

Surprise 146

Chapter 146 Who Gave It; Return It

After a night of passion, Courtney and Alexander fell into a deep sleep. By the time they woke up the next day, it was already late in the morning.

“What time is it?”

Courtney rolled herself over. With her droopy eyes, she looked at the figure at the end of the bed.

Alexander was fastening his watch strap around his wrist. Upon hearing her question, he turned around and looked at her. “11 AM.”

“11 AM?”

Courtney was wide awake all of a sudden. Immediately, she sat up from the bed. “Why didn’t you wake me up?”

This was her first visit to the Duncans’ ancestral home, and she slept for so long. Her image would be ruined if Scott knew about this.

“The servant came and woke you up three times, but you didn’t wake up.”

“That’s impossible.” As Courtney put her clothes on, she protested, “I didn’t hear anything at all. Stop fooling around.”

“That’s because you were exhausted from yesterday night. You were deep in sleep.”

“Who said I was exhausted?” Color rushed up to her cheeks. Lowering her head, she mumbled, “Don’t get cocky.”

“Really? Then, you should have heard what I just said to the servant.” Alexander looked at her in a teasing manner. As he turned around and leaned against the table, he slowly said, “I told the servant that you were too tired from last night, so we won’t be having lunch with Grandpa today.”

Upon hearing that, Courtney looked up immediately. She was so embarrassed that she was frustrated.

“You rascal...”

I wonder how thick his skin is? How can he say something like that without flinching?

“Are you angry?” Alexander looked at her, pretending as if he did not understand the reason behind her wrath. “So, you still want to have lunch with Grandpa?”

Annoyed, Courtney did not say anything. She left the bed and headed straight to the bathroom.

Staring at herself in the mirror, she saw her cheeks painted red and hickeys all the way down her neck. “Alexander Duncan!”

She pulled the door open angrily and yelled, “Look at what you did.”

These won’t go away for a few days. What am I going to do when I go back to work?

Alexander rested against the chair as he flipped through a magazine. When he heard her, he looked up for a moment. He then tilted his head innocently and shrugged.

“Courtney, this is something out of my control. But, you can hit back and take an eye for an eye.”

“You...” Courtney gritted her teeth. For a long moment, she couldn’t say a word.

“Bring me my liquid foundation.”

“Okay.”

A hint of a smile crawled onto the corners of Alexander’s eyes. Arching his brows, he fumbled through her purse.

While waiting for Alexander, Courtney stood in front of the bathroom mirror. The collar of her white shirt was buttoned to the very top, but it could not cover up the two obvious hickeys. I wonder if the liquid foundation can conceal them? Well, nothing’s dead until it’s buried.

After a while, Alexander came to the bathroom door.

“Did you find it?” she asked without turning around.

“What is this?” he asked in return.

Turning her head, Courtney saw him holding a purple satin box. She was startled. “My jewelry. I told you to bring me my liquid foundation. Why did you bring this instead? Someone gave it to me. It’s quite expensive, so don’t lose it. Put it back quickly.”

Looking at her nervous state, Alexander’s expression hardened. He continued to question, “Who gave it to you?”

“Jen...” The name almost slipped out from Courtney’s lips, but she suddenly sensed jealousy from Alexander’s words. Moving her gaze away, she quickly grabbed the liquid foundation from his other hand. She applied the foundation onto her neck as she looked at the mirror.

Casually, she said, “A friend from abroad.”

Courtney was trying to annoy Alexander as revenge for the frustration he caused her early in the morning.

Sure enough; the moment Alexander heard her answer, his tone sank. “You seem to have a lot of friends. Is this a teenage boy again?”

Huh! Looks like he’s bringing up the past now.

Courtney avoided his gaze intentionally. She kept looking into the mirror and said with an indifferent tone, “Why can’t I know someone that is older and more experienced? Don’t look down on me.”

“Older? More experienced?”

Alexander sounded like he uttered those words through his gritted teeth. Before Courtney could react, he grabbed her arms and turned her around with a strong force. She spun around and was pressed against his chest.

He sounded annoyed. "Courtney Hunter, did you forget that you belong to me?"

"You're hurting me." She looked up and frowned. "Let me go."

"Who gave it? Return it."

Flames were dancing in his eyes, and his attitude seemed intolerable.

However, Courtney was not afraid at all. A trace of cunning was hidden behind her eyes.

"Fine. Call Jennifer on your own and send someone to deliver it abroad. There's no way I'm going to explain why I have to return something I just received from her."

Jennifer?

Alexander's expression froze.

"You don't believe me?" Courtney broke free from his hold and took the jewelry box away. "This pair of earrings is from Jennifer's collection. I even wore it to the farewell banquet. But, someone was putting your tie on for you at the entrance that day, so of course, you didn't notice."

It's not like I don't know how to settle old scores with you.

Alexander looked awkward, which was a rare phenomenon.

Deliberately, Courtney glared at him with an aggressive look. 'Let's see how you're going to explain your way out of this' was written clearly all over her face.

"That was a misunderstanding."

Frowning, Alexander did not know how to explain himself.

At the entrance of the hotel that day, Britney stopped him when she got out of the car. Because they were attending a banquet, she reminded him that his tie was crooked and wanted to straighten it for him. He did not think too much during that time because his servants usually did it for him. Thus, he forgot the occasion they were at and the person who was doing it for him.

"Would you mind explaining it to me?"

Courtney grimaced, but there was mischief in her eyes.

Staring at her for a second, Alexander realized he had been tricked. "Are you trying to mess with me?"

"Who's messing—"

Before she could finish her words, her vision went dark and her mouth was sealed by a kiss.

"You're a rascal."

After a long moment, the pair separated. With her cheeks flushed, Courtney slapped his hands that were touching her away and said, "Stop messing with me. Aren't you going on a business trip? I need to go home and pack some things too."

She wanted to move her things away from Cameron's place to her new place now that it was the weekend. Alicia was right. She couldn't stay in Cameron's house all the time. Since there was a suitable place for her to stay now, she had to move out as soon as possible.

The pair came out from the bathroom together. Courtney kept her liquid foundation in her purse and Alexander followed behind her before handing the jewelry box—the source of the earlier conflict—back to her.

“Why don't you move only after I'm back from the trip?”

“It's fine. I don't have many things with me. I can move them by car. Besides, the place is huge. Didn't you plan to let Jordan stay with me for a while? This will be convenient too.”

Alexander thought for a moment, but he seemed to remember something. His brows furrowed, yet he did not continue asking.

“By the way, if you meet Jennifer on your business trip, greet her on my behalf.”

Opening up the jewelry box, Courtney let out a sigh. “Back then, Jennifer gave me this because I was about the same age as her daughter. She always thought of her daughter every time she saw me.”

“Okay,” Alexander promised. When his eyes swept across the jewelry box, he was startled.

“Jennifer gave you this?”

Chapter 147 Lost It Six Years Ago

“What's wrong?”

Courtney did not know what had happened when she noticed Alexander's change of expression.

Alexander took the earrings out from the jewelry box and examined them. After a while, he seemed to be sure of something. He went into the study opposite his room and came back with a black-and-white photo. The photo looked old; its corners had discolored.

There was a young woman in a cheongsam inside the photo. She looked like she was eighteen or nineteen years old, and she exuded a cold aura. She wore an inlaid gold necklace around her neck. The necklace was inlaid with two pieces of jade—one smaller and one bigger. Despite the age of the photo, one could see the smooth outline of the jade through the photo.

“This is...?” Courtney was puzzled.

Alexander compared the earrings with the necklace before he put the photo down.

“This is my grandmother. The necklace she was wearing was her family heirloom. There were two pieces of jade inlaid in the necklace. One was small, and another one was big. They were a matching pair of circular jades. When the country was in total chaos, the Duncans' ancestral home was occupied by soldiers. The Duncan Family became poor, and she had to sell the smaller one to support the family.”

“The smaller one?” Courtney’s gaze fixated on the earrings in her hand, and she noticed that the jade was indeed similar to the one in the photo. “Is this the one?”

Alexander nodded.

Who would have thought that this jade would go overseas and land in Jennifer’s hands?

In the end, it came all the way back to Courtney again.

“How about the other one?” asked Courtney.

Alexander frowned at her inquiry.

“Grandpa gave the remaining one to me, and I made it into a necklace. Unfortunately, I lost it six years ago.”

Courtney was puzzled upon hearing that. She couldn’t help but clench her fists; her expression became nervous.

Could it be that the necklace he’s talking about is the one I snapped off his neck back then?

“What’s wrong? What’s on your mind now?”

His voice snapped her back to reality. A little absent-minded, she said, “Nothing. I’m just surprised to hear that. I didn’t know these earrings would have something to do with the Duncan Family.”

“It’s probably fate.” There was warmth in his eyes. This was the first time he had ever mentioned ‘fate’—it was a trivial concept he had never considered before.

However, Courtney had mixed feelings. When she greeted Scott and left the house with the children, her mind was still occupied by that necklace.

What an ill twist of fate. The existence of that necklace was like a reminder about what happened six years ago. It reminded her about the identity she was still hiding from Alexander. It was originally a clue to search for her son, but now it became a hot potato that she did not want to touch.

When Courtney moved, she locked the earrings and the necklace in a safe. Once the safe was locked—as if her past had been locked inside there—she felt relieved.

“We’re going to live here in the future. Do you guys like it?”

After spending an afternoon tidying up the house, Courtney brought the children back from Cameron’s place.

Tina was extremely excited as she checked out every room in the house. “Wow! This is so pretty. It’s much bigger than Aunt Cameron’s house. I love my room.”

“Great-Aunt Alicia decorated it for you.”

Courtney followed behind her. Staring at the dolls that were carefully placed inside the room, her heart was full of warmth.

Alicia told her that the house had been vacant and no one was taking care of it. Yet, when she stopped by, the house was fully furnished and was beautifully decorated. She had even prepared the daily necessities for her. Tina's room had been painted pink, there were dozens of children's toys piled up, and there were new clothes in her wardrobe.

"Jordan, this is your room."

She pushed open another door and waved at him. "Come and take a look."

Jordan nodded obediently and walked toward her. Standing in front of the room, he observed. He was just like his dad, and Courtney could not tell whether he liked it or not.

"Do you like it?" Courtney could only take the initiative and asked. "The decoration is simple probably because Great-Aunt Alicia didn't know that you're staying over here too. I'll redecorate your room later. You can tell me if there's something that you like."

Jordan ran back to the sofa and picked up his small drawing board. Lowering his head, he wrote something on it and held it up: 'I like being with you and Tina.'

The moment Courtney saw the writing, her heart ached. Squatting down, she pulled him into her embrace.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

The sound of the doorbell was followed by someone's loud voice. "Hurry up and open the door, Courtney. My wrist is almost broken. I brought hotpot."

Tina poked her head out from her room and cheered, "Godmom!" She darted to the entrance.

Cameron came into the house with bags of food. With a weird tone, she said, "Wow! This place is good. No wonder you moved out from my little house in such a hurry."

In response, Courtney raised her brows. "Why don't we switch places? After all, I'm used to your house. Since what's yours is mine, what's mine is yours too."

Finally, Cameron flashed her a smile of satisfaction.

"Since you said that, I'm going to cook tonight. Consider it a housewarming gift from me."

If one were to look forward to Cameron's cooking, their lowest expectation was that she would not burn down the kitchen. Fortunately, Cameron knew her limits, so she brought hotpot. However, there was still another problem.

"I don't have a pot for the hotpot."

Courtney shrugged helplessly.

"That's not a problem at all. Wait here." Cameron turned on her phone and dialed a number as she twitched her brows at Courtney.

The call was quickly connected.

“Courtney just moved to a new house, and she wants me to ask if you’re free to come and have dinner tonight.”

“Okay. Come quickly, then. Buy some things that we might need for the hotpot while you’re on the way here.”

“Nothing so troublesome. We have everything here. I bought all the food we need.” As soon as she said that, she raised her voice. “Courtney, is there anything that you need?”

Courtney’s name was suddenly mentioned and reflexively, she responded, “A pot.”

“Okay. You heard that, right? Courtney said we don’t have a pot. The kind we use for hotpot.”

After Cameron hung up the phone, she sank herself into the sofa. “Done.”

Courtney’s lips twitched.

“Why do I feel like you’ve dragged me into your evil plan to torture glorified souls?”

“Glorified souls?” Cameron pouted. “Gale has the word ‘scumbag’ written from the tip of his hair to his toenails. He is far from a glorified soul.”

“True.”

Courtney nodded approvingly. The negligible feeling of shame in her heart vanished into the air. She then asked Cameron to call Gale again to bring Oliver along with him.

Half an hour later, Gale came with a pot along with Oliver.

As soon as Oliver came, Courtney handed the kitchen and the dining table to him. Even Gale had been instructed to help out in the kitchen. The two women lay on the sofa as they chatted and snacked on sunflower seeds.

When Cameron recalled Oliver’s elegant but ruthless attitude from earlier, she spat out the husk of the sunflower seed.

“Why do I feel like Oliver has changed into someone else? Wasn’t he a fool when he first woke up in the hospital?”

“Did he?” Courtney was ignorant when it came to reading people. Therefore, she did not notice anything wrong with Oliver. “Perhaps, he has something on his mind? Why? Do you think there’s something wrong with him?”

Cameron raised her brows and looked toward the kitchen with a thoughtful expression. “No. What I’m saying is that he looks much more handsome than before. How old is he? Is he twenty yet?”

“Don’t tell me you’re in love with him.”

Courtney stared at her warily.

Chapter 148 Are You Going to Tell Him?

“Don’t be so rash. Oliver hasn’t even graduated yet, and he still doesn’t remember what happened back then. Who knows? He might already have a girlfriend.”

Based on her understanding of Cameron, Courtney knew that whenever she started paying attention to a man, it most likely meant that she was interested in him.

So much about Gale being a jerk. They’re both equally bad, Courtney mused.

“Why do you sound like my mom?” Cameron scowled at her. “I only asked a question. Why are you acting like I’ve already made a move on him?”

“You were thinking about it.”

Cameron flung a pillow at her. “Don’t you have fantasies, too? What’s so wrong about being attracted to a young man?”

“Whatever. Don’t you think I don’t know you? It’s just a spur of the moment. Go and watch some Korean dramas about older women dating younger men and forget about your feelings. I think Gale treats you really well. He always listens to what you say.”

“He listens to any female person.”

At the mention of Gale, Cameron’s spirits fell, and she slowly looked away from the kitchen. “A tiger never changes its stripes.”

“What happened? Did he flirt with another woman again? Aren’t things going well these days?”

“Just because he doesn’t flirt with them doesn’t mean no one comes up to him first. He’s not like Alexander who has always been a man with integrity. Gale is infamous out there. Do you really expect him to clean up his act and be able to hold himself back? We’re all adults here. If we want to have a peaceful life, we just have to feign ignorance.”

Seeing how downhearted Cameron was made Courtney upset.

“Cameron, don’t dwell on the past. We have to live life looking ahead. You don’t have to constantly be afraid of looking forward to the future. Don’t try to bear all the burden on your own and pretend like you don’t care about anything. Besides, the things that happened in the past might never happen again.”

With a stiffened expression, Cameron clenched her fists and explained, “I’m not bothered by the past. You saw how I was back then. People’s futures are in their hands, but mine is not. It’s better not to have expectations or expect too much from others. I’m content with just being happy now.”

“What if it doesn’t recur? Hasn’t it been three years already?” Courtney grasped her hand. It felt icy as though there was not a degree of warmth in her body.

“Like you said, it’s only a ‘what if’.”

Cameron looked pale. At that moment, her usually cunning eyes were filled with a myriad of untold stories. Only a handful of people in this world knew about her past—it was an unbearable past that made a lasting impact on the rest of her life.

After being silent for a while, Courtney looked in the direction of the kitchen where Gale was preparing vegetables and turned back around to ask, "Do you plan on telling him?"

Cameron shook her head and blinked. "Why would I tell him? What if we break up again after this meal?"

Courtney let out a sigh. A crease was engraved between her brows.

Not long after, the hotpot was ready.

It was the dog days of summer, so the air conditioner was on full blast while the boiling hotpot continued to exude heat.

Since the age of three, Tina had not been a finicky eater and did not shun spicy food. On the other hand, Jordan started coughing until he teared up after having just one bite of some beef from the spicy hotpot.

Cough! Cough!

When he was coughing uncontrollably, Courtney quickly got him a cup of water and managed to quell the heat. After that, he did not want to eat anymore and grabbed a box of chocolates to bring back to his room. Tina shoved two more spoonfuls into her mouth and also followed after him.

"He can't eat spicy food, just like his dad," Gale teased. "When Alex was younger, he always had a stiff expression on his face like an old man. One time on April Fool's Day, one of his friends gave him a biscuit that was covered in chili sauce. He was clearly in agony, but he still put up with it. Luckily, I noticed in time and rushed him to the emergency room."

Cameron looked at him. "Why were you the one who noticed it?"

"Well..." he touched his nose, "it must have been fate."

"Really?" Courtney interrupted. "I heard that when Alex was hospitalized for two days after the incident, you cried by his bedside every day. Was it brotherly affection?"

"Alex even told you about that?" Panic grew in Gale's eyes.

"So what was the reason?" Cameron pried.

"Don't say it."

But, it was too late for him to stop Courtney.

Without hesitation, she revealed, "Because Gale was the one who covered the biscuit in chili sauce. When Alex was in the hospital, he went to see him to apologize in tears every day because his father had spanked him. As long as Alex did not forgive him, he continued to get punished. Even after he apologized for a whole week, Alex did not utter a single word to him."

"That's brutal." Cameron burst into laughter.

"No!" Gale was displeased now. "That's because he hurt his throat from the heat and couldn't speak for that whole week! When his voice returned, he immediately forgave me."

"It's not like he was in a coma. So what if he couldn't speak?" Cameron countered. "Look at Jordan! He can't talk, but does it affect his ability to express himself?"

Gale boiled over with rage.

While Gale was being teased repeatedly, Oliver suddenly remembered that Jordan was unable to talk.

"Was Jordan born mute?"

"No." Courtney shook her head. "After suffering from a high fever when he was younger, he was unable to speak anymore. I don't really know the details either."

The moment Gale found an opportunity to save his pride, he interjected, "When he was around three years old, he was still living with Old Master Duncan. I had gone over to talk to Old Master Duncan about something, but he wasn't home at the time. I thought I'd go see my nephew since I was already there, but when I got to Jordan, I saw that his nanny wasn't with him. He was just lying on the bed and crying all alone inside the room."

"The nanny wasn't around? No one tended to him even though he was crying that badly?" Oliver inquired.

"You've never been to the Duncans' ancestral home before, so you don't know this." Gale glanced at him. "The ancestral home is huge. Jordan and the old master didn't live in the same building. If I hadn't intentionally gone over to see Jordan, I wouldn't have discovered the situation, either."

Courtney felt a tug in her chest.

If Gale hadn't cared to go check on Jordan, he might not have been here today.

"Doesn't the Duncan Family care a lot about Jordan? How could his nanny be that irresponsible?" Oliver was hung up on the nanny's agenda as if he had found a loophole.

Courtney pulled her focus back and was perplexed by the same question.

She had been to the Duncans' ancestral home before, and there were housekeepers all over the house. Even Scott's adopted daughter always had two housekeepers following in her shadow. Considering how much Scott adored and cared about Jordan, it did not make sense that he only had one nanny with him.

Something isn't right here. Oliver's reminder sent chills down her spine.

If it had been someone's doing, then that person must have been familiar with the Duncans' housekeepers' work schedule. They had to know when the house was bustling with people and when it was not. They might have even been able to bribe people off and enter the house when no one was around. These were not things that just anyone could carry out.

This person was definitely familiar with the ancestral home. Perhaps, it was even someone from the Duncan Family.

“After the incident, Alex brought Jordan home and looked him all over, but he didn’t find anything. They found out that the nanny had skipped work that day. It wasn’t her first time, but Jordan was always obedient so nothing ever happened. During the day before the incident, however, Jordan happened to catch a cold and develop a high fever, then one thing led to another.”

Gale remembered what happened that year very clearly. Of all the years he knew Alexander, he had never seen him that angry before. Jordan was his biological son. Scott wanted him to settle down, so he gave him a grandson to deal with. Even though Alexander acted like he did not care, when something happened to Jordan, he was more worried than anyone else.

“What happened to the nanny?” Oliver asked.

“Of course, she got fired. After Alex brought Jordan home, he handpicked every housekeeper they hired. He brought Jordan along on his business trips whenever he could. If he wasn’t around, then Britney would look after Jordan. She was not the only one who wanted to be Jordan’s stepmother, but she was the only one who could reach him. How would she dare to neglect him?”

“That might not be entirely true.” Oliver looked calm. “If Britney could only reach Jordan after the incident, and get to Alexander through him, then she is obviously the biggest beneficiary here.”

“She is.” Gale failed to notice the implication of his words. “Isn’t that what I meant?”

Courtney, however, picked up on it. “Are you saying that what happened to Jordan has something to do with Britney?”

They were stunned.

Oliver’s face was still hard to read, and he spoke in an unhurried manner. “I’m just speculating. Besides, Alexander is famous for his disinterest in women. Britney was the only one who appeared next to him from time to time, but he didn’t treat her any differently. If all of this happened so she could use Jordan for personal gains, then it actually makes sense.”

They felt chills all over from hearing his explanation.

What could someone do by using a child?

Courtney quickly thought of clinical cases where childhood trauma resulted in mental illnesses.

Some children who suffered severe psychological distress ended up becoming traumatized and refused to interact with people.

“She wouldn’t go that far to do that.” Gale looked baffled. “Don’t you think you’re going overboard with your conspiracy theory? Even if you give Britney all the courage in the world, she still wouldn’t dare to pull this stunt in front of Alex. Two years ago, she was just a small-time actress who was not well-known; who did not have much of a background; and who knew her place. It was only because of those reasons that Alex let her pretend to be his girlfriend to fool Scott.”

“There is no limit to desire. I believe Alexander played a big part in helping her become who she is today over the past two years,” Oliver commented, then abruptly changed the topic. “Let’s eat. It’s cooked now.”

After dinner, Gale and Oliver were in the kitchen doing the dishes when Gale asked bluntly, “How do you know so much?”

“Is it that hard to find out?” Oliver glanced at him. “You just have to search on the internet. It’s the 21st century, Gale.”

“What was your intention for looking up those things?” Gale had his guard up now.

“I wanted to find my memories.” Oliver shrugged. “Maybe I was a police officer in training; I seem naturally sensitive to my surroundings. But, I was just saying. Why are you so tense?”

Gale pulled his brows together. “I would advise you not to pry any further.”

“Oh?” Oliver shot him a questioning look. “I think I hear various implications in that.”

“It’s nothing like that. If you don’t want trouble, then don’t bring this up again. Do you think people are fools who don’t know anything? It involves tremendous financial benefits and isn’t as simple as you think it is.”

Oliver raised his eyebrows but did not exhibit any intention to reply.

He was well aware that huge financial benefits could drive a person mad.

Gale assumed that his warning was enough to stop Oliver from talking, but before Oliver left, he told Courtney everything without missing a beat.

After closing the door behind her, Courtney did not even know how she made it back to her room. It just felt like her mind was a tangled ball of mess that could not be undone.

Does that mean Alex knew about what happened all along? But, why did he act like he had no clue? He keeps telling people that Jordan lost his ability to speak because of the high fever he developed from being neglected by his nanny.

Could someone really use a child as bait and a bargaining chip for financial gains?

Oliver’s words kept replaying in her mind.

“Two years ago, not long after Jordan’s incident, Alexander’s cousin stepped down from his position as the chief financial officer of Sunhill Enterprise. Scott also legally acquired all the shares he had on hand. When the board of directors was dismissed, the only entity that was capable of going up against Alexander in the Duncan Family was also gone. That was how Alexander secured his position as president at Sunhill Enterprise.”

Alexander was the only child in the Duncan Family in his generation, but he had numerous cousins. That year, a number of his cousins were on the board of directors at the company, and many also held important positions in each department.

At the time, Scott said he would not let Alexander be the successor if he did not get married. For the sake of the inheritance, Alexander even gave him a grandchild through surrogacy. During that time, Jordan was only a trivial living being of little importance to Alexander.

The more Courtney thought about it, the more she felt chills in her bones and she dared not to think any further.

Perhaps I'm overthinking this.

Late at night, at an obscure jazz bar, the sounds of chatter in booths blended with the slow music. A woman with a slender body moved through the public space to a private room on the second floor. When she pushed open the door, her face tensed up under her sunglasses.

A lone young man was inside the room, leaning against the window as he looked down at the jazz performance below. A single glass of whisky sat on the industrial-styled table before him.

Looking at his side profile, the woman tightened her grip on her handbag and walked in.

"Are you Benjamin Ford?"

"You're here, aren't you? Why bother asking when you already know?" He scorned. "Sit down. You can order anything you want. Even though I'm going to press charges against you for attempted murder, we still have time for this."

Britney's face went white. Looking around nervously, she mumbled, "I told you. I'll give you as much as you want. This issue ends here."

"I do like money, but I want to change things up a bit this time." He smirked and a menacing look grew in his eyes. "I want to take back what's mine. If you help me, I can pretend like you never inflicted harm on me before or that you cost someone their life."

"What do you want me to help you with?"

"Alexander's son. He's a real eyesore to me—get rid of him."

The expression on her face shifted. "Are you telling me to kill someone?"

"It's not like you've never done it before." He shot her a sidelong glance.

Britney felt an intense shudder.

"Haven't you always yearned to be the Duncans' daughter-in-law? If you get rid of that nuisance, you'll have that chance. As for me, I just happen to have some bad blood with Alexander. It's that simple."

Chapter 150 Sever Ties With Her

Britney looked up to meet a pair of bleak eyes. Shuddering in fear, she instantly had the feeling that Benjamin was not an average person, and that his connection to Alexander was not an average one, either.

"What happened between the both of you?"

"That is none of your business. You just have to do as you're told."

He was indifferent toward her question. It was clear that he had no intention of engaging in idle talk.

“What should I do?” She put her mind to it and took a deep breath. “You have to give me some instructions.”

It was tough to be in the palm of someone’s hand, but things had already unfolded that way. Benjamin was clearly one step ahead of her. The carelessness of the person Jason hired is to blame. How could he let him get away so easily?

“It’s simple—cause an accident to happen and frame someone else for it.”

“Good morning, Miss Hunter.”

“Good morning.”

Courtney brought the two children along with her to the hotel for work today. As they were making their way in, they were greeted by many employees—some of whom gave them strange looks.

“I told you. Do you still not believe me? Miss Hunter and President Duncan have already started living together. Whenever he goes on a business trip, she looks after his son for him, so that’s why he’s been following her to work every day. I saw them yesterday too.”

“Oh? Isn’t the little prince the hardest to tend to? The hotel was in chaos the last time he stayed here.”

“Doesn’t that make Miss Hunter capable? Being able to get on the little prince’s good side is basically getting on President Duncan’s good side.”

“If I had known, I would’ve been the first one to rush to Little Master whenever he came to stay at the hotel. I wouldn’t budge even if I got punched or kicked. Wouldn’t I become the daughter-in-law of the Duncan Family, then?”

“You have a wild imagination! If you bother the little prince, you wouldn’t even have this job anymore.”

“That’s right.”

“Oh well, I’ll just wait for an ordinary person. It’s still better to have your feet on the ground. Only a person’s career can change their fate.”

Despite the heated gossip and chatter in the office, Courtney remained oblivious to it all. Since it was not too malicious or far-fetched, she did not bother with it even when it reached her ears.

Alexander was on a business trip for two days. She did not feel at ease leaving the two children at home, so she decided to bring them along with her to work at the hotel. Besides, the people at the hotel already knew who they were. She let them run around the hotel as long as they did not step outside.

“The same rules from yesterday apply today. If you’re hungry, go look for Uncle Oliver. You have to stay inside this hotel. If there’s a problem, come to me or Miss Penelope at the front desk.”

“We know, Mommy. Get to work already.” Tina urged her to leave while Jordan nodded his head obediently and tugged at Tina with a compliant look on his face.

When Courtney arrived at her office, Addie came running over in a frantic state. “We have a problem, Miss Hunter!”

“What is it?”

“A call from the headquarters came just now. They told us to tighten security at the hotel and advised you not to come to work for a couple of days.”

“Why?” Courtney looked up from her computer when she sensed the gravity of the situation. “What happened?”

“Look at the trending searches on the internet today.”

Filled with alarm, Courtney’s hands started flying across the keyboard and quickly brought up the trending news articles on the screen.

‘Popular singer Shay Spencer’s first love and girlfriend exposed at the same time.’

‘Rumored adoptive sister and his current girlfriend got into a big fight.’

‘Shay Spencer hasn’t forgotten about the incestuous headquarters’ love affair with his sister.’

Courtney was rendered speechless.

The red and bold headlines were shocking. Most of the pictures included in the articles had the watermark of only one media source.

“The headquarters and Shay’s company are rushing to resolve this issue, but the editor-in-chief at the media company seems to have a bit of animosity toward President Duncan. I’m afraid he won’t show us mercy. Netizens are currently leaning more toward one side.”

Addie was overwhelmed with concern. Very carefully, he said, “Miss Hunter, we don’t believe that you are this kind of person, but the pictures might be difficult to justify.”

The picture captured what happened backstage on the day of Shay’s performance. The person claimed to be his current girlfriend was Anna Hunter while the adoptive older sister he once talked about while on a program was naturally Courtney.

Courtney clenched her fists. “This is nonsense.”

“We think it’s nonsense too.” Addie nodded in agreement. “You’re older than him by two to three years, and you’re not related by blood. Why is it considered an inappropriate relationship?”

Courtney gave out a side-splitting laugh and rolled her eyes. “Addie, you sure know how to discern a problem.”

An unbelievably slow-witted Addie took it as a compliment. “I learn from the best, Miss Hunter.”

The news came out in the morning and spread across the internet very quickly. Even though Shay rose to fame recently, he was still building his reputation and fanbase. Since a large portion of his fans were students, the internet blew up with rage in an instant.

As soon as they managed to take down one trending topic, ‘Pity Shay’s Girlfriend’ made it to the top three.

Courtney followed the headquarter's advice and was packing up her things to leave early when she received a call from Alexander.

"I just came out from a meeting." His voice sounded hoarse like he hadn't slept enough. "I saw the news. Stay at the hotel for a couple of days and don't run off anywhere else. It's not safe to go home."

She was rather taken aback. "Aren't you going to ask me about the picture?"

In the picture, Courtney and Shay were seen embracing each other. The paparazzi happened to find a convenient angle where it looked like they were tied up in each other's arms when it was just an endearing hug. There was even a picture of Anna running away in tears with her hands over her face beside it, giving people the wrong idea.

"I don't want you to believe things that you see about me on the news, either. It goes both ways."

Feeling touched by his words, Courtney murmured, "Thank you. When are you coming back?"

Alexander had been gone for a few days, so she figured he must have been swamped with work. It was also their first phone call since he left.

"I won't be returning for the time being. Can you manage on your own?"

"Yes," she answered firmly.

"Okay."

After exchanging a few sentences with each other, the call ended. Alexander was always brief and to the point while Courtney always preferred to deal with her own problems.

Thinking about that phone call, Courtney guessed that it wasn't even a minute long.

If it were a different woman, she would probably have boiled over with anger by now. It was no wonder he stayed single all these years. He did not know how to speak affectionately, but he happened to meet Courtney, who understood how busy he was.

At the thought of that, Courtney felt like she had gotten the short end of the stick. Why am I so good at finding excuses for people?

At the entrance of a five-star hotel in a foreign country, Alexander hung up the call and sat inside the car.

"Who released the news?"

"Storm Media." Josh furrowed his brows together. "At the moment, people who have voiced their opinions on the internet seem to fall into two categories: Shay's diehard fans who won't accept that he has a girlfriend, and those who feel sorry for the said girlfriend. Should we do something about those who keep cursing at Shay and Miss Hunter?"

"No." Alexander looked firm. "Sever all of Courtney's ties with Sunhill Enterprise."

"What?" Josh looked puzzled. "Sever ties? What about—"

Upon seeing Alexander's indifferent expression, he took back the latter half of his sentence.

Don't try to guess what Alex is thinking; I won't get it anyway.