

## Standing before Love Chapter 702

It had been a long time since Lara had been described as a little girl, but she didn't let her reaction show. Nikolai probably had no idea that his casual remark was making her heart race like crazy.

He had always been a dim little boy in Lara's eyes; she knew that she was no match for Matthias, and she understood that there was a certain distance between her and Nikolai as well.

All of a sudden, Lara felt a little miserable—was there no other man left for her in this world? Why did she have to waste her time on this pair of cousins? At that moment, Lara couldn't help but criticize herself for her poor choices.

"You're the one who's acting like a little boy, Nikolai. It feels like you'll never grow up," Lara replied. Her words stunned him momentarily, and he had the urge to refute her claims.

"Are you saying that I'm still a child?" Nikolai seemed quite unhappy with her opinion, for he had clearly improved tremendously in the past few years. Thus, he was unsatisfied to hear that from her.

Lara could make out the discontentment in his tone, so she didn't linger on the topic and brushed it off with a smile. On the other hand, Nikolai stared at Lara in confusion; for the very first time, he was reconsidering who he was in this woman's eyes.

Even though Lara had moved on from the topic, Nikolai still couldn't let it go. He said again, "Have you always thought of me as someone who's super childish?" He didn't realize that Lara was praising him, and he thought that it was an insult.

"No." Lara wasn't sure why Nikolai was exceptionally impulsive today, so much that a sentence as simple as that could trigger him immensely. It was pretty unbelievable indeed.

"I'm sorry, I was being too emotional." Nikolai saw the shift in Lara's expression and knew at once that it wasn't a good time to keep prodding on. Otherwise, the two of them might end up in a quarrel again.

Nikolai was always like this—even though he was stubborn at times, he knew just when to stop. His sharp attitude immediately put out Lara's flames of frustration.

"Stop apologizing to me. You'll make me feel guilty." Lara didn't want to hear his apology, for it made her feel like she was constantly bullying him.

"All right, let's not talk about this anymore." Nikolai didn't know why they were being so fussy with each other today. In fact, their meaningless bickering made them seem a little dumb.

Lara nodded. Both of them had just become unemployed, so there was no need to hurt each other with words. Thus, she turned and stared at the road ahead. Right now, her heart was still racing from Nikolai's earlier words, and she wondered if he was feeling the same.

Their car ride wasn't a long one, but Lara was a little exhausted from it as her emotions were running wild inside. For a split second, she even had doubts if she'd actually fallen for Nikolai. Am I really falling for another man? she asked herself. If that wasn't the case, why was she seeing him in a different light all of a sudden?

Perhaps Lara couldn't bring herself to admit that she had unknowingly developed feelings for Nikolai after working together with him for some time. These two were blind as a bat when it came to such matters, for they were still inexperienced in dealing with romantic relationships.

Meanwhile, Nikolai couldn't stop stealing peeks at Lara from the driver's seat. He didn't understand why either, and he simply wanted to look at her for no good reason—even a glance or two wasn't enough.

An unfamiliar possessive feeling rose up in his chest all of a sudden. Nikolai thought that he was going crazy, and he just noticed that Lara had such a beautiful side profile. The unanticipated speeding up of his heart made him restless all of a sudden like an anxious little boy.

"Just turn left over here." Lara smiled at Nikolai, wanting to give him the prettiest smile she had.

The moment one noticed a change in their friendship, they would end up being more conscious of their appearance. Lara recalled countless times in

the past where Nikolai had seen her sluggish state, and feelings of embarrassment washed over her.

Most of the time, fuel needed to be lit in order to trigger a romantic relationship; a sudden epiphany could make two people realize their importance in each other's hearts. Matthias, who had been a long-time observer, gave them such an opportunity to spark their relationship. After all, Nikolai's overly impulsive moment led them to expose their feelings for each other. Even though Matthias had to endure a round of his cousin's vicious scolding, he wasn't mad about it. In fact, he was even a little grateful.

Love was blind, and it could even be destructive at times. Along with that, it could also complete a person. Matthias didn't know if he was ruined in the hands of Heather or if she had completed him, though. Whatever it was, he hoped that love could bring Lara and Nikolai happiness.

Meanwhile, Matthias was stuck in an endless loop of day-to-day working life. He stopped for a moment and thought about his future—now that he had lost both his most trusted assistants, he was sure that tomorrow would be a boring day. To be honest, he was already quite bored as of now.

Matthias studied the CCTV footage on his monitor, but he couldn't spot Lara nor Nikolai. He was truly not qualified to be a businessman—how could he make such a choice? If he really were to lose Lara and Nikolai at a time like this, it'd greatly affect his plans for the future.

In truth, he had become like this all because of love. Needless to say, emotions were a businessman's biggest enemy. Matthias rose from his seat and stared at his reflection on the glass window, looking awfully haggard at that moment.

"Look at you—you look nothing like a corporate big shot," he muttered to himself. He didn't know if he was doing the right thing, but since he had already done it, he might as well carry on without leaving any regrets.

He would return to his villa after getting off work, but his life would still be as dull as ever. Now that Evan was no longer serving him, there would be less fun at home—in fact, the house would even lack a certain liveliness to it.

Matthias was truly all alone. From now on, he could only fight his battles by himself; he'd even lost his beloved Heather. Perhaps this isn't so bad, though. Just then, a devilish smile crept up on his face.

He recalled his mother's words of the past. "You have a long way ahead of you, Matthias. You'll meet someone you love and who loves you back; she'll complete you and also ruin you. When that happens, don't repeat my mistake."

Indeed, his mother had been ruined by love. Matthias thought about his own family history, and it probably wouldn't take long for him to meet the same fate as well. After all, he knew that he would live a life of destruction ever since he was a little boy; even if he didn't meet Heather, he would've stepped on this path of no return anyway.

"I'll make them pay their price, Mom. I'll avenge you for sure," Matthias said as he stared fixedly at his own reflection in the window. He looked a lot like his mother, and it seemed as though he could see her standing before him.

His mother never wanted him to drown in hate, but considering his young age when those things had happened to him, how could he not? His mother simply wanted Matthias to learn to accept the past and live his own life. Unfortunately, he still chose the path of destruction in the end—he didn't want to fulfill anyone else's wishes.

At that moment, the Locke Group was already hanging by a thread since Matthias' various tactics had garnered a lot of negative attention from the public. Moreover, he even openly challenged the Hart Family. As a result, the Locke Family successfully became an unwanted guest in Bradford City.

Matthias had worked hard to move all of the Locke Group's forces here, and all of that was for this day to come. He was unsure of what else the head of the family had up his sleeves, but he would definitely make the Locke Group suffer huge losses this time.

Matthias was waiting for the right moment to strike while trying to get to the bottom of the Locke Group's hidden forces. At the same time, he was constantly provoking many influential parties in Bradford. Essentially, Matthias was taking one step at a time to force the Locke Group into a dead end, and he was never loyal to the company to begin with.

Back then, there was a long period of time where he wanted to become an international business tycoon through the Locke Group's name; it wasn't until he met Heather did he remember his original goal.

If Matthias were to grow the Locke Group and become a successful businessman in the process, he would've brought glory to his name. However, he wouldn't be able to forgive himself. The Lockes had killed his mother; Matthias wanted them to pay for what they did, and there was no better price to pay than the Locke Group itself.

As soon as the company fell, those good-for-nothings from the Locke Family would experience what it was like to live in hell. Naturally, Matthias couldn't wait for that day to come.

He used to be brainwashed by the typical businessman mindset until Heather stirred his emotions once again, reminding him that he was capable of feeling things. He often felt like he was staring at himself when he looked at the woman—they weren't purely businesspeople. In fact, not even Tony was considered a true businessman.

Their judgement would often be affected by their feelings; if they had to make a choice between emotions and profit, they would even unhesitantly pick the former over the other. Nevertheless, Matthias didn't feel like it was a weakness at all. He was willing to accept this side of himself; the world had many other business tycoons to deal with, so the fact that he wasn't one wouldn't make a difference.

However, the more he wished to fulfill his wish of destroying the Locke Group, the more he had to pretend to care about the company. He had to express his concern more than anyone else in order to trick them.

In the end, he even had to trick himself. Thus, from Heather's point of view, there was a huge possibility that Matthias would pick the Locke Group over her. At that moment, Matthias suddenly realized something—he finally understood that Heather's scornful attitude toward him back then was directed toward the Locke Group.

Nonetheless, now that he was in a dire situation, Matthias didn't have a choice anymore. He didn't even have the courage to stand before Heather to tell her the whole truth.

He had driven away his most trusted companions, and he had lost Heather as well. Everything he was doing was according to the Locke Family's wishes. Although he was a step closer to gaining their trust, he didn't know if he should be mourning or celebrating.

Troubled by his thoughts, he pushed away the stack of documents on his desk, but even so, he couldn't calm his disturbed state of mind. Just then, he suddenly remembered about Ether who had left his villa in a hurry—he still owed her an explanation.

Since he wasn't in the mood to work, he decided to visit her. Matthias didn't want to owe anyone anything, especially when it was a woman. He recalled that the woman's body was a little cold to the touch; for a split second, his mind brought him back to the night where he and Heather had cuddled to sleep.

Matthias suddenly felt like a lowly idiot and a failure. The unanticipated reminder made his reason for visiting Ether seem so ridiculous. Did he intend to explain things to her, or did he simply want to search for a sign of Heather on that woman's body in desperation?

Whatever it was, Matthias left the presidential office and headed straight to the Caliph Nightclub. He didn't know how he was going to apologize to Ether, but perhaps he could make her leave the club forever. After all, Ether wasn't suitable to be mingling around in a place that served to entertain men.

Indeed, it was in a man's nature to free a damsel in distress, and Matthias was no exception. Even though he wasn't very close to that woman, he didn't want her to keep working at a place like that.

From an outsider's perspective, it might seem like Matthias was always surrounded by beautiful women. In reality, he couldn't be bothered by those women around him. If not for professional purposes, he never made contact with women in private.

Nevertheless, what he had with Ether was an unforeseen connection; it was the first time Matthias wasn't as irked by a woman like her. Still, he was vaguely aware that he was simply using her as a source of emotional support.

With nobody around him at the moment, Matthias needed a friend; more accurately, he needed someone to listen to him. As such, he naturally thought of Ether, the woman who would appear in front of him from time to time. He didn't think he was an exceptionally noble person, and he didn't feel like she was lowly either.

Matthias no longer felt like suppressing his feelings. Since he finally had something he wanted to do, he was going to do it. He was even considering

giving Ether a new identity; after all, life was too short not to go crazy once in a while!

## Standing before Love Chapter 703

The car sped along the highway. As it passed through a tunnel, Heather's face appeared vaguely before Matthias's eyes. Matthias hated such a hallucination, so he sped up the car and quickly passed through the tunnel. The lights inside made him feel very uncomfortable, and he felt sick as scenes about Heather kept popping up in his mind. He tried his best to shake off such a state of mind since there were many other things he needed to accomplish. Hence, he couldn't be completely under Heather's control since now wasn't the right time to be wrapped up in a relationship.

There wasn't much distance left between Matthias and Caliph Nightclub after he passed through the tunnel, and he tried his best to recognize the signs around him as Caliph Nightclub was hidden among them. As his car slowly drove in, he found the nightclub with his sharp eyes. Then, he parked his car in front of it with a half-smile. Who would've thought this was such a place by looking from the outside? The place looked ordinary, and it was a pretty good disguise.

He stopped his car and gracefully got out of it with his face devoid of expression. Then, he pushed open the door to the nightclub right away. The front desk receptionists were still the same people as before, and they recognized him because he had an outstanding air about him. With a face so stony that no one could guess what was on his mind, he told the front desk receptionists about the reason for his visit. However, they looked at him with troubled expressions because the request he made was against the rules.

"Tell your boss to come out and meet me." Matthias could tell that they were in a difficult situation. Indeed, it was useless to talk to the small fries about such things. He didn't like making things difficult for ordinary people, and he even often took care of their feelings. Sometimes, he felt he was incredibly gentle, yet he was unwilling to show such tenderness to profit-seeking businesspeople in the business world—he felt that he had a lasting hatred for the rich in his bones.

Since it was Matthias, the nightclub's owner came out without any hesitation. Matthias looked at the owner and asked him, "Can we find somewhere quiet

to discuss things?” He had always been well-mannered, and the owner naturally had no reason to turn him down when his features softened.

The owner then led Matthias to his private space; he lived at the nightclub most of the time because the place often had emergencies he needed to personally deal with. “Please have a seat, Director Locke.” The owner had a shy smile on his face.

Only then did Matthias get to see the owner’s face clearly. They merely came across each other last time, and only this time did Matthias find that the nightclub’s owner’s face showed signs of aging together with pure shyness similar to a high schooler’s. Such a discovery surprised him, for few middle-aged people could retain such shyness. What a strange person he is, he thought to himself. “Is Ether here?” he asked straightforwardly.

Meanwhile, the owner looked at Matthias in a troubled manner. “You probably don’t know this, but she’s already quit her job.”

No wonder the front desk receptionists had that look on their faces, Matthias thought to himself. It seemed like they were unaware of Ether’s resignation and merely thought that Ether wasn’t here today for some personal reasons. “She quit her job?” he asked in bafflement. Indeed, this answer caught him by surprise.

However, the owner was very surprised too, for he thought Ether quit her job so easily because she had become acquainted with Matthias. After all, he knew Ether’s family situation very well, and she needed this high-paying job. However, it seemed that he had misunderstood her.

As he looked at the strained expression on the owner’s face, Matthias asked again, “I need her address.” He believed the owner knew where she lived.

The latter looked at him; when he saw how serious Matthias appeared to be, he guessed what had happened between him and Ether. This was a profound mystery, but he readily gave Ether’s address to Matthias—the man had an aura about him that made him look commanding even though he didn’t look angry, so the owner didn’t dare to lie to him. Besides, he thought Matthias could even help her out.

Unlike other owners who bore no conscience, this nightclub owner still maintained his morals. Matthias discovered this after several rounds of conversation, though he wasn’t interested to know too much about the story



behind it. He gave the owner a nod and said politely, "Thank you." Naturally, it gave people a sense of kindness.

The owner smiled a smile of gratification as he watched Matthias leave this small space of a few square meters. Perhaps because he was used to seeing those garishly and frivolously dressed dandies, he couldn't help feeling a little excited at the sight of an exception like Matthias.

Meanwhile, Matthias looked at the small note in his hand with Ether's address written on it. As he stood in front of the car, he hesitated for a bit. He had gone beyond reason by suddenly rushing to the clubhouse, so he thought he must have gone crazy since he wanted to go to Ether's house as well. Upon thinking of her resignation, he had to connect it with himself. Would Ether have quit her job so quickly if it weren't for him?

He then looked at the envelope he was holding, which was some form of compensation that the owner wanted to give Ether. In other words, the owner entrusted him with the task of delivering this to Ether during his visit. It seems like I already have a reason to go to Ether's house, he thought to himself with a relieved expression. In reality, he could easily find out Ether's bank account number and transfer the money to her directly by remittance. In an instant, a reason that necessitated the visit became far-fetched.

Matthias got into his car as he was considering this. He wasn't prepared to actually meet Ether, not to mention that Ether hadn't prepared herself for this either. Such a scene had been portrayed too many times in novels and TV dramas, but Matthias didn't think he was the prince who fell in love with Cinderella. Therefore, his reasoning made him unable to start up his car and go to Ether's house.

Still, he couldn't throw away the note he was clutching in his hand, though he had tossed the envelope containing the money onto the passenger seat. Deep down inside, he was in an unusual dilemma. He slowly started up his car, and he had to be on the road no matter what choice he would make.

Meanwhile, Nikolai and Lara had stopped in a field in the countryside and were regretting that they didn't drive a cross-country vehicle over. "The wilderness?" Nikolai asked while looking at Lara in bafflement. He didn't expect Lara's secret garden to look like this.

"What's the problem? Do you not like it?" Lara stared fixedly at him. She couldn't guarantee his safety if he dared to give any wrong answers.

Nikolai could tell the threat in Lara's eyes, so he waved his hand. "No, I like this place very much." Even the smile on his lips became hypocritical.

"It seems that you don't like this place. I regret sharing my secret garden with you," Lara said in annoyance.

It was winter, and flowers had withered in Lara's secret garden. Only some wildflowers that could survive hardships were scattered here and there, and even the thick growths of grass were in low spirits. The place was overgrown with dead greenery, and it looked as though they could be destroyed by wildfire at any time. Lara felt somewhat sad as she looked at her secret garden. As it turned out, she hadn't been here for a long time, and the garden had withered.

Upon seeing Lara's sad eyes, Nikolai felt embarrassed instead; he felt the need to comfort her. "Cheer up, Lara. This place is really beautiful." He instantly felt he lacked the ability to describe things, and he disliked himself inwardly for that.

"Really?" Lara cast Nikolai a disdainful look as she didn't find what was beautiful about this place. She almost forgot that she had not been here for half a year; this was not because she had nothing to be sad over, but merely because she was unusually busy. "You know that I was born and raised in Bradford City, Nikolai. I visit Bradford City every year, but do you know how happy I was when President Locke said he wanted to develop a business in Bradford City and moved the Locke Group's headquarters here?" She closed her eyes. This way, she would be much closer to her secret garden and could often come here. However, things hadn't gone according to plan. Despite such a close distance, she had never been here even once. Lara was thoroughly disappointed with herself. When she moved back to Bradford City at that time, she thought she was back to her home ground. Unfortunately, she was wrong. Not only did she lose Matthias here, she also lost those past joys.

"I remember that. You chuckled like a cat that sneakily caught a fish back then, but I never saw you chuckling like that again afterward." Nikolai reminisced about the past with Lara. Before arriving in Bradford City, they had been an unbeatable trio. It seemed like they shouldn't have come here, and Nikolai knew that the changes in their relationship had been caused by the woman named Heather. He would never deny Heather's charm, but he still regretted the changes in their relationship very much.

“Have you decided what to do in the future, Nikolai?” Lara asked him. She didn’t know where her new starting point was.

“Perhaps we can team up and start a business,” Nikolai suggested jokingly. This wasn’t the first time he had such thoughts; he thought about this possibility during the days when he had a secret crush on Heather, but he didn’t think of being together with Lara back then.

“It sounds like a nice idea.” Lara laughed, but tears accidentally streamed down her cheeks.

“Why don’t we imagine how we’d divide up the labor and work together in the future right now?” This was better than what Nikolai had imagined, for he still had Lara keeping him company at the very least. He became increasingly doubtful of his capabilities after working under Matthias for a long time. He didn’t know where his limits were, nor did he know if he’d be able to make some achievements after leaving Matthias. Starting a business was the best way to prove oneself. As Nikolai looked at Lara beside him at this moment, he strengthened his resolve even further.

“Why should we discuss something boring like work in my secret garden?” Lara disagreed with him. She had just regained her freedom, so why would she trap herself in the workplace again?

“Okay, let’s talk about something interesting then,” Nikolai suggested. In reality, he didn’t know what was interesting.

“In that case, we might as well travel together.” The days in Bradford City made Lara feel very oppressed. In particular, she felt as though she was living on the edge of a blade recently, so traveling might be able to get her to relax temporarily.

“In that case, may I ask where you would like to travel, Miss Locke?” Nikolai hadn’t backpacked for a long time, so the idea of traveling together sounded really nice to him.

Lara was seriously considering the idea of traveling. “We need to find a place where we both like. Why don’t we reduce the scope first? The entire world is too big of a scope.”

“In that case, we’ll just travel within Solaria,” said Nikolai, suggesting an area that sounded much smaller compared to the globe.

“Great. Let’s visit the south then.” Lara smiled innocently, for she liked that place.

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As the young pair continued to chatter, the secret garden would be disturbed...

## Standing before Love Chapter 704

As the cold breeze brushed against Lara, she shrank her neck upon feeling the chilly sensation. When Nikolai saw that, he took off his coat and put it over her.

“The weather’s so weird! Maybe we shouldn’t stay too long out here.” Having given up his coat, Nikolai was prone to the assault of the cold.

“Yeah.” Although she was reluctant to leave, it wouldn’t be wise to stay out any longer.

“If you like it here, we can come over anytime we want, Lara.” Nikolai saw her reluctance and smiled at the woman, offering to keep her company the next time they came.

Since having company was indeed welcomed, Lara nodded her head in agreement, feeling Nikolai was getting more and more pleasant. Now that she had the opportunity to assiduously observe him, she realized that he was rather outstanding. In fact, she wondered why she had never seen him in such a light before.

“Don’t stare at me like that. You’re making me self-conscious.” Nikolai got curious about what she was peering at and touched his own face. There’s nothing on my face!

Lara shook her head and laughed. “What’s with that? Are you afraid that I’d fall for you?” Upon hearing her charming laugh, Nikolai’s heart started to palpitate uncontrollably.

Nonetheless, he regained his composure and hastily defended by saying, “No! Of course not!” Feeling as though she was toying with him, he couldn’t look her straight in the eyes.

“Let’s go!” The moment Lara smiled, Nikolai felt like his entire world had brightened up.

Although he wanted to hold her hand, he didn’t have the courage to do so—he withdrew his arm before he could fully extend it. Just like how he didn’t dare to admit his feelings for Heather openly, he couldn’t bear any indecent thoughts toward Lara, and he disdained himself for being so cowardly.

However, he was not the only coward—Matthias was the same, for he was troubled by his inability to make a rational decision. As he clutched the note in his hand, he suspected that he had truly gone insane for being so indecisive.

Despite having a clear answer in his heart, he couldn’t find a reason to convince himself. Perhaps that was the reason why he had been living so dully all this while.

Not wanting things to continue this way, he quickly turned his car around. Since he wished to see Ether and no one could stop him from doing so, why would he burden himself with more doubts?

As the car sped forward, Matthias tossed away every single thought of Heather in his mind, refusing to be such a pathetic man. Judging by Heather’s character, she would surely abhor someone with such a petty mindset; only a man who could afford to stand by her side deserved to be with her.

Nonetheless, he wasn’t aware that every single movement of his was being observed by a certain someone, and him going for Ether was precisely what the person wanted.

The anonymous person was dying to stir up more drama between Heather and Matthias, for it would make everything much more fun. After getting someone to follow Matthias in secret, it seemed like it had been a fruitful decision. When Heather sees these pictures...

The person smirked subtly, eager to sabotage the couple’s relationship. Bradford City is getting more and more interesting right now!

Meanwhile, Matthias was immersed in his own world. He had always been sensitive to being trailed, but he failed to notice the stalker this time.

Since Ether feared that her family would find out about her rather shameful job, she worked far away from home. Although they were needy, her elders

were educated enough to disallow her from partaking in such a disgraceful line of work.

After driving for more than 30 minutes, Matthias finally arrived at Ether's home and parked his car at a spacious spot. To be exact, he had arrived at the suburbs of Bradford City—one that was impoverished rather than renovated and breathtaking. Needless to say, it was a joke to the people residing in the city.

After getting out of his car, Matthias adjusted his collars. Such a place was one he rarely visited. Back when he was still under his mother's care, they weren't poor enough to live in a poorly developed area, so he was quite unfamiliar with the situation in front of him.

As he stared at the disorganized apartments, Matthias was visibly speechless. In fact, trying to figure out which block Ether lived in was a perplexing puzzle.

Instead of unnecessarily racking his brains, he thought it would be more efficient to ask the people nearby. When he saw a mother-daughter duo walking his way, he went over and asked them for directions.

"Good day," Matthias politely greeted.

As it was a rarity for a fine man like such to appear in that area, the mother and her daughter were simultaneously captivated by Matthias' appearance. They were so baffled that they even forgot what to say to him, but the mother tactfully regained her senses first.

"Good day to you too." She grinned in a bashful manner, stunned by his handsomeness.

"Could you perhaps point me to block 21?" Since the buildings weren't numbered in order, Matthias was visibly confused. Indeed, it was a pain in the bum to navigate oneself in such a complex area.

"We happen to live there as well! Why don't you come with us?" The mischievous little girl offered assistance as she ogled at Matthias, for she was charmed by the man's idol-like appeal!

At that, Matthias revealed a smirk as he nodded. How could he not realize that it was his manliness that triggered the duo's enthusiasm?

Since the path was rather bewildering, it would have taken him a long time to locate block 21. Fortunately, he had bumped into the mother-daughter duo. As he followed them, Matthias kept quiet along the way, looking amiable yet prideful at the same time.

The girl thought of various pick-up lines to use on him as they led Matthias to the block, but she swallowed her words since she didn't know what to say to him. After all, the outstanding man behind her was so intimidating that she couldn't bear it, and she became rather clumsy in his presence.

Soon enough, they were almost at their destination. The girl became nervous, but she knew that she shouldn't be fantasizing about such scenarios since she could never be on Matthias' level. In the end, she remained silent as the latter took his leave.

"Thank you for bringing me here. I shall take my leave now," Matthias said as he walked toward the elevator, clueless to the fact that he had unintentionally wavered the youthful heart of a young girl.

From what he remembered, Ether lived in unit 703. Soon enough, he located the unit and knocked on the door.

After some time, an old woman opened the door. She gazed at Matthias' unfamiliar face while the latter merely revealed a courteous smile.

"Good day, madam. I'm here for Ether." It was not until he blurted the sentence did he remember that he hadn't gotten Ether's real name.

As things got awkward, the old woman expectedly glowered at him and asked, "Who's Ether?"

Instantly, Matthias regretted not having asked the clubhouse owner for Ether's real name. How should he explain himself to the old woman now?

Fortunately, when he heard Ether's voice from inside the house, he tactfully claimed, "I'm here for your granddaughter, madam. I heard her speaking just now."

The old woman glowered at him cautiously, thinking that he was probably one of the scoundrels in the area given his odd words.

Evidently, the old woman wasn't easy to deal with. As they stared at each other, a series of footsteps neared them.

"Who is it, Nana?" As Ether's voice got closer, she eventually showed herself and was surprised to see Matthias at her door. There was even a tinge of pleasure on her face, for she never expected him to find her place.

When he saw her, the man smiled slightly as she subconsciously yelled, "Why are you here, Director Locke?"

"I'm here to tell you that I reject your resignation." His beam suddenly turned into a sly grin.

Upon listening to their conversation, the old lady realized what was happening. She assumed that Matthias was Ether's superior, so she immediately welcomed him in with utmost enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, the young girl's heart fluttered since she hadn't expected those words, wondering if Matthias had a little change of heart toward her.

As he sat straight up on Ether's home couch, he swept his eyes around the room, estimating the unit to be about a hundred square feet; such a tiny unit was able to contain four separate rooms.

Evidently, the space in the house was truly limited and the structure of the family was rather complicated since both of Ether's paternal and maternal grandmothers were there.

Since it was still working hours, her parents weren't home; school hadn't ended yet, so the kids were absent as well.

Right now, only Ether and her grandmothers were home. The two senile ladies chatted animatedly with Matthias about their homely matters, and the latter would respond politely. Throughout the entire time, Ether couldn't find an opportunity to interrupt the conversation. When his eyes met hers occasionally, both of them were visibly helpless.

Since she didn't want her elders to bother the man any further, Ether came up with an excuse to take Matthias out of the house. Although she was still dwelling on the pleasure that she received from his visit, she felt somewhat embarrassed after calming herself down.



Undoubtedly, Ether was conscious of how impoverished her home and family were—that was why she was reluctant to let him overstay. Besides, she felt that she looked rather old-fashioned with her house clothes on.

I look hideous right now!

However, Matthias never saw her that way. In fact, he preferred her current appearance since it reminded him of Heather. Even though they were far off in terms of looks and temperament, he could surprisingly detect Heather's scent on Ether.

As they walked along the alley, Ether lowered her head as she was too bashful to look at the man beside her, fearing that he'd judge her. Although she wanted to run away from him so that he wouldn't see her ungodly appearance, she couldn't withdraw herself from his charm.

"I'm sorry for coming without notice," Matthias gently uttered, briefly comforting her trembling heart.

"How did you know about my resignation?" With her head even lowered, she was simultaneously stupefied yet honored by his sudden apology.

"I went to the club." His tender timbre intoxicated her.

It was only then that Matthias had gotten to know her true name, Natalia Wright. It had nothing to do with 'Ether', though.

"You went to the club..." Natalia was too embarrassed to continue, for she felt that she'd appear rather narcissistic.

"I went to look for you," he answered directly, knowing what she meant to say.

"About last time, I hope you don't take it to heart. You didn't do anything wrong that night." Natalia assumed that he was still dwelling on that night's incident.

Matthias wanted to deny her words as he stared at her, but he couldn't say anything despite opening his mouth. Was he supposed to tell her that he decided to come and see her on a whim?!

## Standing before Love Chapter 705

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Natalia could sense Matthias' discomfort, and she began thinking about how she should ease the current awkwardness here upon seeing this.

"Let's sit down and have a good chat, Director Locke," she then suggested, knowing that Matthias would not be leaving any time soon.

When he noticed how Natalia voluntarily shifted the conversation away, the words that were stuck in his throat didn't seem important anymore. Instantly, he let out a breath. He had no idea if Natalia had picked up on his thoughts, but he felt at ease right now.

Matthias didn't feel pressured around Natalia, and he didn't need to think about filtering his words. In fact, he quite liked this carefree feeling. If love weighed people down, was there any real need to continue?

"Okay," Matthias immediately agreed. Things couldn't get any better than this.

Similarly, Natalia also hoped that he would stay a little longer. She knew that there was a KFC nearby which was on the cleaner side. This area was awful, and there weren't many nice shops around here. Hence, her inferiority complex kicked in once again.

In the meantime, Matthias spaced out as he stared at Natalia's back while he followed her, for the woman looked far too much like Heather from behind. His lips curved up faintly, and he couldn't help but feel a little glad at the sense of familiarity.

When he realized that he had been constantly searching for traces of Heather in her, Matthias felt immensely guilty toward Natalia. After all, he truly couldn't stop himself from those actions.

Just then, they had reached the aforementioned KFC. Business didn't seem to be going well for this particular outlet, for there were only a handful of people inside there. Natalia felt that it would be weird to just sit down without ordering anything, so she got a sundae.

Naturally, Matthias had no interest in fast food. Natalia didn't ask him what he would like to eat either, for she knew that people with deep pockets would not eat this kind of food at all.

“There aren’t any other decent places nearby, so…” Natalia said awkwardly as she felt embarrassed. Matthias had personally come to see her, but she could only bring him to KFC.

“It’s okay. It’s nice inside here,” Matthias said with a smile.

It certainly was nicer than the outdoors, for it was freezing outside. The heating in this KFC had been cranked up a comfortable level, so it felt cozy and warm inside. Matthias wasn’t a picky person.

Natalia was surprised by this, for she could tell that Matthias’ words weren’t false assurances. Who would have thought that a CEO would be so down-to-earth?

“Is there anything you want to ask me since you’ve come all the way here, Director Locke?” Natalia switched up her phrasing. She had to get Matthias to say something, or her conscience would be weighed down.

“I’ve already asked you my question.” Matthias eyed the sundae sitting before Natalia. The temperature inside the KFC outlet was a little on the higher side, and the sundae would probably melt completely in a short while.

Natalia wracked her brains to recall what Matthias had said earlier. He did seem to have asked her something just now, and it was why she had resigned.

Natalia couldn’t give a satisfactory answer to that question at all, feeling that she’d sabotaged herself. She had just clawed her way back up from a pit, but she was slipping and falling back into it again.

Natalia gave an awkward laugh, seemingly unwilling to continue that topic. Matthias didn’t mind it though—he didn’t have any say over anyone’s resignations, after all.

“Director Locke,” she said. However, she didn’t know why she had to call his name. She needed to find some other line of conversation to talk about, for she couldn’t stand this awkward atmosphere.

She recalled how she had run out of Matthias’ home in despair previously, but when she looked at him now, all those negative emotions completely disappeared.

Even Natalia herself found it strange; she had only ever met Matthias a few times, but she felt an inexplicable bond with him. Moreover, she didn't mind even if she got her feelings hurt by him. If Matthias hadn't come to look for her this time of his own volition, Natalia would probably never know just how tolerant she could be toward others.

"Ether." Matthias was more used to addressing Natalia this way.

However, it was her first time hating the name 'Ether'. She had only called herself that because she liked how it sounded, but she didn't want to hear that name coming from Matthias' mouth. After all, she knew that Matthias fancied someone named 'Heather'.

Now that she had made that connection, Natalia couldn't stop herself from continuing down that rabbit hole. In any case, she never wanted to hear the name 'Ether' anymore.

Matthias picked up on the unnatural look on Natalia's face. Before he could figure out what was going on, he heard Natalia speak up. "You can call me Natalia or something else, but please don't ever address me that way ever again, Director Locke."

Upon hearing that, Matthias wondered if Natalia didn't want to hear anything related to her time at the club because she thought that working there had been humiliating.

"I'm sorry." Matthias never easily apologized back then, but now, apologies came from him easily. Perhaps it was because he had been around Heather for a long time.

"You don't have to keep apologizing to me. You're making me feel bad this way." Natalia thought about the distance between herself and Matthias. They were in two completely different worlds, and the more she thought about it, the less she could stomach Matthias' apology.

"All right," Matthias answered helplessly. He knew that Natalia had a fragile sense of pride, and he had to protect her carefully precisely because of that.

The two of them were awkward around each other, and they didn't know what to talk about. As such, the duo simply stared at each other. Natalia couldn't think of a conversation topic that would work with him, and Matthias had no idea how to talk to her. They simply sat there stiffly inside the KFC, and

Natalia didn't even finish her sundae. Since she had no appetite to eat it, she simply chucked the sundae into the bin.

Their eyes would meet from time to time, but they darted away just as quickly. Evidently, the pair were stiff with each other. Matthias didn't like this atmosphere, and he thought about how he should ease the awkwardness between them.

Meanwhile, Natalia psyched herself up internally. She couldn't miss this rare opportunity, so she should at least say something to him.

In reality, Natalia had been attempting to leave a good impression on Matthias all this time, but things kept playing out differently than she hoped. As such, she felt that she had lost all her confidence in front of him.

Eventually, Matthias pulled out an envelope from his pocket. It was thick and filled to the brim with something. He handed the envelope over to Natalia and said, "Your boss asked me to give this to you." It had been tough for Matthias to think of something to talk about.

He had never been so awkward with Heather before. In truth, he also beat himself over this. Why couldn't he think of something to say when he was with Natalia? On one hand, Matthias didn't want to say anything that would get Natalia worked up, and on the other hand, he didn't know anything about her at all. He didn't know what to talk about with a stranger.

"This envelope..." Natalia was a little hesitant, but in the end, she took the envelope that Matthias had brought.

Natalia knew her financial situation very well; since there was money being given to her, she wouldn't turn it down. If it wasn't for the severe lack of money, Natalia would probably have continued to be in school as the top-scorer of her year.

Ever since she was little, her grades had been exceptional. However, as her parents got older, the family couldn't afford to pay off their bills. Since she was their eldest daughter, Natalia had no other choice. However, she couldn't find any decent jobs with only a high school diploma and having given up on attending the best university in Bradford City. When her family fell sick, she was in utter despair since she had no other alternatives. Natalia had gone through so much turmoil when she brought herself to step into that industry,

but when she saw how much money she could easily earn, she ended up sinking further.

If she hadn't met Matthias, Natalia figured that she probably still wouldn't have made the decision to leave the nightclub. Her situation at home had clearly improved, and she didn't need to continue earning money that way. However, Natalia was reluctant to part with a job that brought in money so easily.

It was Matthias who made Natalia get reacquainted with herself, and he was the one who made her pride and shame return to her. In other words, he was like a ray of light in the darkness as he shone down on her. Now that this ray of light was sitting in front of her, Natalia felt uneasy as her heart raced. She used to never believe in love, nor did she believe in love at first sight. But now, her heart was telling her that love was right by her side.

"Do you have any plans later?" Matthias took the plunge and extended an invitation to Natalia.

The latter looked at him blankly. She didn't understand Matthias' intentions; she just felt inferior, and she didn't dare to believe what Matthias was saying between the lines.

"I'll just be heading home to spend time with my grandmothers," Natalia answered honestly.

"In that case, do you mind spending time with me instead?" He had no idea how else he could phrase this so that it wouldn't sound so intimate.

It felt as though pure friendship didn't exist between men and women, and such intimate situations could arise by accident. Matthias could look Heather honestly in the eye and tell her clearly that he loved her.

However, when he was with Natalia, Matthias felt that whatever he said wasn't right. He had never talked to a girl like this in a one-to-one setting. Although he had been alone with Lara before, they mostly talked about work or just like how friends would do.

When he was with Natalia, Matthias could clearly sense the intimate air between them. He was troubled over this, and he had no idea how he should treat her. He was like a middle school kid when it came to romantic matters, and he was at a complete loss. All this time, he assumed that he was in love

with Myra, but he ended up falling for Heather instead. What was he doing now?

Matthias side-eyed himself. He was now with a woman in a public space, saying things that couldn't sound any more suggestive. It seemed that hitting on ladies was an innate skill, and Matthias didn't need to practice it much to become a master at this.

"Where would you like to go after this?" Natalia naturally wanted to go with him after hearing such a frank invitation, but she knew that a lady should show some restraint.

"The State Science Center." The places that Matthias' went to unwind had always been unusual. He wanted to take a look at the latest technology.

.....

Natalia was taken aback by his answer, but where they were going wasn't important as long as Matthias was with her...

"Okay," Natalia whispered. A blush crept up her cheeks, for this was simply too embarrassing.

A pleased smile made its way onto Matthias' face. He knew about his charms, and he also knew that he was being despicable like this.

## Standing before Love Chapter 706

There weren't many other people at the State Science Center at this hour. Meanwhile, it was also Natalia's first time here. Back when Matthias had asked Heather out, he would always decide on places that she liked. With other women, he didn't think too much about it.

Natalia surveyed the place curiously. She was only in her early twenties after all, and since she was still a young woman, she had a strong sense of curiosity. Moreover, she felt that the place was extraordinarily fascinating since Matthias was the one who had asked her to come with him—this was probably how the mind of a person in love worked.

"Do you find all of this boring?" Matthias turned to ask Natalia, to which she shook her head. She always ended up shy whenever she was with him, and it was to the extent that she didn't dare to look Matthias in the eye.

“It’s all very interesting.” Natalia didn’t forget to emphasize that.

Matthias smiled since he was pleased to hear this. “As long as you’re having fun.” He had been worried that Natalia would not be interested in the displays here.

Meanwhile, the woman nervously clutched at the hem of her shirt. She hadn’t taken a good look at her appearance when she left her home earlier, and she felt utterly defeated right now. She was embarrassing Matthias as she stood next to him in her dowdy outfit. She had happily gotten into his car without even thinking about her clothes, not to mention that she had gone out without makeup today. Needless to say, it left her insecure.

Naturally, Matthias didn’t know about Natalia’s thoughts. He just couldn’t understand why she perpetually kept her head lowered, and she looked like she had no confidence at all. This made Matthias unconsciously think of Heather, for the woman had always been brimming with confidence. In fact, those around her would be drawn to her because of the aura she exuded.

Heather gave off an unattainable air, and even Matthias was never able to succeed in his pursuit of her. There was just a world of difference between the two women.

Although Natalia said that she liked the science center, Matthias didn’t feel that she was genuinely happy, wondering if this place wasn’t to her taste. Had it been Heather, he would have taken her somewhere else without a moment’s hesitation. However, the person before him was Natalia, not her. Matthias was excited to be here, and he couldn’t figure out another decent place for them to go. Hence, he decided to continue looking at the exhibits since he loved the technology on display here. He was absorbed by the exhibits, and it was closing time soon. It was already evening by the time they left the science center, and night always came earlier during winter season.

Natalia looked off to the side, for she didn’t know what to do. When Matthias looked at her, his heart dropped before he gave it some thought and said, “It’s getting late. I’ll send you back.”

Natalia had been waiting for Matthias to announce where they would be going next for their date, but she hadn’t expected it to end here. Disappointment flashed across her heart, but this was within Natalia’s expectations.



“All right, thank you,” Natalia answered politely, but the disappointment on her face was still apparent.

Matthias glanced at her, but he didn't say anything else. Instead, they simply walked straight toward the parking lot. He felt that he must have gone crazy for inviting Natalia, and he was completely worked up by Heather.

While they were in the car, Matthias thought about what he had been wanting to say to Natalia. He had kept delaying it all day, and he nearly forgot about his main motive. However, was there any need for him to tell her about that matter? Matthias couldn't be sure.

The two of them were silent, neither of them taking the lead to speak up. Natalia nervously clutched at her seat, for she still wasn't courageous enough to talk. Everything that she wanted to say to Matthias was stuck in her throat.

Meanwhile, the latter mulled it over and over. He couldn't let things drag on, so he just opened his mouth.

“Now that you've resigned, are you going to look for another job?” His question was phrased in a polite and inoffensive manner.

Natalia initially didn't understand what Matthias had said, so she was taken aback by this sudden question. Still, she answered his question with utter seriousness and replied, “Yeah, I'm planning to look for a new job as soon as possible, but my educational qualifications aren't up to snuff. It won't be easy looking for another job.”

Matthias continued to ask Natalia like he was an elderly family member speaking to her. “Have you ever thought about what kind of job you'd like to apply for?”

Natalia turned her head to look at Matthias. She wanted to find some hints in his expression, for his questions were getting weirder and weirder that she couldn't answer him. At the sight of his face from the side as he drove, Natalia was starstruck. She thought that Matthias was cool no matter what he did.

It wasn't until he turned to face her as well that Natalia frantically answered, “Maybe sales or something like that will be a good fit for me.”

“Being a saleswoman is a job that's great for picking up new skills. If you're confident, you can come and interview at our company.” Matthias finally found

a good opportunity to extend a job offer to Natalia, and the latter stared at Matthias uncomprehendingly as she wondered if her ears were playing tricks on her. She had Googled Matthias' name before, so she knew that the Locke Group that Matthias headed was one of a handful of mega corporations that went unrivaled in Bradford City—no, even the entire country.

Natalia's heart leaped for joy at Matthias' offer to let her work at the Locke Group. She couldn't describe her current emotions. If Matthias hadn't been there right now, she would definitely have jumped up right there and then. Naturally, she was willing to take up his offer.

"Are you really letting me work at your company?" Natalia didn't dare to believe it, so she asked him again. Her eyes were wide open at this piece of good news that had befallen her, and her excitement radiated from her entire being. Seeing Natalia's simple joy, Matthias' mood improved greatly all of a sudden.

"You shouldn't be asking if I'm okay with letting you work there—you should be asking yourself whether you're fine working there instead." Matthias believed that Natalia was a talent that could be molded, and he believed that she would be able to excel in a sales position under the Locke Group.

He had looked into Natalia's past before, so he knew that she was an excellent and smart student. However, she would probably have to change that distant demeanor of hers; it was better to be warmer and more approachable when it came to sales. Of course, he couldn't guarantee that customers wouldn't be sadistic toward her, or that they would win against her mouth. At the very least, she looked like she had a certain level of competency.

"I want to work there." Natalia hastily nodded. How could she let a chance like this pass her by?

That topic opened up a new wealth of other topics. The initially tense atmosphere dissipated, and they began to chat excitedly. Natalia was filled with curiosity about her new job, so she had plenty of questions to ask him.

This was something that Matthias was good at, so he naturally explained everything to her, sparing no detail. He had once been in the sales department back then, and he was as competent as anyone else when it came to that field.

Without either of them being aware of it, they soon reached Natalia's apartment block. After all, time always flew by whenever people had fun. Matthias stopped the car, but Natalia was a little reluctant to part since she still had plenty of things she wanted to tell him.

"Remember to come to the Locke Group tomorrow," Matthias reminded her as she got out of the car.

Natalia revealed a girlish smile and answered, "I know. I'll definitely be there tomorrow."

Seeing how Natalia smiled so innocently, he too showed a radiant smile. It was relaxing being with this woman.

After they said goodbye to each other, Matthias continued to drive back into the city. It was already late, so he had to go home and rest. He hadn't been resting well lately, and he had a tough battle ahead of him in a few more days. Hence, he had to make sure that he got enough sleep.

By the time he returned to the manor, it was already 8.00PM. Matthias got out of his car, but Evan didn't come to greet him. At that moment, he felt an inexplicable sense of loneliness. He had personally chased Evan out because of a woman, and he didn't know where the latter was in Bradford City right now. Nonetheless, he knew that the kind person hadn't left the city yet.

The earlier fight between the two was meaningless. They had been close friends for years, and they shouldn't have gotten into such a huge fight over Heather.

In reality, Evan was concerned for Matthias. He had enthusiastically tried getting him and Heather together because he knew that it was difficult for Matthias to fall in love with someone. Likewise, the reason he wanted Matthias to give up on Heather was because he didn't want to see his friend fall deeper and deeper until he hurt himself. However, when one had been touched by love, it was hard to shake it off.

For the last few days, Matthias attempted to numb himself through different methods, for that was the only way he could stop himself from looking for Heather. He already had no pride left when it came to her, and he shouldn't embarrass himself that much at the very least. Not only would Heather look down on him for that, he too would not be able to look at himself.

But when the hour was late and the night was quiet, Matthias couldn't control himself from thinking about Heather, especially when he had no one to talk to.

He had chased Evan out, and he had also pushed Lara and Nikolai away. Right now, his lonely self seemed so pitiful; he didn't even have one person he could spill his heart to. With that, Matthias laughed at himself self-deprecatingly.

After brushing his teeth, Matthias plopped onto his bed. As he stared at the ceiling, Heather's face appeared as an image up there. Damn, I'm even seeing things right now.

"Heather, if I can do everything over again, I will not get to know you," Matthias muttered to himself bitterly.

He knew that if he simply bumped into her, he would definitely fall in love with her again. Heather was his other half, and she was someone that God had sent down to him. Matthias could not be saved, and he could not stop himself from loving Heather. From the very first time he set eyes on her, he knew that she was someone fated for him.

Meanwhile, he wasn't the only one suffering from a sleepless night—Heather couldn't fall asleep either. She had already left Bradford City, but her heart still remained there.

At the same time, another person's breaths could be heard inside the room. Heather recalled the days she spent with Matthias in Iceland; they had stayed in the same room during that trip, and they had also been intimate.

Leon's even breaths made Heather sink even further into her memories. She couldn't move past Matthias; the more she pushed him away, the more her heart wanted to get close to Matthias. She really was a failure of a person.

Through the haziness of her mind, she heard Leon sleep-talking. "Now that you're here, please don't go, Heather."

Those words struck a deep chord within Heather's heart. Pining after someone was such a painful thing, and Heather felt that she was hurting others as well as herself.

There was nothing on Matthias' side, so she wondered if Matthias had finally decided to give up on her this time.

Heather smiled self-deprecatingly. She always had the feeling that he would abandon her for some gain, and now, Matthias had really let her go. She had gotten her wish, but a chunk of her heart was lost.

“Matthias, you really are...” Heather muttered to herself, but she was also afraid that Leon would hear her. After all, they were only just a meter apart.

In the bed, there was a man who deeply loved Heather as he slept next to the woman. She wanted to take a good look at Leon’s face with the aid of the moonlight, but she seemingly ended up seeing Matthias’ face instead.

## Standing before Love Chapter 707

Heather put on a jacket and quietly got down from the bed. Then, she went up to the window and admired the moon outside. The full moon was bright and yellow tonight, and it almost seemed as though she could see Matthias’ face printed on it.

The latter seemed to be everywhere she looked these days, and Heather felt like she could go crazy from these hallucinations. In fact, she had much better things to do, so why was her mind occupied by these romantic affairs instead?

In Heather’s eyes, Matthias had the handsomest face which was incomparable to any man on earth—his good looks were precisely the type that could make her heart flutter.

Sadly, she only felt deeply attached to him after she left. Could Matthias also be thinking about her right now? Was it the best decision for them to break up like this?

It was already 2.00AM when Heather returned to her bed, and she still had to wake up early the next morning to drive. According to rumors, there was an incredible physician who dwelled in this city—apparently, he had the power of rejuvenation.

Heather had sourced this information far and wide. Sure enough, when one began to lose trust in Western medicine, they would often seek remedy from Chinese medicine which was both traditional and reliable. Heather wasn’t certain about the doctor’s true abilities, but perhaps he could give Robert a new hope in life.

It was still rather early when Heather opened her eyes the next morning, for she couldn't sleep well at all. On the other hand, Leon was still sound asleep. Similar to Heather, the man hadn't been resting well these days either, so it was great that he was able to get some quality sleep this time.

Heather waited for Leon to wake up, and she even informed the hotel staff to prepare a scrumptious breakfast. When she glanced at the clock, she noticed it was almost 8.00AM. I'll let Leon sleep for another hour.

At 9.00AM, the hotel staff knocked on the door right on time, sending over the breakfast that she had ordered earlier that morning. Heather got down from the bed and opened the door for the servers, whereas Leon was surprisingly still asleep.

The servers left after pushing the food cart in, but Heather stared at the breakfast spread and realized that she didn't have much appetite. However, Leon could eat like a horse, so she believed that he would have no problem finishing it.

Then, she walked up to Leon's bed before she reached out and nudged him. "It's time to wake up." Heather's voice was cold and emotionless.

"Huh?" mumbled Leon as he heard a familiar voice by his side.

"Get up." Heather was a little louder this time. Along with that, she nudged him harder as well.

"What?" Leon mumbled something incoherent after that, and he couldn't wake up at all.

"It's getting late, Leon. It's time to get up." Heather was getting impatient, for the third time was her limit. She was about to get rough if Leon still didn't wake up.

As expected, Leon still wasn't willing to get up—it was clear that he couldn't be woken up by such gentle means. Thus, Heather decided that she wasn't going to be polite anymore.

She pinched his nose without a warning, waiting to see if he would continue sleeping even like this. Leon opened his mouth to breathe, and his eyelashes quivered in panic. Heather then said ominously, "You'd better get up right now, Leon."

He opened his eyes in a flash. He looked toward Heather, but he couldn't tell where he was for a moment, coming to his senses only after a while.

As he panted for air, he said to Heather in dissatisfaction, "You're going to break my nose!" Heather was putting more and more force in her fingers while Leon complained in pain.

"Since you can't be woken up by words, I can only use force," Heather said with a mischievous smile.

After that, she finally let go of Leon's nose slowly. The man's nose was now swollen and red, and a chuckle escaped Heather's mouth all of a sudden. It was too funny to watch!

"Good morning to you too!" Leon exclaimed in distress.

The helpless look on Leon's face greatly lightened Heather's mood, and he was no doubt her happy pill.

"You're being too rough, Heather. No man would want you if you keep acting like this." Leon rubbed his nose, feeling utterly wronged from being tortured by Heather every single day.

"Oh, is that so?" Heather questioned him sarcastically.

"What time is it, Heather?" After that, Leon rubbed his eyes and asked innocently.

"Can't you find out yourself?" She turned around promptly. Since Leon was awake, she couldn't be bothered to talk.

Leon grabbed his watch by the side and was surprised to see that it was already past 9.00AM. No wonder it's so bright outside. He had overslept quite a bit this time, and he even promised yesterday that he was going to wake up super early today. As he recalled that, he repeatedly slapped his face for not keeping his promise.

"I'm sorry, Heather. I overslept." Leon scratched the back of his head apologetically. Right now, he looked exactly like a guilty elementary school student who was admitting his mistakes.

“Quick, come and eat. Quit stalling already.” Heather was already dressed up, and she even had some light makeup on her face.

“Hehe, I know that you care about me, Heather. Look at all this good food you’ve ordered on my behalf!” Leon giggled foolishly as he got down from the bed.

“Cut the nonsense and come here.” Leon was already used to Heather’s cold-shoulder toward his silly behavior.

Thus, he quickly made his way to the table which was filled with all his favorite food—indeed, Heather was just a woman with a tough mouth and a soft heart.

“You look so energetic today, Heather! I guess you’re in a pretty good mood, huh?” Leon praised her sweetly. Lately, both of them were in a slump, so a little positivity once in a while was very much needed.

Heather couldn’t be bothered to respond. In fact, her dark eye circles were extremely horrifying at the moment; if it weren’t for her full coverage concealer, she would’ve looked awfully tired and lifeless right now.

“Cheer up, Heather,” Leon comforted her hastily. He was worried that she was still thinking about Matthias, and he only hoped that she wouldn’t look as troubled as this whenever she was with him.

“Do I look that unhappy?” Heather argued.

“Yeah.” Surprisingly, Leon nodded.

Heather glared fiercely at Leon, wanting nothing more than to slam his face against the table. He then quickly corrected himself after feeling the murderous intent in Heather’s eyes. “No, you look like you’re in a wonderful mood, Heather.”

“Huh,” Heather snickered. Leon’s ability to read the room was improving these days to the point where she couldn’t find a reason to display her ‘brutality’ toward him.

“Come on, Heather, stop acting like that. My poor little heart is going crazy for you.” Leon tried to act cute with a high-pitched voice, and a wave of disgust instantly passed over Heather.



“You’d better start acting normal.” Her tone had a hint of warning to it.

“Hehe, have you finally cheered up a little?” Leon asked proudly.

“Nope.” Heather truly wanted to ignore this fella.

She ate very little during breakfast. Meanwhile, Leon could tell that Heather had lost quite a lot of weight recently, so he wanted to urge her to eat more.

However, the words that came out of his mouth were instead brazen as usual. “You should eat more, Heather. Your boobs are about to disappear.” Leon immediately regretted his choice of words right after, for he seemed to have triggered Heather yet again.

“Indeed, my boobs can never be compared to yours.” Heather’s eyes nonchalantly swept across Leon’s chest.

Leon had a muscular chest; with the added advantage of his foreigner genes, he had quite a natural brawny build.

Once he heard Heather’s words, he covered his chest with his hands and stared at Heather warily. “Hey, stop staring at my body.” He acted like he was protecting himself from a pervert.

“I’m not interested anyway. I don’t like men with boobs bigger than mine,” said Heather in disdain.

At the very least, her daily bickerings with Leon made life feel much more interesting.

“I’m full.” Leon turned toward Heather in dissatisfaction, for he was suddenly unhappy after hearing Heather’s remarks.

“Let’s go, then.” Heather looked at Leon with a half-hearted smile. Right now, he was nothing more than a slave to her—of course she had to use him to her full advantage.

“Shouldn’t we rest a bit after eating?” Leon was used to taking a nap after his meals since life was more fulfilling that way.

“Of course not—especially not after eating. You’ll get fat.” Heather put on a radiant smile as she bared her teeth, and it made her look like an enchanting vampire.

Thus, Leon could only dejectedly follow behind Heather. They were heading to a remote area today, and it was very befitting for a famed physician to reside at.

Even though Leon was Heather's driver for the day, he wouldn't shut up and kept on blabbering on. Meanwhile, Heather was desperate to stuff cotton in her ears; she didn't want to hear any of Leon's rubbish on the way there.

"This famous Chinese medicine doctor you speak of is really odd. Why won't he take the chief physician spot in the heart of the city? Instead, he's hiding away in such a barren, rural area," Leon said in disapproval. It hadn't been easy to find this legendary physician.

"Not everyone works for the money. Some doctors purely want to help people," Heather spat coldly in reply.

"How's that possible in this day and age?" Leon clearly didn't believe her. Whatever it was, profit came first before anything else. Besides, he'd never seen a kind-hearted person before, not to mention a complete saint.

"You shouldn't judge others with your own standards. Everyone has different goals." Heather sounded like an educator when she said that. In contrast to Leon, she quite admired the doctor's resolve.

Nevertheless, Heather hadn't met the doctor in person, so she didn't know if he was simply fishing for fame or if he was truly a kind-hearted doctor. Anyhow, Heather merely wished for the best. After all, she didn't want to go all the way there for nothing, and it'd be such a waste of time.

"You've changed, Heather. You've become too compassionate," said Leon as he roasted her.

Ever since Heather returned to Bradford City, she seemed to be changing every day. She was no longer the arrogant goddess in high school; now, she was becoming more and more down-to-earth. With that, she was straying further away from the stereotypical image of a businesswoman.

"Is it not a good thing to change?" Heather questioned him. She was quite happy with her current self—at the very least, being compassionate was much better than being inhumane.

“For someone in the business realm, it might not be a good thing.” Leon frowned at her.

“There are compassionate businesspeople out there too; you shouldn’t limit your understanding of people in business.” Heather had gained a new understanding of the business industry, and she didn’t think there was a need to force herself to adhere to stereotypical standards.

“A businessperson will have to sacrifice someone else’s profits in order to accumulate capital. A compassionate businessperson will experience a conflict with their conscience, so why not be a heartless one instead?” Leon was still in disagreement with Heather’s perspective. After all, he had yet to reach her level of enlightenment.

“If that’s the case, I’ll try my best to avoid that. I’ll do what I can to come to a conclusion that benefits everyone so I can give back to society.” Heather countered his claims positively, for she didn’t think it was impossible for someone like that to succeed as well.

“Your ideals are so high up, Heather! That’s good to hear. I hope you’ll succeed in becoming a compassionate businesswoman.” Leon was too embarrassed to carry on his insults after hearing Heather’s response.

After all, he was more than happy for her to find a new goal in her life. He remembered clearly that it wasn’t too long ago when she was still doubting herself and wondering if she was truly suited to be a woman in business.

Now that Heather had found her answer, it was definitely something to be celebrated! Leon hoped that she could work her way toward this new goal of hers without straying off again. Indeed, the mental journey on her path to happiness was too torturous and painful.

“Remember to turn right. Keep your eyes on the road,” Heather quickly reminded Leon as the corners of her mouth curved slightly. She knew that Leon would support her decision no matter what, and it put a great feeling in her chest.

“What kind of road is this?! It’s too bumpy! I never knew such narrow and bumpy roads still exist in this country; I would’ve brought my jeep if I had known!” Leon couldn’t stop complaining as usual.

“Narrow and bumpy roads have their own beauty too. Rather than complaining all the time, why don’t you admire the scenery around us?” Heather mused. She sounded like a philosopher with years of wisdom.

## Standing before Love Chapter 708

The scenery outside was indeed quite beautiful, and Leon’s attention was shifted toward the view in an instant. Nonetheless, it wasn’t a good idea for him to admire the view whilst driving.

Just then, the car plunged straight into a pothole. It wasn’t unusual for a narrow and muddy road on the hills to be filled with unmended pits and holes, though. Heather and Leon got down from the car, and it seemed like a jeep would’ve definitely been more suitable for this trip.

“Thank you so much for your suggestion, Heather.” Leon made sarcastic remarks while the former stood by his side.

Heather didn’t feel like responding at all. Without taking a look at Leon, she made a call on her phone immediately. Leon could only sulk in his own words when he realized that he was being completely ignored.

After Heather put down her phone, he came up to her again. She glanced at him and said, “Someone will take care of this later.”

Leon turned to Heather in confusion, for he wasn’t quite sure what she meant by that. In fact, it didn’t seem like she had told him all there was.

“What do we do now, though?” Leon asked hesitantly. Were they really going to wait for help in this desolate wasteland?

“We’ll carry on by foot,” Heather responded calmly in an emotionless manner.

Leon’s eyes were instantly filled with disbelief as he stared at the woman. “By foot? Are you serious, Heather?” He felt that she must’ve gone crazy—no ordinary person would ever want to do that.

“We’ll reach our destination after hiking this hill. It won’t take long on foot, but we’ll have to take a detour if we drive.” Heather had thoroughly studied the map, and she knew that the steep mountain path was a short-cut.

“Are we really going to leave the car behind, Heather?” Leon tried to snap her out of her impracticality by mentioning the car. At any rate, he wasn’t ready to scale an entire mountain today.

“I told you—someone will take care of it. Besides, the car’s already locked, so nothing will go wrong,” Heather said nonchalantly. Sure enough, a car meant nothing to her.

“Since someone will be here to take care of it soon, it wouldn’t take long to wait for them, Heather. Walking isn’t as easy as driving.” Leon would rather wait for help to arrive and resume their trip after.

“Trust me on this—walking will take as much time as driving right now.” Heather didn’t want to waste any more time; she was unsure how long it’d take for the repairmen to arrive, so she’d rather make haste and start walking instead.

“Let’s not worry about it for a few minutes, Heather. Why don’t we wait a little?” Leon didn’t feel the need to rush. After all, the old physician would always be in the village in the mountains; he wouldn’t run away any time soon, so he couldn’t understand why Heather was in such a hurry.

“It’ll make us seem more sincere if we go on foot.” In fact, Heather had other ideas.

She had found out much about the doctor before she came. The famed physician was an eccentric old man with a strange personality; Heather had a feeling that money alone wouldn’t be an attractive currency for him, so she naturally wanted to make a good impression through other means.

“It’s not our choice whether we go by foot or by car, Heather. No one would look that deep into it.” Since when was Heather so stubborn and inflexible? Businessmen weren’t supposed to be sincere and truthful to begin with.

“It’s been a long time since I last had a breath of fresh air outdoors. Can’t you just let me have a walk?” Since Leon was so determined to change her mind, Heather had no choice but convince him with personal reasons.

“I didn’t know you’d be so eager to calm your mind in nature, Heather.” Leon couldn’t argue any longer. His persistence would only lead to worse outcomes since the woman was adamant.

As a result, Leon reluctantly followed behind her. One reason he wasn't willing to carry on by foot was because of Heather—she had just been discharged from the hospital, so she needed to take extra care of her body.

“Come on, keep up. Why are you dilly dallying? You're a man,” Heather urged Leon as she walked in front. She was quick with her steps, and she didn't look like someone who had just gotten out of the hospital at all.

Meanwhile, Leon quickly picked up his pace. He understood Heather's temper, so he obviously didn't want to upset her. Soon, the man caught up to her from initially being far behind. Since he was fit and healthy, he had no problems keeping up with Heather if he was being serious about it.

As it turned out, hiking wasn't a leisure activity at all—Heather's forehead was beaded with sweat, but they still had a long way to go. The map clearly stated that they only had a few miles on their route, but it was awfully time-consuming to actually hike up the path.

Just then, Leon turned to Heather who was strenuously biting down on her lip. He knew that she was pushing herself, for her body hadn't fully recovered yet. In other words, Heather was obviously torturing herself by doing this. Meanwhile, Leon couldn't help but be reminded of Matthias. He thought to himself if Heather was still feeling remorseful about what happened between them.

From his understanding of Heather, Leon knew that she couldn't let go of Matthias at all. She had simply forced herself to say those hurtful and heartless words to him back in the hospital. Unfortunately, Matthias' response to that was less than mediocre. He was quite a proud and egoistic man, so it was natural that he'd be severely angered from Heather's provocation.

At times, Leon pondered why it was so difficult for Heather to find a suitable man. Perhaps she was looking for a saint to be her partner—after all, how many people out there could endure her sharp tongue? The man would even have to learn to observe her ever-changing mood, and only then could he penetrate the layers of her cold facade to understand her soft and fragile heart.

Even Leon himself couldn't do it, let alone Matthias. He could only watch her suffer while being unable to help. Sometimes, he'd even question himself—why did he decide to help his romantic rival? There was always a voice deep inside of him, constantly telling him to keep Heather to himself.

“How much longer to go, Heather?” Leon looked at her worriedly. He wanted to find an excuse to stop so that she could take a rest.

“We’ll be there in about half an hour; we’ll be going downhill in a bit,” Heather replied excitedly. Her energy seemed to be fully replenished at this moment.

It was as though they would see the renowned doctor in person if they kept pushing on for just a while longer. As a result, Leon felt a lot more motivated as well. However, from the looks of it, Heather’s body was already at its limit. As such, Leon reached out a hand and firmly steadied her by her arm.

“I can’t go on anymore. Let me take a rest,” Leon begged cheekily. He knew Heather very well, for this was the only way to make her stop for a break.

She turned around and stared at Leon; she knew that he was sympathizing with her, but she didn’t feel like taking a break at this time. Leon gripped her arm harder in response to her blatant display of perseverance, but it seemed like Heather was eager to continue forward.

“We’ll take a rest after we reach the peak of the hill.” This was also considered a mini goal that Heather had set for herself.

Finally, Leon let go of her in resignation. Since she had put it that way, it wasn’t right for him to keep on insisting. Heather wasn’t just any normal person; she had extraordinary willpower, so he believed that she would have no problem carrying on.

It was wintertime, and tiny colorful flowers sprouted from the grass on either side of their path. The flowers were scattered all around, and one wouldn’t even have noticed them if they didn’t pay attention.

Heather gazed at the tenacious lifeforms in the harsh winter, and her mouth curved into a slight smile. Indeed, life was more dynamic in the wild compared to the city. Winter in Bradford City didn’t look any different compared to other seasons—one wouldn’t be able to tell the four seasons apart in a city. As such, she almost forgot that fall was the season of harvest.

“You look like you’re in a much better mood after sweating, Heather.” Leon came up to her again; he could always find ways to make small talk.

He had an ethereal appearance comparable to a god's, but his chatterbox personality greatly reduced the attractiveness brought by his outlook. In Heather's eyes, he'd always be a boy that would never grow up.

"Leon, do you know that your entire face is covered in sweat?" she said to him as a mocking smile tugged on her lips.

Leon wiped his face with the back of his hand and said, "What about now?" He couldn't imagine himself being covered in sweat, but it would definitely destroy the perfect representation of his image. He couldn't allow that to happen.

Just then, Heather laughed at Leon's embarrassed reaction. Is he really unaware that I'm just bluffing?

Leon realized that Heather had tricked him the moment he started wiping his face, but since his behavior was able to win her smile, he thought that it was worth it. Leon retrieved a piece of wet tissue paper from his pocket before he wiped his face with it. Then, he started wiping his hands over and over again.

With that, he felt a lot more refreshed on his hands and face; he was also grateful that he'd brought along a packet of wet tissues just then. Meanwhile, Heather watched Leon before her gaze shifted to the sun above.

The weather was exceptionally great today, and Heather could finally experience the warmth of the sun in the wintertime. At that moment, she wanted to undo some of the buttons on her shirt. However, she gave up on that thought in the end as she was worried about catching a cold. In actual fact, Heather knew that she hadn't fully recovered and that she had to take extra care of her health.

After crossing the mountain, Heather and Leon began to see several houses down the road; Leon's mood instantly lightened at the sight of that. There were quite a few of them by the hillside, and the cluster of houses formed a small and simple village by the hills.

However, Heather didn't know the specific residence of the doctor. As she peered down from the hilltop and noticed the village, she wanted to head there to find out more about the mysterious doctor.

Leon and Heather exchanged a knowing look—it seemed like they were on the same page. Heather hadn't had any breaks throughout their journey, and



now that they had arrived at a bustling neighborhood, Leon had to drag her there to take a good rest.

Not too long after, the two arrived at the village. The villagers were quite visibly shocked by their sudden visit. Sure enough, there was a huge difference in the way Heather and Leon dressed compared to the villagers; they could tell immediately that these two were from the big city.

Moreover, Leon's appearance had piqued the children's interest; a group of kids even came up to him eagerly, speaking aloud in a dialect unknown even to Heather. She looked around and tried to find someone that she could converse with, but after a glance, she noticed that there weren't any youngsters in the village.

The entire village consisted of only the elderly and the young, and it seemed like the strong and able-bodied people were all out for work. Heather didn't understand their local dialect, so she was thinking of finding someone who could speak standard English to ask them for more information.

Meanwhile, there was an elderly woman who was especially irked by Heather and Leon's arrival. She came up to them and continuously snapped at them in a local dialect. The both of them shared awkward glances, not knowing that this old woman was being unkind to them as they stared at her with indifferent looks on their faces.

"May I know what you're saying? I can't hear you clearly." Heather could only vaguely make out a few words from the old woman's speech; perhaps she could understand her if she repeated her words.

However, the old woman simply glared at Heather with obvious hostility in her eyes. Upon seeing that, Leon hastily took a step closer and shielded her protectively. He didn't know what on earth this old lady was saying, but he wouldn't let Heather get hurt even a little.

The old woman jutted a finger at Heather and Leon. In fact, she seemed even more displeased with him; it was probably his foreigner appearance that made the old woman awfully unhappy. After all, this area was still a closed community unexposed to civilization.

## Standing before Love Chapter 709

The two of them shared uncomfortable looks, for they'd never faced a situation as awkward as this. What could they do now, though? Meanwhile, Heather noticed the old woman's resentment toward them as well, so she pulled Leon to the side immediately. It seemed like they'd run into quite an ancient village today.

"I don't think we're welcomed here, Leon." Heather lowered her voice since she wasn't sure if the villagers could understand them.

Leon blinked a few times; he was unsure as well, but he had a feeling that the villagers were extremely unfriendly toward them. Leon tried to think of a way to solve the issue at hand, but he couldn't come up with any good ideas even after racking his brains.

"Do you have any solutions in mind?" Heather assumed that Leon had already found an answer, for his eyes were darting left and right.

"No, but why don't we go deeper inside?" Leon felt that it wouldn't help to keep being surrounded by these groups of people, and it'd be better to continue the search themselves.

"Okay." Since they didn't have better ideas at the moment, they could only go with this one.

Heather and Leon continued walking under the unfriendly gaze of the villagers. The two of them didn't know where they'd find more signs of human life, but nothing could go wrong if they followed the hillside path.

Right now, they weren't anywhere near the depths of the mountains or forest, so why were these people acting like they'd never seen any forms of modern civilization? Heather was constantly troubled by this doubt, and it seemed as though this place had been completely cut off from the outside world.

Was this why the old physician had decided to reside here? After all, he was indeed known as someone with pure intentions to help the sick. Heather studied the faces of the surrounding people and noticed the dull and spiritless look in their eyes—she had a feeling that there was something not quite right with these villagers.

Soon, the duo finally let out a breath of relief after leaving the village. However, they had now entered a forest. Just then, a strange and inexplicable fragrance wafted from the trees; the faint yet notable scent surprised both Heather and Leon.

She took a deep breath and turned to Leon. “Do you smell that?”

Leon followed suit and took a deep breath as well, inhaling a huge gulp of the mysterious fragrance into his lungs. After that, he felt uncomfortable all of a sudden; there was something unusual about the scent.

“Something’s definitely wrong.” Leon was confident about it.

“This fragrance is indeed suspicious,” Heather expressed her doubts. Why would there be a lingering floral scent in the middle of winter? It doesn’t smell like plum blossoms, so what is it?

“You took such a huge breath of it earlier, Heather. Aren’t you feeling dizzy?” Leon narrowed his eyes at her, for it seemed like Heather wasn’t feeling any aftereffects at all.

“No.” Heather shook her head. She wasn’t dizzy, but Leon didn’t look so good on the other hand.

“Could it be a poisonous gas?” Heather guessed. At the same time, panic rose on Leon’s face as soon as he heard that.

He looked at Heather in disbelief and terror—why would there be poisonous gas in the middle of an ordinary forest?

“Don’t scare me, Heather. We’ve been here for some time now; how could we still be alive if we’ve really inhaled poison?” Leon was a little worried about himself, for he didn’t want to sacrifice his life in a place like this.

Heather shielded Leon behind herself and said to him in a strict tone, “Anything is possible in a place like this.” She wasn’t trying to scare him, but since this was the famed physician’s chosen residential spot, there was bound to be something special about this place.

“What do we do, then?” Leon wanted nothing but to leave this forest as soon as possible. Otherwise, he wouldn’t know what to do if they were really poisoned to death here.

“Why don’t we turn back? Maybe they’ll help us if you pretend to pass out.” At that moment, Heather thought of an idea.

Healers were supposed to believe in equality for all lives; since the renowned physician was kind-hearted with pure intentions, he would definitely lend a helping hand to any sick person. If that happened, wouldn’t they be able to find the doctor effortlessly?

With that thought in mind, Heather let out a silent chuckle of glee—her idea was not bad indeed and it seemed reliable. However, Leon wasn’t too happy with her suggestion. He didn’t want to pretend to be sick, but he was actually feeling quite dizzy.

“Are you sure it’s going to work, Heather? They looked so disgusted earlier; will they really help us?” Leon was a little concerned, and his heart shuddered at the thought of the old woman’s terrifying glare.

Heather put on a confident smile and said, “I don’t think they’d leave us to die. All right, then. I’ll be counting on your performance later. Considering your outstanding acting skills, I know you’ll win their pity for sure.”

Leon stared at the ominous grin on Heather’s face. Why does her plan feel so unreliable? That peculiar village didn’t feel safe at all.

Snippets of horror films appeared in Leon’s mind. The storyline they were experiencing was precisely a common occurrence in such a genre—they’d first arrive at an uncivilized village, and that would lead to many bizarre incidents.

Right now, Leon was more than eager to leave this place; even the way their car had descended into a pithole seemed straight out of a horror movie. At the thought of that, Leon was instantly covered in cold sweat.

This didn’t feel like a journey to find a doctor at all! Instead, what a strange experience this was—he felt like they were on a treasure hunt. They couldn’t have been tricked by the group of scary old people, right?

While Leon was still immersed in his wild imagination, they had already exited the forest. In truth, they hadn’t gone very deep inside it, so it would only take a short walk before they reached the strange village again. With that, Heather turned to Leon—it would soon be his time to shine.

However, Leon clearly still hadn't snapped out of his trance. Heather coughed loudly to gain his attention but to no avail, so she could only slap his shoulder hard to wake him up.

"Hey!" Leon exclaimed in shock. "What the hell, Heather?" He glared at her in dissatisfaction.

"What are you daydreaming about?" In fact, Heather was more annoyed at Leon—he was being absent-minded this whole time.

"Are you really sure about this, Heather? Do you really think they'd really bring us to the doctor? Besides, he can't be the only doctor around!" Leon listed a series of possible scenarios, insisting that her plan was unreliable.

"You're not entirely wrong, but either way, we'll find the doctor faster this way. Just endure it for a little while!" Heather blinked repeatedly at Leon. His strong reluctance against her plan was quite interesting to watch.

Indeed, Leon wasn't planning to be swayed by Heather's persuasion attempt. He turned his face away, but Heather quickly pushed his head back to face her. She stared at him innocently and tried to convince him by acting cute.

Heather knew that she had to be soft in order to deal with Leon. Sure enough, he couldn't resist her display of cuteness. His brows snapped together, and he had already decided to give in deep down.

"Come on, Leon. Let's give it a try, okay?" Heather said coyly. With that, there was nothing else the man could say against her.

She maintained her pleading gaze as Leon nodded reluctantly. He chewed on his bottom lip and said, "Remember to be alert later, Heather." Leon was still doubtful about the plan, but there was no way he could reject her at this point.

Heather put on a kind smile and replied, "Don't worry, I'll protect you." Heather knew exactly what Leon was worried about, and he was definitely thinking too much again.

If someone were to fall sick in a horror movie, it would mean the end for that character. Male characters were mostly used as bait in such plots, and Leon had a feeling that he was currently in a similar scenario.

The two of them walked side by side while doubt still lingered on Leon's face; he was a little regretful for accompanying Heather on her arduous journey. How could someplace like this still exist in this day and age? Indeed, the way a famous doctor's mind worked was different from an ordinary person, and he wondered how the doctor could get used to living in a place like this.

From afar, they could see the figures of the old folks in the village. These people moved very stiffly to the point where Heather and Leon felt uncomfortable.

There was still no sign of the younger generation this time round. As the two of them entered the village again, Heather deliberately let out a few coughs in Leon's direction, signaling that it was time for him to pass out.

However, Leon didn't make a move. He simply stared in puzzlement at the elderly and children around him. All of a sudden, he felt like he was surrounded by a group of Neanderthals.

He took in the mud houses around him, and he was a little worried about his safety at that moment. Since the villagers weren't aggressive by any means, though, he could at least relax slightly.

"Are you feeling unwell, Leon?" Heather turned to him, seemingly questioning the man fiercely with her eyes.

"I'm fine, Heather. Is your throat feeling dry?" Leon asked in concern. Heather was almost panting for air from her excessive coughing earlier.

"Don't push yourself, Leon," Heather forced those words out through gritted teeth, refusing to believe that Leon was that oblivious to her hints.

It seemed like he couldn't escape any longer. Without a choice, he let himself collapse to the ground in an exaggerated manner. Heather's face fell immediately, and she stared at Leon in panic as he lay motionless on the ground.

"Are you okay, Leon?!" Heather shook him gently; the astonishment on her face didn't look like play pretend at all.

As Leon lay there with his eyes shut, he could only think about his clothes which were ruined just like that. The ground must be filthy... My clothes must be covered in mud right now... Leon was practically crying inside.

“Wake up, Leon!” She pinched his philtrum as she spoke, being completely serious with her acting.

Leon was still unresponsive, so Heather turned to the people around her and yelled, “Is there a doctor? We need a doctor!” She hoped that they could understand her.

Surprisingly, the crowd seemed to have understood her words. Either that, they had caught meaning from her gestures and facial expression. They pointed her in a direction and gave her a bunch of instructions too. Sadly, Heather couldn’t understand them at all.

Just then, a boy who looked like he had autism came up to them suddenly. He spoke to Heather in standard English with incorrect pronunciation as he said, “I’ll take you to Dr. Turner.”

Heather looked at the boy like she had just found her lifesaver, for she didn’t think there was anyone in the village who knew standard English. Even though his pronunciation made it difficult to understand, at least it was slightly easier to comprehend compared to a Scottish accent!

“Thank you.” With those words, she put Leon’s weight on her own back and stood up while supporting his side.

The elderly and children were all shocked to see that—they’d never seen a woman with such great strength. Heather smiled slightly as she noticed the stunned expressions on their faces. This had indeed destroyed her image of an elegant goddess, but she was a strong and independent woman to begin with. Now wasn’t the time to pay attention to those unnecessary details.

Leon didn’t look too heavy, but Heather felt otherwise as soon as she had to carry him. If it weren’t for her strength training in the past, she would’ve probably been crushed by his body weight.

As she followed behind the little boy, she asked him, “This Dr. Turner you mentioned... Is he from your village as well?” She seemed to be too straightforward with her question.

However, the boy didn’t seem to think much of it. He replied frankly, “No, he’s from the big city. He’s the one who taught me standard English.”

Heather was overjoyed inside. Her plan was a success indeed—they'd effortlessly found their target. Nonetheless, Leon wasn't in a celebratory mood as he lay on Heather's back; he didn't feel right to put his full weight on her, but he couldn't get up either. What should I do? He felt unbelievably shameful to be carried by Heather like this!

## Standing before Love Chapter 710

Fortunately, no one knew Heather and Leon in this remote and backward place, so the latter felt less embarrassed. Sometimes, it was perhaps Heather's manlike behavior that struck a chord with him.

The boy went straight into the forest, but Heather smelled that strange fragrance before they entered. She frowned and didn't feel like going in, but the boy turned around and seemed to have noticed her hesitation. He pointed in a direction and said to her, "Dr. Turner lives in the woods."

"Why doesn't he stay with everyone else?" Heather was somewhat perplexed, for this Dr. Turner seemed quite reclusive.

The boy shook his head. "Dr. Turner prefers to live in seclusion. If someone in the village falls ill, they'll go to him."

The boy looked inconspicuous in front of Heather, but he didn't seem like a boy that was easy to deal with since his words were very measured. "Okay," Heather replied casually as her mind wandered. She wondered what methods she should use to convince Dr. Turner later.

As expected, the boy wasn't lying. With him leading them, it didn't take long before Heather and Leon saw a log cabin in the woods. Just as they expected, it was very important to have a guide since they hadn't seen anything after walking for so long when they entered the forest earlier.

Surprisingly, Heather had great strength in her petite body as she piggybacked Leon the entire time without feeling tired at all. Instead, she looked fresh as a daisy. The closer she got to the log cabin, the more delighted she seemed since she looked forward to meeting Dr. Turner very much.

Heather had mixed feelings toward doctors, for she revered renowned ones while being extremely disgusted by quacks. In her opinion, there were too many quacks and very few skillful doctors. She was very curious about



traditional Chinese medicine, and it was rumored that Dr. Turner came from a family skilled in this particular branch of medicine and always had unique insight for it. Not only that, she wondered if she would be pleasantly surprised or disappointed when she actually met him. Too many people were angling for fame and compliments these days, and there were especially too many people who did that by playing up their expertise in Chinese medicine. Therefore, she hoped that making this trip would be worthwhile.

Just as Heather's mind wandered, the boy knocked on the wooden door, but no one answered the door for a long time. Upon seeing this, the boy changed his ways and slapped the door directly with his tender hand, creating a loud noise. Only then were sounds heard from inside the cabin. Heather felt a stir of apprehension within her, and she wondered what kind of man would come out of that door later.

After a while, she saw a man pulling the door open and poking his head out. He seemed cringy, and it was completely different from what she had imagined—the man before her eyes seemed skinny and malnourished. After looking at the boy, he shifted his gaze toward her face. As he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, she felt inexplicably disappointed; this man was somewhat different from the renowned doctor she had imagined.

"What brings you here, little slick?" Dr. Turner's voice was very deep and commanding. It didn't match his looks at all.

"This man is sick, Dr. Turner," the boy said while pointing at Leon on Heather's back.

At this moment, Leon only wished Heather to put him down sooner. His body tensed up as he didn't dare to move, so he could only obediently pose as an unconscious patient.

"Hurry up and bring him into the house," Dr. Turner urged while pushing his glasses. He seemed to know his stuff, for he looked unhurried. However, the look in his eyes changed when he saw how Heather had piggybacked Leon into the house directly, and it seemed like he had never seen such a physically strong woman.

Heather remained silent the whole time as she inwardly deliberated what exactly to say. Dr. Turner didn't ask her anything as well, and it was quite embarrassing for her. Luckily, even though he didn't seem to have the air of a renowned doctor about him, he was a nice person. Heather was very

confident about her looks, yet Dr. Turner didn't look at her. This indicated that he was a man of integrity.

"Young lady, may I ask what is your relationship with the patient?" Dr. Turner asked Heather earnestly.

"We're friends." Heather stared at Dr. Turner blatantly with hidden seductive charm in her eyes. She wanted to see whether he was a real man of integrity or pretending to be so.

However, Dr. Turner didn't care about Heather's seductive eyes at all. Instead, he looked especially serious with a look of solemnity. "In that case, please step aside with the little slick and wait first." Naturally, he didn't want to be disturbed by anyone while examining his patient.

Upon hearing Dr. Turner's words, Heather and the boy voluntarily stepped aside. She looked at Dr. Turner from time to time, and he appeared very professional while taking Leon's pulse in all seriousness. Besides, she couldn't find any fault with him. It seemed that he indeed came from a family of renowned doctors, and this put her mind at rest.

Dr. Turner knitted his brows in careful contemplation. Soon after that, he let go of Leon's hand, turned to look at Heather, and said to her, "Your friend is fine."

That was indeed the case. Leon was pretending to be ill, so how could there be any problems with him? However, Heather quickly pretended to be anxious. "He entered the forest with me earlier and said he thought he smelled something strange. Then, he fainted as soon as we came out of it." She pretended to be panic-stricken while purposely describing the situation in grave terms.

"Relax. There's nothing wrong with him, so he'll be fine after some rest." Dr. Turner believed in his pulse-taking capabilities. The man in front of him had a normal pulse, so there wouldn't be any major problems with him.

"In that case, what should I do now?" Heather pretended to be at a loss for what to do. At any rate, she had to stay at Dr. Turner's place.

He then suddenly asked, "Have you two found somewhere to stay?"

Heather shook her head. "Not yet." Right now, she wished that the sky would darken sooner so that they would have an excuse to stay at the doctor's

place. She looked at the little slick beside her, and she had to find a way to send this boy away right now. Otherwise, she didn't know how to tell Dr. Turner about all the things she wanted to discuss with him.

Naturally, Dr. Turner had his heart in the right place and asked them to stay. "In that case, you may let your friend rest here for a while. You two may decide what to do next when he wakes up."

A faint smile played on Heather's lips. With a grateful expression, she replied to Dr. Turner, "Sorry for troubling you then, Dr. Turner."

Meanwhile, he looked serious as though he couldn't smile. After averting his eyes from Heather, he looked at the boy and said to him, "It's getting late, little slick. Just go back as early as possible!"

Heather was still racking her brains for an excuse to send this little boy away when Dr. Turner directly asked him to go back. Thank goodness! she thought to herself.

The boy looked at Heather before looking back at Dr. Turner. After thinking for a moment, he replied, "I don't want to go back so early. I want to play at your place for a while."

Heather looked morose upon hearing his words. Why is he being like that at such a critical moment? she thought to herself. She was somewhat dismayed by this, but she couldn't chase this boy away directly. After all, this boy had led them to the cabin.

Dr. Turner walked over directly to the boy and looked at him with a loving expression. Then, he whispered softly to him, "Thank you for sending a patient over today. I'll reward you with a piece of candy for this." As he spoke, he conjured up a piece of candy in his hand. Surprisingly, he even knew how to perform magic.

The boy brightened up at once when he got the candy. He said to Dr. Turner, "Hehe! In that case, I'll be going back first!"

The wooden door squeaked as the boy left, creating a spooky atmosphere in the log cabin. Meanwhile, Leon lay on the bamboo bed while letting his imagination run wild. He was here with an eccentric doctor at this moment, and it seemed very much like a horror movie scene. The quiet surroundings

gave him the creeps as he couldn't hear a single sound, and the fact that the log cabin stood alone in the woods was really weird.

Leon was almost frightened by his own thoughts. Since he could no longer maintain his composure, he wondered if he should pretend to regain consciousness at this moment. However, upon recalling Heather's purpose in coming here, he felt that he should hold on a bit more. After all, no ordinary people could get close to Heather with her fighting skills. Still, he was worried; it would be troublesome if this Dr. Turner really harbored evil designs and used some kind of sleep-inducing incense. These doctors were good at these tricks, so he had to be wary of them. When he thought of this, Leon even felt that he had difficulty breathing. For some reason, he felt somewhat uncomfortable as though he had landed himself in a den of thieves.

Heather didn't think this way, though. She appeared very comfortable as she sat quietly on a bamboo stool nearby, but in reality, she was contemplating on how to speak to Dr. Turner later. Furthermore, she was still unaware of his real capabilities, and it would be embarrassing if she rashly asked him to go back with her only to be let down.

Just then, Dr. Turner's eyes roamed over Heather, and their eyes met. He didn't seem very old, though—in fact, he was much younger than the aged doctors of traditional Chinese medicine that Heather usually met. As she eyed him up and down, she surmised that he was probably in his forties. However, he was too skinny and had quite a lot of fine wrinkles on his face, and these fine wrinkles were very apparent when he made specific expressions and movements. It would be better for an aged person to put on some weight since that would make them look slightly younger than their peers.

As Heather sized Dr. Turner up, he was also measuring her with his eyes. He squinted at her while inwardly guessing her purpose for coming here. Heather's behavior seemed suspicious, but he didn't want to be too much of a busybody. After all, no ordinary people would come to such a place. Besides, since Heather wasn't providing a legitimate explanation, he wouldn't ask her about it, of course.

Leon could feel the undercurrent surging in the air even with his eyes closed, whereas Heather looked at him with boredom. The person lying down right now was at ease, for he had left all the problems to her. She was considering if she should just go straight to the point instead of continuing to dawdle like this. After all, Leon couldn't possibly continue playing unconscious since doing

so would make him aggrieved to death. “Dr. Turner,” she called him softly, causing Leon to have his heart in his mouth.

Dr. Turner was studying herbs on the other side of the room and was surprised when he suddenly heard Heather’s voice. However, he was relatively composed, so he merely raised his head slightly and looked directly at the woman, signaling her to just say whatever she wanted to say.

“I heard that you have particularly amazing medical skills. It’s said that you can evoke a miraculous cure and bring the dying back to life.” Heather thought she should reveal her identity appropriately at this moment. Otherwise, the atmosphere would be too stuffy with them looking at each other like this in embarrassment.

“Uh-huh,” Dr. Turner responded flatly without saying anything else.

“Do you really plan on staying in this log cabin for the rest of your life, Dr. Turner?” Heather decided to be more straightforward as she couldn’t care less about anything else at this moment.

However, the doctor remained unmoved and continued to handle the medicinal materials in hand. He just knew from the look in Heather’s eyes that she was up to no good when she arrived here, for her purpose was written clearly in her eyes.

## Standing before Love Chapter 711

When Heather saw how indifferent Dr. Turner’s attitude was, she became even more worried. It seemed like he didn’t care about such things at all, and Heather didn’t know what to use to move him if he didn’t care about anything material and external. Furthermore, he looked indifferent to fame and profit, making her even more uncertain where to start. What should I do now? Heather thought to herself as she looked at Dr. Turner in distress. She was even more bothered by the fact that he hadn’t even responded once so far.

With that, Heather believed she had to take the initiative instead of continuing to be so passive. After all, her grandfather’s life was concerned. She walked directly up to Dr. Turner and stared at him, making him totally unable to ignore her. She was very confident of her charms, so she didn’t believe Dr. Turner wouldn’t be drawn to that as a man.

Meanwhile, the latter looked at her with an unperturbed expression. He couldn't understand what she meant, though he wouldn't be self-confident enough to think that she was seducing him.

"Did you not hear what I just said, Dr. Turner?" Heather looked at Dr. Turner playfully, thinking that doing so might please him more.

However, he merely got goosebumps all over him when he heard Heather's deliberately forced voice. He couldn't stand women behaving like this; as a person with a pure heart and few worldly desires, he wouldn't be seduced by a temptress like her so easily. Instead, he looked at her in a serious manner with a look in his eyes that spoke for itself. "If you have something to say, you might as well say it straight." He didn't like to beat around the bush, so he didn't want to continue playing hide-and-seek with her. Can't she say whatever she wants to say directly? he thought to himself.

Heather smiled an infectious smile than Dr. Turner's little heart could bear, so he could only turn his face away.

"Dr. Turner, I'd like to ask you to come out of seclusion and help me save an old man." Heather thought she'd better state her purpose directly. If Dr. Turner really was a renowned doctor who had his heart in the right place, he certainly wouldn't close his eyes to a dying person. As such, she could only make an issue of his conscience.

However, he didn't extend a helping hand. "Sorry, but I can't help you," he refused Heather right away.

His refusal displeased Heather somewhat. How could he do this? Not only did he turn me down without thinking, he wasn't even willing to inquire about the details! she thought to herself. "I'd like to know why." She felt that Dr. Turner had gone a little too far. Isn't his refusal too straightforward?

"I swore on the day I came here that I'll never leave this place," Dr. Turner replied while staring at Heather's eyes. He liked her eyes, for they made him feel as though he was looking at a certain someone from ages ago.

"Are you going to shut your eyes to a dying person? How could you reconcile this to your conscience? Do you think you can apply your talents while staying here for the rest of your life? So many people outside are waiting for you to effect a miraculous cure and bring the dying back to life, yet you live in this remote and backward place. Have you never thought of looking for someone

to pass on your excellent medical skills to? Do you think you've acted worthy of your ancestors?" Heather chastised in one breath. She was going to be pissed off by Mr. Turner. How could there be such a person? she thought to herself.

Meanwhile, Dr. Turner looked at Heather and found that his guess was correct. He stated airily, "You came for me this time, and you investigated me in secret." Now that everyone had made themselves clear, there was nothing to hide. As such, Dr. Turner thought they'd better lay their cards on the table directly. He looked at Heather icily as he needed an explanation.

"You're right. I came for you because my grandfather needs you to bring him out of danger." Heather looked at Dr. Turner indignantly as she didn't understand why he would react like this.

"Too many people in this world need to be cured. I can't save all of them, so I can only look after my own turf," Dr. Turner retorted bluntly. He wasn't the person Heather imagined him to be—how could he possibly save everyone with his medical skills?

"You're rather selfish as a doctor. Have you ever thought of your ancestors' contributions to Chinese medicine? You possess unique skills handed down by your family, so how could you have the heart to let these skills vanish from the world?" Heather didn't believe that Dr. Turner felt no guilt since she could see the sorrow in his eyes.

"You don't have to say anything else. I won't leave here—not even this forest." Dr. Turner didn't want to listen to Heather anymore. He knew that he was ashamed to face his ancestors and that he shouldn't become like this for the sake of a woman, but how amazing love was! Love would sometimes make one feel sad and disheartened, but it would also drive one to despair at times. Of course, it could also give birth to hope.

"What are you guarding in this forest? Why did you choose to settle down in this place?" Heather questioned Dr. Turner again and again, thinking that there must be a story behind this.

"Don't ask anything anymore. I don't want to tell you any of it, nor will I leave here, so please find someone more competent instead!" Dr. Turner suppressed his anger. One could be shamed into anger, so he didn't want to let someone seize his sore points and continue to lecture him.

“You really are a well-bred doctor, but you’ve forgotten your duty as one. No matter what happened to you before, you shouldn’t abandon yourself to vice. Your ancestors must be ashamed of you.” Heather kept seizing on the subject of Dr. Turner’s ancestors, doing so just to arouse a sense of guilt in him so that he might disclose his past to her. She knew that Dr. Turner was plagued by something, so she had to liberate him from it. In other words, she believed that she would make a breakthrough.

“Shut up and stop poking into my business!” Dr. Turner glared at Heather fiercely, thinking that she had really gone too far.

Meanwhile, Leon wondered if he should keep on feigning unconsciousness as he lay on the bamboo bed. He heard the conversation as clearly as daylight and felt that the atmosphere between Heather and Dr. Turner smacked heavily of gunpowder, so he feared that they might come to blows. He thought to himself, If it weren’t for the fact that Heather needs Dr. Turner’s help, she would’ve knocked him to the ground by now. After all, few people dare to speak to her like that.

“In that case, go out with me and save my grandfather.” Heather looked at Dr. Turner icily. Her patience was limited, and she had plenty of ways to force him out of seclusion.

“That’s impossible,” Dr. Turner refused directly. He wasn’t someone who would surrender that easily.

“You probably don’t know who I am. I know you want to guard this forest, but I can tell you confidently that I can raze this place to the ground.” Heather didn’t believe that Dr. Turner didn’t care about what he was guarding, so she would like to see how he would respond to this.

Dr. Turner looked at Heather. Indeed, he didn’t know who she was, but he could tell from her tone of voice that what she said didn’t sound like an exaggeration. He frowned slightly, unsure of whether he should tell her what had happened in his past.

The two looked at each other for a long time before Dr. Turner was beaten first. He let out a sigh of resignation and said, “What I’m guarding isn’t this forest, but the people in this mountain.”

Dr. Turner’s sigh had a sense of story to it. Heather suddenly felt that she was being somewhat rude—was she really right to coerce a stranger like this?



“Is it even possible that your dream is to be a country doctor? I can’t understand this at all. You can protect more people instead,” she asked in a slightly mocking tone.

“You probably haven’t looked into the villages in this mountain. This mountain isn’t high, and it has 12 villages in total. There aren’t many villagers here, though. In fact, there are less than 1,000 of them. Like other mountain people, they are sincere and hard-working, but God has been very unfair to them. Their average lifespan is very short, and many are already lucky enough to live to the age of 50,” Dr. Turner explained in a mournful tone as he recalled the woman he loved. She died of a sudden illness in her early thirties, and there hadn’t been enough time to save her life.

“Why would their lifespan be so short? Are they still living in a primitive society?” Heather asked puzzledly.

Dr. Turner shook his head. “It’s because of the forest. You both have smelled the strange smell inside here, and it’s precisely that smell that eats away at their health bit by bit. People with poor health may not even live to the age of 30,” he answered while shaking his head. He wondered if this place was a corner forgotten by God, for this was too unfair to the people here.

“In that case, they can leave here or destroy the forest, can’t they?” Heather didn’t think it was difficult to solve this kind of problem, so she couldn’t understand why Dr. Turner looked so distressed.

“Those dwelling in the mountains live off the surroundings. The forest is the mountain’s foundation; by destroying the forest, the foundation that villagers rely on for survival will be destroyed as well,” Dr. Turner refuted Heather, thinking that she was the kind of person who lived in clover and was completely unaware of how poverty-stricken those living at the bottom of society were.

“In that case, they should leave this place.” Heather thought that staying alive was the most important thing.

“Some young people have left one after another these years, but the elders are unwilling to move. After all, they are reluctant to part with the place where they have lived all their lives.” Dr. Turner didn’t want to explain it to Heather anymore. He controlled his temper as he didn’t want to let himself sink to her level.

“So are you staying here to find a way to solve this problem?” Heather finally figured out what Dr. Turner was thinking. Wouldn’t he weigh the pros and cons before doing such a risky thing, though? she thought to herself.

“This is what I promised someone—I’ll change this place and turn this forest into a normal one,” Dr. Turner vowed solemnly, feeling that he was getting closer and closer to his goal.

“You should think about how old you are, Dr. Turner. Do you think you can definitely change this place with your own mortal body? Did it ever cross your mind that you might also die early here?” Heather hit the nail on the head even though she didn’t really want to dampen Dr. Turner’s spirits. After all, the tenderness revealed in his eyes just now was deeply moving. She already had a general idea of the truth; Dr. Turner had probably made a promise to the woman he loved, which was why he decided to stay in this place and disregard his life. However, it seemed that the person he loved had passed away, so she secretly felt sorry for him.

“I know I don’t have much time left, so I must work even harder right now. I’ll find a way to cure the villagers very soon as long as I’m given a little more time,” Dr. Turner insisted almost madly.

Heather was somewhat affected by Dr. Turner’s words since such a devoted lover was rare in this world. Besides, he meant well by doing that. At the thought of this, she said directly to him, “I can help you realize your plans as soon as possible, but you must help me.” The corners of her mouth turned up slightly, for she believed that she would definitely convince him this time.