felix’s left temple.

“Stop covering your forehead. Let me see where the wound is. If it’s serious, we’ll head to a hospital.” Colin grabbed the object with which I bludgeoned Felix and put it back on the back seat. It was a portable electric heater. The part that cut Felix was the lid covering the

port.

Colin found some alcohol wipes to disinfect Felix's wound. Felix sat still and let Colin do what he had to do, but his eyes stared directly into my soul.

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I felt guilty that I accidentally hurt Felix. It made me more annoyed.

"It's just a small cut. You'll be fine after we apply some ointment. I need to send Felix back to get him treated. We might be late for dinner. Is it okay?" asked Colin as he let Felix press the alcoholic wipe on the wound.

It was just a simple dinner, not a grand occasion. I just needed to inform Mom beforehand. However, before I could speak, Felix uttered, "It's okay. Let's head to the restaurant. I

haven't had dinner."

I felt a lot better after I took my frustration out on Felix. He said we could go to the restaurant right away, and I complied. After all, I did hurt him just now.

Inside the private room, my observant mom noticed Felix's injury. She quickly asked us what happened. Colin grinned silently as I fumbled in my mind to come up with an excuse. Telling her that I was asking Felix to return my love letters felt embarrassing.

Aunt Mel then asked Uncle Austin to get some band-aids. She checked on her son worriedly,

which made me feel even more guilty.

As the ancient adage went, mothers knew best. She noticed my unease and poked at my ribs. "You did that?"

"It's not my fault. He bullied me first," I explained in a hushed voice.

“That doesn’t mean you can hit someone.”

“I know. I just didn’t think it through.”

“Colin, you were with Felix, weren’t you? How did he get injured?” Aunt Mel was getting anxious. Getting no answer from Felix, she turned to Colin.

It wasn’t Colin’s fault, so I shouldn’t ask Colin to clean up my mess. Meekly, I raised my

hand and said, “Aunt Mel, I…”

“I accidentally ran into a wall. Stop freaking out, Mom.”

I swallowed the words on the tip of my tongue. Then, I saw Colin doing everything to stifle his laugh. I tried but failed horribly, so I laughed out loud.

Mom slapped my head playfully and chided, “Stop laughing. Be serious.”

I laughed even harder after Mom reprimanded me. It was not a crime. Why was she so

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serious? I caught the smile on Felix’s face from the corners of my eyes. He was rocking a band-aid on his forehead.

He was laughing after I hit him. Was he a lunatic?

Despite Felix's injury, all of us had a hearty meal. It had been four years since we last had such a peaceful time together.

At night, as soon as I stepped into my home, Mom gave me an earful. Amidst the scolding, I relayed what I learned to Mom so that she knew how angry I was. However, instead of being mad, she found it amusing.

"Not bad. Matthew has great taste in women. And he's loyal too. You should consider dating him."

"Mom, that's beside the point. Felix intercepted my love letters. He invaded my privacy. I

should sue him."

"You also assaulted him, so it's even between you two. Alright. Leave me alone now. Go do your thing."

Kicked out by my mom, I had nowhere to go but my room.