

Seduced 341

Chapter 341

What Helen said warmed my heart. It made me realize that in life, love and family weren't the only things that could warm one's soul. Friendships could too.

Ten days after the accident, which was also the second day after I was discharged, Professor King called me in the morning. He told me that I needed to see him in the office for something important.

My left arm was injured, not my leg, so I happily complied.

Besides, I could hear the faint excitement in his voice. There had to be good news, so I should be there.

Carrying my out-of-cast yet bandaged left arm with my right arm, I rushed to Professor King's office under everyone's curious eyes.

Professor King said he had two pieces of good news.

One, the result of my previous competition was announced. I did well and obtained second place, which meant I'd receive a reward of 150,000 dollars after tax. My current submission had to be better or I risked ruining my own reputation.

Two, my art had attracted the attention of a construction company. They were developing a Tudor-style building. They had been looking for several renowned artists and designers to design the mural, but they weren't pleased with the results.

However, an art piece from me, a rookie, managed to catch their eye. They asked around and located Professor King. They then reached out to invite me to draw the murals for each floor.

“But Professor King, I don’t know anything about interior design. I only know how to draw. Designing a building is a serious project. I won’t be able to afford the damages if I screw up. I love the project, but I don’t think I can pull it off. I have to say no,” I declined politely while scratching my head.

Annoyed by my cowardice, Professor King wanted to smack me with the scroll in his hands. However, I brandished my injury, and that persuaded him to drop his aggression.

“Don’t chicken out! You’re not designing the whole building. They’ll give you the size of the murals and the style they’re gunning for. You just have to draw according to the theme. Besides, they didn’t ask you to paint the murals straight on.

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+15

“You just have to come up with the designs and they’ll have a way to put it on the walls. Are you not confident enough in your skills? Fine. I won’t force you. Just don’t tell anyone that you’re my student. You’ll bring shame to my name.”

“Professor King, I know you’re using reverse psychology here. But I want to turn it down because I don’t want to ruin your reputation. If I mess up, it won’t affect me much because no one knows who Luna is. But they know who Ash King is.”

I tried to reason with him, but he wouldn’t be persuaded.

“Don’t try to take the moral high ground now. I’m too old to care about what people think of me. Just admit you’re too afraid to take on this project. There’s no need to find other excuses. I’ll turn them down. What a shame. It’s an eight–million–dollar project.”

Eight million?

“Sorry? How much?” I asked again. I even stretched my wounded left arm, but it did not

hurt at all.

Eight million dollars! That was a lot!

If I won the project, I'd be financially independent.

A devilish grin appeared on his face. He poked at my face. "Money can change your mind, huh? Yes, eight million dollars. Do you want this project or not?"

"I do! You invited me to take on this project. As your tutee, I must take on this challenge. It's my job to make you proud, isn't it?" "1

Who in their right mind would turn down an eight-million-dollar offer?

Professor King then teased me for how money-minded I was.

I then hopped, skipped, and jumped back to my apartment. Thinking that I was about to be filthy rich, I was exhilarated.

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I wasn't a gold digger, of course. I wouldn't be a sellout for money. If not, I wouldn't have rejected Matthew, who came from a rich family.

I just believed that spending the money I earned was the most rewarding feeling ever.

When I arrived at my apartment building, I ran into the delivery rider who was delivering my food. I took my meal from him and climbed upstairs.

With only one arm available for my use, it took me a long while to open my apartment door without toppling my food.

As soon as I put down everything, Colin wanted to video call me before I even had a chance to wash my hands.

My heart leaped when I saw Colin's handsome face appearing on my screen. I used to think that he was decent-looking. But now that he was my probational boyfriend, he looked sexier than before. So much so that I wanted to keep looking at him. Other hot guys, including Felix, looked less appealing now.

I blamed Colin for setting the bar too high.

"Hi there, handsome. What brought you here?" I was in a good mood, so I flirted with Colin cheekily.

"You sound happy. What's the good news?" After working tirelessly for many days, he lost the weight he had put on during Christmas. His weight loss accentuated his facial features, making him look extra seductive.

I boasted the eight-million-dollar project to Colin. "I've never done a mural before, but I couldn't say no to eight million dollars. I kind of regret my decision now. Do you think they'll ask me to pay up if I mess up?"

"Come on, you know you won't mess it up. Besides, it'll take a while for them to decide on which art to put on. Once Felix is better, I'll help you. If you hit a wall, we can ask Professor King. I also have some friends in Jinovy who do designs. We can consult them too.

"It's daunting in the beginning, but I have faith in you."

"Eight million dollars is a lot of money. Do you think this is a scam?"

Colin smiled, displaying his white teeth. "Of course not. I've heard of the construction project. It's worth billions. Eight million dollars is just a drop in the vast ocean. You might

receive extra money if you impress them with your work.”

“So only the very rich can own that place. Oh, no. What if I screw up?” I flopped on my

and wailed.

bed

While I was anxious about the project, it wasn't so serious that I'd have a mental breakdown. I just wanted to listen to Colin's words of encouragement.

“You can do this, babe.”

With Colin's encouragement, I felt confident. We talked for a bit, and Colin told me that Felix would have a thorough check-up this afternoon. He might not have time to chat with

me.

I told him not to worry about me and that he should keep me in the loop.

At night, Colin didn't call me. I wanted to ask him for an update, but I was afraid of disturbing him. I then decided to wait patiently since Colin would let me know if something happened.

I had a good night's sleep, and I woke up early tomorrow morning to go to school.

My left arm was injured, so I couldn't carry my school bag on both my shoulders. Instead, I slung it on one shoulder.

When I almost arrived at the cafeteria, Colin called. I answered the call happily, ready to show Colin my new style. However, I was greeted with Colin's sour face. He looked very sad. My breath hitched, and I thought about Felix's check-up. Did something bad happen?

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“What’s the matter, Colin?” I asked worriedly.

Colin rubbed his face with his hands, yet the fatigue, the pain, and the frustration in his persisted.

“Lulu, Felix is blind now. He also can’t feel anything below his knees.

What?

eyes

Upon hearing the bad news, I almost slumped to the ground. It was as if something heavy was pressed on my shoulders, threatening to flatten me.

“How can this be? He could still see two

days ago. How could he turn blind so suddenly? Also, I massaged his calves and he could feel it then. Is this a misdiagnosis? Colin, get a second opinion.” I fumbled and came up with a response.

“The doctor said that there are blood clots in his brain. They moved and pressed against his nerves, causing him all these symptoms.”

“Then take them out. Can’t we remove the blood clots with surgery?”

“The doctor said that the blood clots are located in a sensitive area. He’ll be blind if we let them be. But if the surgery goes awry, he might be handicapped forever. Also, there are a lot

of blood clots.

“Even after the surgery, they might come back in the future. Unless there’s a way to remove all the blood clots completely, no surgery will be performed.”

“But we can’t just do nothing, can we?” I said impatiently.

Felix had to be safe. Otherwise, I wouldn’t know what to do.

The bad news was enough to drain the blood from my limbs. I no longer had the appetite to eat or attend classes, so I found a spot nearby and sat down. I wouldn’t want to trip myself on a busy corridor. People would panic.

The long-gone dread made a comeback. And this time, it hit harder.

“The best solution is to wait till his body absorbs the blood clots itself. However, this will take a long time. Don’t worry about him, Lulu. Eat and go to your classes. I called to let you know that Felix couldn’t handle the news very well, so I might need to spend more time with

him.

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“I won’t be able to hang out with you, but please, if something comes up, reach out to me.”

“Okay, Colin. I’ll visit him after my class.”

I still wasn’t able to snap back to reality after the call had ended. My mind was abuzz. All I could think of was Felix sitting in a wheelchair with an ashen expression.

If he truly turned blind and handicapped, how should I face him? How should I face his parents? How should I face Colin? What would happen to the budding relationship between Colin and me?

All this happened because I insisted on buying Colin medicine.

Not in the mood to eat, I went to a quiet corner and called Mom.

I was so distraught right now that I could only rely on my parents.

It was still early in the morning, so Dad and Mom hadn't left for work yet. When I told them about Felix's condition, they expressed their concerns. They told me that they would visit him tomorrow since it was a Saturday.

They also told me to calm down. When there was a will, there was a way. Maybe a miracle would happen.

Later that night, Helen drove me to the hospital. Felix was sleeping on his side. I stood by the entrance, afraid of entering the ward.

I wondered if it was just me or if everyone thought the same too. Felix was thinner than before. His skin was pale, and he looked deflated.

"He's been throwing a tantrum for the entire day. He won't eat or drink. He only slept after the doctor gave him a sedative." Colin was afraid of rousing Felix. He dragged me to the benches outside, and we talked over there.

Colin kept rubbing his temples. He was at his wit's end.

"There must be a way. Medical science is so advanced now. They're just blood clots. How hard is it to deal with them?"

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Colin rubbed his temples, exhausted. I felt bad, so I pulled his head into my arms and gave him a head massage, trying to make him feel better.

“The position of the blood clots is just unfortunate. I searched online. Jinovy Hospital has the best neurosurgeons. If they said they can’t do anything about it, no one else can. We can only pray for Felix. There’s no other way.”

“How long will it take for his body to absorb the blood clots?”

“No one knows. It can take a week, a year, or a lifetime.”

“It’s all my fault. What should I do?” I was fraught with worry.

I was afraid of entering the ward just now. When Felix was hospitalized the previous time, it wasn’t my fault yet Aunt Mel had yelled and cursed at me with nasty words.

Now that Felix had lost the function of his eyes and his legs just to save me, I feared that she might do something more radical. I wouldn’t be able to handle that.

While Colin often took my side, he wouldn’t be able to do anything because it concerned his own mother and the well-being of his brother.

I walked into the ward with trepidation. I looked down all the time, afraid of meeting Aunt Mel’s eyes in case she began insulting me again.

To my surprise, Uncle Austin only glanced at me briefly while Aunt Mel stared at Felix impassively. I was ignored.

I was happy that I wasn’t insulted. Yet it also made me feel even more culpable.

Perhaps if they had cussed at me, I would have felt better.

We always wanted the best of both worlds even though it was contradictory.

Because of me, Felix suffered so much. But I couldn't do anything about it. I could only watch as he became blind and sat in a wheelchair forever.

The guilt overwhelmed me.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. I'm the source of the misfortune. Don't blame yourself. Take care of yourself now. Don't make me worry about you. We'll find a solution eventually."

"Why does it have to be blood clots? If it were his eyes that were affected, I would've gladly

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donated mine to him. I could give him both my eyes now and it still wouldn't bring back light to his life,"

"Enough of your nonsense." Colin knocked on my head. "It's not your fault at all. If there's nothing else, go home. Helen is waiting for you."

Colin tried to shoo me away. He didn't want me to feel guilty and upset because of Felix's condition.

As always, he wanted to shoulder all the pain and misery himself. He only left me with happiness and joy.

"Alright. You need to rest too, Colin. Don't overwork yourself."

"I will. Don't worry."

I was beside myself with worry when I left. I couldn't focus. Everything felt wrong. I had an ominous feeling.

That night, I slept fitfully. One moment, I saw Felix lying on the bed like a doll. The next moment, I saw Colin gazing at me with wistful eyes under the rain.

I woke up the next morning with a splitting headache. My body felt exhausted as if I had been working the entire night. My wounded arm also joined the symphony of misery too, twitching in pain from time to time.

I felt suffocated. Something bad was going to happen.

Helen drove me to the airport to pick up my parents. She didn't return to the apartment last night, so she didn't know what happened to Felix yet.

I told her everything on our way to the airport. She was worried too, but there was no better solution. She told me that she'd talk to Matthew and see if he could find an international specialist to help out.

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Dad and Mom went to the hospital right away. Colin wasn't there. Aunt Mel was stunned to

see my parents. Then, she slowly nodded and uttered, "Harper, we're even "

Mom choked on her tears and grabbed Aunt Mel's hands. "No, Melinda. We owe Luna's life

to Felix."

Upon hearing what Mom said, the brave front Aunt Mel was putting up finally collapsed. Tears came gushing out of her eyes. "Don't say that, Harper. It's all karma. I know it."

"What do you mean? If karma does exist, good things will happen to Felix because he saved Lulu. He will get better."

They held each other's hands and consoled each other with reddened eyes.

The accident brought solace to the pain from the past. They reconciled.

This should be the best thing that had happened out of this mishap.

Felix was awake. His eyes darted toward the entrance when he heard the sound of an opened door. Then, he sat there motionlessly.

The eyes that I knew so well were still beautiful. But there was no soul in them. They were like two bottomless pits.

There was a new scar on his forehead and a fading, red handprint on his left cheek. They weren't there when I came to visit yesterday. I supposed Felix woke up after I left. He then tried to harm himself and was punished for it. However, I didn't know who slapped him.

"Mom, who's here?"

My mom wanted to speak, but Aunt Mel shook her head to stop her. Respecting Aunt Mel's wishes, Mom swallowed whatever she wanted to say.

"It's the nurse. She's here to check on your IV bag. How are you feeling? Do you feel unwell?"

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Aunt Mel pulled Felix's blanket over him and tucked his hand outside back into it. She performed the action gently as if she were handling a fragile doll.

"It's so dark." Disappointed, Felix's eyes darted to the ceiling. Like someone who had given up on hope, he did not care whether he was alive or dead. It pained me to see him like this.

In a world without light, there was only darkness.

Without a miracle, his world would forever be dim.

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I made him blind. I was the sinner. 1

I closed my eyes, imagining how it'd be to live forever in the void that light could never reach. After five minutes, I felt lonely and despair.

It felt like I was walking aimlessly in a tunnel without an end, like I was searching everywhere but I couldn't find the exit. Despair seized me again and again until I could feel my spirits wilting.

Was this Felix's future?

I leaned against the wall, defeated.

If only I were hit by the car. If only I were the one turning blind and handicapped. I'd rather suffer this myself than deal with this overwhelming sense of guilt. I was too powerless to change anything.

I owed my life to Felix. Even though I hated to owe him anything, I now owed him something that I could never repay.

I wept silently.

If possible, I would donate my eyes and my legs to Felix. I wanted him to be healthy, to be the handsome guy I used to know.

Mom was moved to tears too. She covered her mouth and began sobbing.

Suddenly, life returned to Felix's eyes. He raised his left arm and pointed at the door.

Aunt Mel held his hand and inquired, "What do you want, Felix? Tell me. I'll bring it to you."

'Mom, can I have Lulu?'"

His request shocked me. I staggered, almost slumping to the ground. My body trembled uncontrollably.

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I felt pressure crushing my chest, so much so that I struggled to breathe. It was as if a hook had gripped my heart and yanked it out of my body.

The thing I feared most about, the one thing that had been hanging heavy on my mind, had finally arrived.

I finally understood the words he had mouthed at me that morning in his house. He was saying, "If I save you, your life will be mine."

He had sharpened and polished those words until they became silver blades that could slice through me.

Everything had been part of his plan. He had just been waiting for an opportunity.

The rain, the downpour that blurred my vision, the vehicle that sped through, Colin falling sick and resting in his apartment... Everything played out according to the plan he had devised.

The puzzle pieces came together.

Colin, his family, me, and even himself were pawns in his scheme. Felix plotted everything to bind me to his side, even at the cost of his own life.

He put his life on the line to separate Colin and me.

What a ruthless man.

He was ruthless to me; he was ruthless to himself.

However, he jeopardized his own health to enact a confusing yet elaborate plan just to obtain me, whom he used to despise. Was it worth it?

“What are you on about, Félix?” Colin was entering the ward when he heard Felix’s demand. He steadied me and hollered at him.

“Colin, is Lulu here? I can smell her. She’s here, isn’t she?” Felix asked gently, paying no heed to Colin’s question.

He had lured me into a trap. I should despise him to the core.

Yet looking at his sickly frame on the bed, I saw that his eyes were soulless and his legs were lifeless. I didn’t have it in me to hate him. He was so frail.

But his plan plunged me into the depths of pain.

I could no longer love him, yet I could no longer hate him either. It was a miserable feeling.

I wanted to speak, but Colin held me back. He added with teary eyes, “No, Lulu has classes today.”

“You’re lying. You think I can’t see, so you’re lying. I can smell her. Lulu is here, and so are Aunt Harper and Uncle Gerald. All of you are trying to fool me.”

His voice was faint and weak.

For a moment, I was bewildered.

I once read that when someone turned blind, their other senses would be augmented. Felix couldn't see anything, but his nose had become so sensitive that he could distinguish people via their scents.

Was it true, then?

Colin hugged me while I dissociated. I felt cold, and I couldn't see anything. The sun outside was bright and warm, signaling the arrival of spring. But I couldn't see the light or feel the warmth.

A disembodied voice told me that if Felix was disabled forever, the light in my life would disappear too. There would only be darkness in my future.

"If I save you, your life will be mine."

What a powerful curse.

Colin tightened his embrace, his tall frame rigid. As always, his hug was so warm that I never wanted to leave it. But it did little to quell the overwhelming despair I was feeling.

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"I can't see, and I can't walk. I feel so lonely, Mom. I don't want to live."

Felix stared emptily at the ceiling. His hand reached out to grab something, but there was nothing. He put it down dejectedly and left the comment.

He wore a calm expression when he said that. There was no emotion in his lightless eyes. It sounded mundane like he was saying he wanted a burger for lunch. Yet he was using his life to force everyone to play by his rules.

Perhaps he did know that we were all there.

Aunt Mel wailed. She grabbed Felix's right arm and cried loudly, "No, Felix. You shouldn't have those thoughts. Dad and Mom are here. We'll stay by your side forever. You won't be lonely, Felix. Trust me. Trust your mom."

"But what do I do after you're dead?" continued Felix emotionlessly. Like a fragile, porcelain doll, he elicited empathy. But the words he uttered cut deep.

My heart was icy all over. Coldness crept through my body, starting from my toes. In an instant, I felt like an icicle hanging under the roof in winter.

Every inch of my skin froze over.

Felix had used his life to cast a net on me. It bound me tightly, leaving me no way

to escape.

"Stop talking nonsense! I'm not that old yet. I can live for many years to come. Maybe you'll recover and your eyesight will return?"

Felix fell silent. Only sobs could be heard in the ward. Other than that, it was eerily silent.

I was lost and disoriented, I saw dark tendrils in the corners of my eyes. "What do I do, Colin?"

Before Colin could answer, I collapsed in his arms. I heard my parents and Colin calling out my name earnestly. Mom was crying, and Colin was choking on his tears. Something hot fell on my face, burning me.

My eyes fluttered open as Mom gently called my name.

I was lying on the bed in the emergency room. Colin was holding my hand as he stood next to me. His eyes were puffy.

“She’s fine now. She collapsed from the shock. Make sure she gets enough rest. And don’t do anything that’ll make her emotional. Otherwise, it might leave some permanent damage.”

Dad thanked the doctor and walked him out.

“Colin, what do I do?” I asked in tears.

Colin kneeled and covered his eyes with the back of my hand.

After nearly a month, this sturdy man who could always make me feel safe was crying once more.

“I don’t know. It’s all my fault. I dragged you into this. Why did I fall sick? It’s my fault.” Colin put the blame on himself. His words became more and more

incoherent until a guttural sob was left.

Aunt Mel came. Afraid, I hid under my blanket.

She helped Colin stand up and patted his hand to console him. Then, she touched my cold cheek and smiled dryly. “Lulu, rest assured. I’m here to tell you that it’s Felix’s destiny to endure this hardship with Colin. You’re caught in the crossfire,

that’s all.

“Felix won’t regain his eyesight if you date him, nor will he turn evil if he doesn’t date you. I made a mistake by forcing you back then. But this time, I won’t repeat the same mistake.

“You’re right. Colin is my son too. I shouldn’t play favorites and trade one son’s happiness for another. Félix is already unhappy. I don’t want Colin to be unhappy too. Don’t force yourself to do something you don’t want to, Lulu.

“If you love Colin, then stay with Colin. Have a happy life together.”

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“I have two sons. Whichever one of them leads a happy life, I’ll be happy too. So Lulu, don’t ever feel that you must do something. As for Felix, your Uncle Austin and I will handle him.”

Aunt Mel’s words warmed me and moved me to tears. Spring had arrived after this harsh winter. Mom looked at Aunt Mel in disbelief and quickly grabbed her

hands..

For the first time in a few months, the two who had grown up together hugged each other again.

Thanks to Aunt Mel’s encouragement, Colin and I saw hope in the predicament

once more.

“Thank you so much, Melinda.” Mom and Melinda cried together.

It seemed like tears were the only thing capable of conveying our emotions here.

Colin kissed the back of my hand and said gratefully, “Thank you, Mom. And sorry.”

Just then, the loud noise startled everyone.

Uncle Austin was pushing the chairbound Felix, and they were by the entrance.

The source of the noise was a big, red apple. It rolled on the floor.

Felix seemed to have used up every ounce of his strength to throw that apple. He reclined on the wheelchair weakly. His eyes were abyssal. And his face, sharper due to weight loss, showed rage, despair, regret, and pain.

“Felix...”

“Felix...”

No one could finish their sentence because

we did not know what to say. Seven of

us were in the emergency room, yet not a sound was made.

Uncle Austin’s scream was the first to break the silence. Felix had fainted.

After an emergency treatment, he quickly regained consciousness. refused to communicate or throw a tantrum. He became mute.

Once again, the reticent Felix who blocked everyone out returned.

A therapist said that his condition was looking dire because his depression had returned and he also recently became handicapped. He’d need familial support to make him speak up again. We would need to encourage him to think about his favorite fond memories.

“At the moment, what is the worst–case scenario?” Colin asked the therapist, concerned.

The therapist adjusted his glasses and said plainly, “It’s hard to give you a definitive answer. Some make a full recovery after a few months because they’re willing to work with me. Some decide to dwell on it, and no medicine can help

that.

“In extreme cases, patients might engage in self-harm.”

“Self-harm?” Aunt Mel repeated incredulously.

“Yes, I know of a pregnant woman. Her postpartum depression didn’t improve, so she ended her life by jumping from the ninth floor. But of course, this is a special case. Most patients will eventually make a full recovery.”

Death.

This word continued to hang heavy on everyone’s mind. It shackled everyone.

The hope we had vanished in an instant.

Under the effect of a sedative, Felix fell asleep. Uncle Austin kept him company while we sat quietly in the smoking room.

There were six chairs in the room. My parents sat in the left corner while I lay in Colin’s arms. Aunt Mel sat in the right corner.

All five of us looked at the empty seat. Only quietness remained.

“Harper, I meant what I said. I’m not being heartless here. I already lost Felix. I can’t lose Colin too.”

Aunt Mel rubbed her eyes that had run out of tears and smiled bitterly. “Lulu, just stay with Colin. No matter what happens to Felix, it’s none of your business. Your Uncle Austin and I will handle everything.”

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Mom grabbed Aunt Mel's hands over the long, rectangular desk. She kept apologizing and thanking her while crying.

Colin and I held each other's hand. I snuggled in his arms. As always, he was warm, but I felt cold. I fell more and more in love with him as each day went by.

But the image of Felix lying in a pool of blood and his soulless body on the bed would never get out of my head.

While Aunt Mel's words managed to bring me some solace, what would Felix do? He trapped me with his life. He saved my life. Would he give up?

If one day, his condition was declared incurable and he chose death, how was I going to face that?

If I had to make the choice... My heart was telling me to pick Colin. Yet my mind told me that I should pick Felix because he got hurt while saving me. I wanted to repay my debt to him. I couldn't leave him high and dry heartlessly.

What a dilemma.

And if I followed my heart and picked Colin, would we be happy living with that decision?

"I won't be happy, Lulu. I don't want to lie to myself forever." The night was dark. Colin's trembling fingers held a cigarette while he gave me his honest answer painfully.

I knew that'd be his answer. He wouldn't be happy, and I wouldn't either. Maybe no one would be happy.

"But Lulu, even if it means I have to live in guilt forever, I don't want to give you up. Promise me that no matter what happens, you won't give me up either. Please promise me that, Lulu."

“Yes, I promise you,” I reassured Colin. I lay silently in his arms, trying my best to locate his pine scent amidst the nicotine.

broke. We didn’t cry or speak.

We felt close yet distant at the same time.

Like a puppet, Felix lay on his bed silently. He ate and drank when we fed him. And then, he would stare at the ceiling while spacing out. Regardless of what we said or did, he would not react to it. He only fell asleep when no one paid attention to him.

That became his life..

He turned himself into a living corpse. Apart from the fact that he was still breathing, he was no different from a cadaver.

Uncle Austin and Aunt Mel took an extended leave to take care of Felix. Colin went to teach at school in the morning and came at night to take over his parents

’ duties.

23 days after the accident, the doctor said that they had already done what they could and that Felix’s wounds had healed. He could be discharged.

Uncle Austin rented a two–bedroom apartment in the residential area opposite the university and moved in. Meanwhile, Colin applied for a hiatus on Felix’s

behalf.

Originally, Aunt Mel wanted to take Felix back to Southville to make caring for him easier. But for some reason, they agreed to let him stay in Jinovy.

Everything was over, and my mundane life returned.

I resumed my daily commute between my school, the cafeteria, and my apartment. Nothing much had changed in my life, but I hardly saw Colin now. We stopped calling each other every day too. We only met at school once in a while.

He was skinnier than before. The coat he used to wear now looked too big for him.

I felt miserable. One, I owed Felix too much. Two, I felt bad because Colin was clearly overworked.

That said, a brief embrace and a warm smile were all that was needed to make my day.

That night, both of us couldn't sleep. We hugged each other and sat until dawn broke. We didn't cry or speak.

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He was skinnier than before. The coat he used to wear now looked too big for him.

I felt miserable. One, I owed Felix too much. Two, I felt bad because Colin was clearly overworked.

That said, a brief embrace and a warm smile were all that was needed to make my

day.

+15 BONDS

I often lingered on the street Colin would pass by on his way back to his home so that we could see each other. I could hug him, and he could hug me.

I missed him so much.

No one ever gave me updates on Felix. Colin wouldn't mention hi either. He only asked me to take care of myself.

Chapter 350

Colin told me that time would bury everything.

The temperature in Jinovy reached a record high in mid-April.

Over the past few months, the 23-year-old me became more mature and composed. Whether I felt happy, sad, or angry, it all stayed hidden under my always-smiling mask.

Helen told me that I had become more aloof. She said that one day, I would become a nun who forsook mortal desires.

I laughed, saying she was exaggerating. But with a serious expression, she told me that if love hurt, it was time to let go.

I knew that, of course.

But I couldn't and wouldn't let go. There was nothing wrong with my relationship with Colin. The problem was Felix.

I caressed my wet eye corners and asked, "Are you able to let go of Matthew, then?"

Helen fell silent. Then, she began sobbing until she fell asleep.

I didn't tell her that I would never give Colin up. Love never hurt me. What I was feeling was my guilt toward Felix.

I had been dreaming about the Felix from before he turned 18, that handsome young man who stood under the garden while gazing at me with his cold eyes.

His slender fingers snatched my school bag away and put it on his shoulder. He walked in front of me reluctantly and would turn around from time to time to ask me to hurry up. If I dallied, we would be late.

During a PE exam where we had to run for 800 meters, I fell and cut my knees. He chastised me for being a dead weight while he ran to the infirmary to get

bandages and disinfectant to treat my wound.

1/3

We had made some unforgettable memories together. But many things had happened since then. The fondness we felt was slowly replaced by resentment.

Felix and I were not meant to be together. I used to resent him for his

heartlessness and cruelty. Nevertheless, I wanted him to live happily. I wanted him to be who he used to be.

I did not love him. But I did not want to owe him anything either.

I didn't have class on Friday afternoon, so I sat alone in my favorite corridor.

Too many things had happened in the past six months, so much so that I had not visited my favorite place for a long time.

The view was still the same, but I wasn't as carefree as I once was.

I had once argued with Felix here. I had promised my love for Colin here.

Here I was at the same spot. Yet the people I knew were long gone.

“Colin, we haven’t seen each other for six days. How have you been?” I hugged my knees on the bench and asked the breeze.

I didn’t have the courage to bother Colin. He was working very hard for our future. If I called at an unfortunate time and it triggered Felix, the outcome could be disastrous. Colin’s effort would be in vain, and our future would look even

more hopeless.

But I missed him dearly. He spent more than 20 years becoming an integral part of my life. I couldn’t live without him.

I knew what I wanted now.

I loved Colin. I loved him deeply.

Colin was enduring pain and suffering in a place beyond my sight. And I was waiting alone for him to bring me good news.

He was doing everything he could for me. I appreciated that. And I also missed him terribly.

Helen rarely came back to the apartment lately. I was all alone in the apartment

as if the world had abandoned me.

When I phoned Mom last night, I couldn't hold it back anymore and cried.