

Stealing Your Heart Chapter 361

Zong Jinghao said nothing more as he opened the door and got in the car.

When he left the scene, Shen Peichuan patted Su Zhan's shoulder. "Let's have another drink."

"Okay."

Lin Xinyan was feeling sleepy as she waited for Zong Jinghao at the hospital's entrance.

At this hour, even the usually busy hospital, especially at the receptionist desk, was quieter.

Zong Jinghao finally arrived after half an hour. When Lin Xinyan saw his car, she walked over when he stopped right in front of her.

"Where's Su Zhan?" she asked while fastening her seatbelt.

"He's with Shen Peichuan," he replied while keeping his eyes on the road.

Lin Xinyan was glad to know that someone was keeping Su Zhan company.

It was already two in the morning. Lin Xinyan leaned back on the seat, nodding off unknowingly.

Zong Jinghao slowed down and drove steadily. When they arrived at the villa, she was already sound asleep.

He went out and rounded the car to go to the other side. After that, he opened the door before bending down to unfasten her seatbelt and carried her to the house.

Lin Xinyan frowned and mumbled something upon sensing the movement. She quickly adjusted into a comfortable position in his hold as she continued her slumber.

They emerged through the door, and Cheng Yuxiu, who was up, was drinking water.

Her eyes shifted from the couple to the clock, noticing that it was three in the morning.

“You’re back this late?” she questioned in a hushed tone, to which the man only hummed a reply out of habit.

Cheng Yuxiu froze as her eyes widened.

Did he just respond to me?

She walked back to Lin Ruixi’s room without even finishing the water. As she was about to push the door open, she turned around again to go to Zong Qifeng’s room instead.

“Hey, wake up.” She shook the sleeping man slightly.

Zong Qifeng slowly opened his eyes, adjusting his vision under the faint light before the woman’s face came into view.

Isn’t she supposed to be in Ruixi’s room? Why is she here?

“What’s the matter?” he asked while sitting up, staring at Cheng Yuxiu, who seemed all over the place.

“J-Jinghao just talked to me.”

Zong Qifeng turned on the bedside lamp, brightening up the room.

“What did he say?”

“I asked him why he’s back so late, and he replied me with a hum.”

That’s it? She really woke me up for this? The man frowned.

“Don’t you think this is an improvement? Will he slowly accept me?” *I’m anticipating for that day to come.*

“He will,” Zong Qifeng answered while staring at her happy expression.

Zong Qifeng somewhat understood Zong Jinghao. He knew that it would not be easy to break the latter’s wall.

He has never treated her well, yet she’s this happy just because she received a hum from him?

Cheng Yuxiu’s whole being lit up even more after getting his reassurance. “Then should I talk to him more from now on?”

She really can’t think straight when it comes to Zong Jinghao. We’ve been married for more than twenty years, and he has always shown her the cold shoulder. How can she think he’ll open up to her now?

“Come here,” Zong Qifeng sighed, waving her over.

Cheng Yuxiu sat by the bed, and he stroked her cheek.

“He has been like this for years. Don’t get your hopes too high.”

I don't want her to be disappointed.

“I understand,” uttered Cheng Yuxiu. However, she was actually already dizzy with excitement.

They had been together for ages now. Zong Qifeng knew her well enough to know that she was not listening to him.

I'll talk to her again when she calms down.

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Meanwhile, Zong Jinghao carried Lin Xinyan all the way to their room.

She was sleeping deeply, but when he laid her on the bed, she rolled her body to get under the covers when she could feel the mattress. Zong Jinghao furrowed and bent his body over hers to gaze at her.

Her head was tilted, and her small cheeks were as white as porcelain. Her eyelashes were so long that they had their own shadows. Her luscious red lips seemed like they were seducing him.

He lowered his head to capture her lips with his own. The sudden contact stirred Lin Xinyan awake, and she frowned before letting out an irritated grunt.

She slowly fluttered her eyes open, only to see Zong Jinghao mere inches away from her face. "I'm sleepy." She pushed him away, a bit flirtatiously. Her sleepy voice was hoarse and soft, luring him even more.

Zong Jinghao mumbled a response without detaching himself from her lips. Lin Xinyan could feel his hot, uneven breath on her skin.

She could not help but grow nervous. Her sleepiness faded away when she recalled how dominant the man was in bed.

Every time they had a steamy session, she would always be left panting for air.

"Jinghao, I'm really sleepy," she cautiously voiced out.

"What should you call me?"

Lin Xinyan was in a daze. “Jinghao?” she asked questioningly.

Should he be called Zong Jinghao or just Jinghao?

“Mmph!”

Suddenly, she felt a cold breeze brush all over her body as he lifted her skirt. Just as she was about to cover it back, he quickly grabbed her hands and pinned them above her head, hovering over her. “I’ll ask you one more time. What should you call me?”

“H-hubby?” she stuttered.

He raised his brows as a wide smile plastered across his face, radiating immense joy.

“I wanna sleep,” Lin Xinyan cooed, taking this opportunity to act coquettishly.

Zong Jinghao placed a kiss on each of her eyelids, and she closed her eyes, enjoying the affection.

“Go ahead.” He smiled fervently while caressing her hair.

“Okay.” She leaned up to kiss his cheek softly, making the man’s heart burst with happiness.

Zong Jinghao helped her remove her shoes, revealing her milky white and small feet.

During the process, Lin Xinyan had not fallen asleep yet. She chose not to make any movements, simply enjoying this moment all she could.

Unwittingly, the corners of her lips rose slightly.

After that, she heard the sound of the man taking a shower as she gradually fell asleep. Before she drifted into dreamland, she felt the mattress behind her sink deeply before a strong arm wrapped around her slender waist, pulling her close to him. She could smell his shower gel as she finally slumbered in his comfortable arms.

It was nine in the morning when she woke up.

Typically, Zong Jinghao was already headed to the company at this hour. Surprisingly, he was still at home today. “You’re not working today?” she asked while sitting up.

Zong Jinghao stood in front of the mirror while putting on a necktie as he glanced at her. “Everything’s been arranged. Qin Ya can go today.”

Upon hearing that, Lin Xinyan got out of bed, approached him, and wrapped her arms around him from behind. “Thank you.”

“How should you thank me?” he questioned while still fumbling with the necktie.

She rounded him and stopped right in front of him, stretching her arms to grab the necktie. “Next time, let me do this for you.”

She was a fashion designer herself – she could handle things like this easily.

When she was done with the necktie, she helped him button up the suit before smoothing out the neckline.

After that, she sighed in satisfaction and took a step back to admire the man and her work. He had a thin waist, and his hips looked sturdy.

The dangling lights on the ceiling illuminated his glowing skin, highlighting all his charming points.

Zong Jinghao smiled. "Like what you see?"

"Just a little bit," Lin Xinyan nodded seriously, pretending to actually mean what she said.

"A little bit?" The man arched a brow, clearly disliking what he was hearing.

Lin Xinyan hooked her arms around his neck, tiptoeing while lifting her head to land a kiss on his chin. "Kidding, I love it."

I can't deny it anymore. I'm falling for him.

Zong Jinghao hugged her small waist with a smile plastered on his lips. "You should change your clothes."

Lin Xinyan nodded and walked over to her wardrobe to take out a new outfit before going to the bathroom for a quick change.

Now that Zong Jinghao had arranged for everything, the only thing left for her to do was fetch Qin Ya to the airport.

Concurrently, Guan Jing took care of everything in the hospital as per Zong Jinghao's order after the latter received a call from the other party.

Some of the medical staff would go along with Qin Ya in case anything happened.

He had arranged everything accordingly. When they arrived, Guan Jing approached them. "Everything's set. We can go to the airport now."

"What time is the flight?" questioned Lin Xinyan.

"It's a chartered flight. We can fly anytime," Guan Jing replied readily.

“Okay, then. We’ll leave once everything’s ready.”

We can’t afford to postpone Qin Ya’s treatment.

It took half an hour for Lin Xinyan to send Qin Ya to the airport from the hospital.

Qin Ya was lying on the stretcher carried by the medical staff, with a doctor on the side. They stopped at the boarding gate. “I’ll visit you soon,” Lin Xinyan announced.

Qin Ya only replied with a timid ‘okay’ and nothing more, for she felt that the words ‘thank you’ were not enough to describe the gratitude she felt towards her friend.

“Get well soon. Everything will be alright.” Lin Xinyan held her hand tight. “I’ll wait for your return to help me manage the store.”

“Okay,” Qin Ya replied as tears welled up in her eyes.

With that, the medical staff carried her into the airplane. Shortly after, Lin Xinyan watched as the plane took off.

Meanwhile, two men were standing in an unobtrusive corner of the airport. One had on a serious expression, while the other looked sorrowful.

Su Zhan would have rushed forward if it weren’t for Shen Peichuan holding him back.

He could only helplessly watch Qin Ya take off into the skies, leaving him heartbroken.

Of course, he knew it was best for him not to show up in front of Qin Ya. However, that would fill him with endless contrition.

Ever since Qin Ya was rescued, all he had managed to do was take a glance at the unconscious woman. They never exchanged a single word after she woke up because she had refused to meet him.

Shen Peichuan let go of him after Qin Ya left, and Su Zhan immediately dashed towards Lin Xinyan.

“Su Zhan!” Shen Peichuan shouted, chasing after the other man in fear that the latter would curse Lin Xinyan for making Qin Ya leave.

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Instead of confronting them, Su Zhan tried his best to keep himself calm. However, he wanted Lin Xinyan to tell him the details of Qin Ya's whereabouts to get himself ready.

Shen Peichuan had been keeping him company since last night.

Finally, he made up his mind. No matter what he was up to, he would have to put everything on hold until Qin Ya recovered. If he were to approach Qin Ya, he would only bring her more misery, affecting her recovery.

"I'm wide awake." Su Zhan smiled bitterly in return. He looked at Shen Peichuan and placed his hand on the man's shoulder silently.

He deemed it unnecessary to explain himself.

Similarly, Shen Peichuan placed his hand on Su Zhan's shoulder. "I'm glad you have finally sorted things out."

The former felt a sense of relief when he heard that Su Zhan had made up his mind. Truth be told, he was worried about his friend because Su Zhan had been in a foul mood over the past few days.

"Xinyan," Su Zhan greeted Lin Xinyan in a husky voice because he felt guilty deep down.

Judging by Su Zhan's look, Lin Xinyan managed to figure out his motive. She assured him, "Don't worry. Once she recovers, I'll get in touch with you and let you know her whereabouts."

“If that’s the case, I’ll place her under your care, Xinyan,” Su Zhan nodded in return and replied thoughtfully.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take great care of her. For the time being, you have to take good care of yourself as well,” Lin Xinyan instructed in the end.

“Liu Feifei used to be my first love. Hence, I got anxious when she showed up out of nowhere back then. I was the reason she managed to get the better of me and hurt Qin Ya. I will bear the consequences of my actions and beg for her forgiveness once she recovers,” Su Zhan asserted.

Lin Xinyan had no intention of meddling with Su Zhan and Qin Ya’s relationship.

After all, she was merely an outsider. Hence, she wasn’t in the position to make the call on anyone’s behalf.

“I’ll get her to revert back to you once she’s ready,” Lin Xinyan told Su Zhan and bade farewell with him.

She wanted to return to the store since Zong Jinghao would have to return to the company soon.

Once they walked out of the airport, Zong Jinghao opened the door of his car and ushered Lin Xinyan into their ride.

After Lin Xinyan got into the car and buckled up, Zong Jinghao asked, “Are you heading over to the company?”

“No. Can you please drop me off at the store?” Initially, she wanted to draw everyone’s attention to Tea Silk. However, she had to put everything to a halt for the time being due to Wen Qing.

She could barely sustain her store’s day-to-day operation. Hence, she was in desperate need of dazzling collections to bring LEO back to the public’s eyes in B City.

Ever since the launching of the store, she had encountered a series of events. In other words, she had accidentally neglected her store's operation. She needed to establish a proper contingency plan. Otherwise, things would get to the point of no return and adversely impact LEO's image.

Lin Xinyan walked out of the car once Zong Jinghao pulled over in front of her store. The latter received a call all of a sudden.

Lin Xinyan turned around and instructed, "You should pick up the call. I'll get going immediately."

It was a call from the Wen family's landline. Usually, Wen Qing was the only one who would approach him. Zong Jinghao looked at Lin Xinyan and told her, "I'll pick you up after you're done."

Lin Xinyan nodded in return before walking into her store.

Zong Jinghao picked up the call, but he had his eyes glued to the departing figure of Lin Xinyan.

"Jinghao, can you please do me a favor?" Wen Qing's voice could be heard.

Zong Jinghao would never turn Wen Qing down because the man had never once asked for a favor from him.

"What is it?"

"Can you please drop by Imperial Hotel and approach someone who has checked into room 808 on my behalf? I need you to retrieve an item for me. She'll hand over the item to you once you tell her you're there on my behalf."

Usually, he would instruct Guan Jing to retrieve items of sorts on his behalf, but he decided to drop by Imperial Hotel since it wasn't much of a hassle.

As soon as he reached the hotel, he headed over to room 808 as instructed. He pressed the doorbell to notify the person of his arrival.

Soon, someone answered the door.

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The person who answered the door was a young and gorgeous woman.

She wasn't shocked the moment she detected Zong Jinghao's presence. In fact, she seemed to be expecting his arrival all along.

In fact, she would be surprised if it weren't Zong Jinghao who had shown up in front of her doorstep.

"Are you here to retrieve an item?" the young woman asked with a smile.

Due to the illumination of the corridor, the woman's flawless facial features could be seen. Her glistening pair of eyes stood out amongst the features she had been blessed with. In short, she was an ethereal beauty.

However, Zong Jinghao behaved casually, as though he couldn't be bothered by the woman's so-called flawless features at all.

He replied nonchalantly with a poker face, "Mm."

"Come on in," the woman replied with a smile and moved away, showing him the way into the room.

Zong Jinghao frowned in confusion. He had his fair share of doubts deep down because he couldn't recall encountering this woman by Wen Qing's side.

Apart from that, he couldn't figure out the rationale behind why Wen Qing had handed over his item to such a young woman.

“My father and Uncle Wen have been close acquaintances for years. My father was the one who has access to the information of the exceptional recruits who have been recruited through the drill. Uncle Wen wanted to peruse the information, but my dad wasn’t free. Hence, he sent me on his behalf...” The woman explained the reason behind it and introduced herself, “My name is Chen Shihan. If anything is bothering you, please give Uncle Wen a call.”

Since Chen Shihan had introduced herself and told Zong Jinghao everything he had been wondering, he could not bring anything else up anymore.

Once he marched into the room, Chen Shihan closed the door and passed him the folder she had retrieved from the table.

However, when Zong Jinghao tried to take it away from Chen Shihan, she held on to it firmly.

She looked at Zong Jinghao and asked, “Aren’t you curious about the reason Uncle Wen has sent you to retrieve the documents? I mean, people like my father and Uncle Wen have bodyguards around them twenty-four seven. In fact, they have an entire unit at their deployment. Both you and I don’t need to meet up for a mere set of documents.”

“Oh? Does that mean you know what they’re up to?” Zong Jinghao played along because he had been wanting to figure out the reason behind it as well.

“Of course! I heard the conversation between my father and Uncle Wen prior to my departure.” Chen Shihan sat on the couch nonchalantly; she was certain Zong Jinghao would be interested in the things she had to share with him.

Zong Jinghao nodded in return. He wasn’t interested in the content of the conversation they had, but he wanted to figure out the reason behind Wen Qing’s action.

“Do you want me to tell you?” Chen Shihan asked with a bright smile.

It was evident that she had no intention to share it with him unconditionally, but Zong Jinghao had always been a proud man.

He would never allow a woman to overpower him.

Therefore, he cast a skeptical gaze at Chen Shihan before stepping out of the room.

She didn't expect him to leave her behind without any hesitation. Immediately, she got up from the couch and went after Zong Jinghao.

By the time she reached the entrance, Zong Jinghao had already boarded the elevator and made his way downstairs. She chuckled as she stood by the entrance. "Zong Jinghao, you're such an interesting man!"

Zong Jinghao was a young and wealthy man. He possessed countless assets and a flawless look that could easily charm another woman.

Chen Shihan got pumped up because she could not wait to figure out the arrangement Wen Qing and her father had in store to match-make them.

Previously, Chen Shihan had merely heard rumors about Zong Jinghao. She finally had the opportunity to run into him in person. He was a charismatic man. As compared to his peers, he was far more exceptional.

Once Zong Jinghao got into his car with the folder, he made his way back to his company.

He couldn't figure out the meaning behind Chen Shihan's words, and neither could he figure out Wen Qing's intention behind his request.

As soon as he reached his company, Zong Jinghao parked his car in the underground parking lot. The moment he alighted from his car, he noticed the folder and decided to bring it along with him.

He boarded the elevator and made his way upstairs.

“Send Guan Jing to my office immediately,” he instructed after he walked out of the elevator and passed by his secretary’s seat.

He entered his office once he delivered his instructions. Zong Jinghao placed the folder he had brought along with him on the table casually and adjusted his tie.

As soon as Guan Jing walked into his office, Zong Jinghao pointed at the folder on his table and instructed his subordinate to deliver it to Wen Qing.

Guan Jing took note of his instruction and took the folder along with him as he made his way out of his supervisor’s office, but Zong Jinghao stopped him. “Hold on.”

Hence, Guan Jing stopped right where he was before he could make his way out of Zong Jinghao’s office. He turned around and looked at Zong Jinghao, awaiting the next instruction.

Zong Jinghao fell silent for a few seconds before instructing, “I want you to investigate if there’s been anything odd regarding the Wen family lately.”

Guan Jing couldn’t figure out the rationale behind Zong Jinghao’s instruction because he was aware of the sort of relationship Wen Qing and Zong Jinghao had.

Hence, Guan Jing asked carefully, “Am I supposed to investigate Wen Qing?”

“Have I not made myself clear?” Zong Jinghao stretched his arms and removed the cufflinks on his sleeves.

“No. Everything is clear,” Guan Jing replied with a smile and made his way out of Zong Jinghao’s office right away.

He stood in front of Zong Jinghao's office once he shut the door tight. Guan Jing took a peek at the folder he had with him and darted another glance at the door that had been shut tight.

Although he noticed Zong Jinghao in a foul mood, he shrugged his shoulders helplessly because he was aware that he shouldn't poke his nose into his supervisor's business. He made up his mind and decided to focus on the mission that had been assigned to him instead.

He made a call as he walked down the stairs with the folder that Zong Jinghao handed over to him.

On the other hand, Lin Xinyan gathered every staff of her store around once again.

No matter how exceptional the designs of her outfits were, it would not do her any good if no one were aware of their existence.

Therefore, she needed someone influential to put on the outfits she had designed to achieve positive word-of-mouth.

Ellen caressed her chin and suggested, "I think Mr. Zong is the best candidate for the task since he's a renowned figure!"

In return, Lin Xinyan knitted her eyebrows and gave it some thought, but she soon recalled Zong Jinghao had always shown up in front of others in formal wear.

She could not possibly get him to promote his outfits to others either. He would never give in to her request as well.

Hence, she couldn't rationalize the idea her subordinate had suggested because it didn't make any sense to turn Zong Jinghao into her brand's spokesperson.

In fact, she had never once wanted to rely on Zong Jinghao either.

“No,” Lin Xinyan turned down the suggestion of her subordinate without any hesitation.

“Are you sure you’re not turning me down because you’re reluctant to put him under the limelight?” Ellen teased her in return.

Lin Xinyan chuckled because she found Ellen’s words hilarious. She wasn’t mad since she was satisfied with her current state of living as well as her relationship with Zong Jinghao.

Ellen stated, “The only ones who are able to contribute to our goals are the celebrities.”

Actually, Lin Xinyan shared the same idea deep down. However, she didn’t want to procure the aid of a female celebrity.

All along, they had focused on designing outfits for females. As a matter of fact, they had rarely launched outfits for males. Hence, Lin Xinyan wanted to penetrate their business segment into the male market.

“What about Li Zhan? He’s the most sought-after male celebrity nowadays, but it’s going to cost a fortune to procure his service,” Ellen explained.

Since Lin Xinyan had never been a fan of the entertainment industry, she was not aware of the ongoing issue. Besides, she might not want to procure the service of the most sought-after male celebrity because the one thing she emphasized the most was compatibility.

“Ellen, each of us will design two outfits. We’ll decide on the flagship design once we’ve come out with our separate designs. I’ll deal with the spokesperson on my own.”

“Alright, Xinran.”

“Everyone, it won’t be easy in the upcoming few weeks, but let’s give our best!” Once the designs were drafted, they would have to produce the outfits based on the designs. They might have to work overtime to achieve the quality desired.

Nevertheless, Lin Xinran’s employees didn’t complain because they would be the beneficiaries of their actions, should the profit the store generated increase. Hence, they were willing to work overtime voluntarily.

Lin Xinyan shut herself in her office once the conference ended. She had a few rough ideas in her mind. Therefore, she started drafting her designs immediately.

Finally, she completed one of her designs. She had to decide on the best candidate for the spokesperson to endorse the outfits she had designed next.

Since she had made up her mind to procure the service of a male celebrity, they would have to pay a higher premium to secure their services.

Although it might cost Lin Xinran a fortune, it would be necessary for a greater cause in the long run because they might achieve positive word-of-mouth and penetrate the male market easily. Apart from that, most of the male celebrity’s fans were female. The fans might be a potential source of customers Lin Xinran could tap into as well.

She surfed the internet to gather the male celebrities’ information. The first one who showed up on the list was Li Zhan, the one Ellen had brought up previously.

The man had delicate facial features that make him seem as though he was the reincarnation of the legendary Narcissus from Greek mythology. He had a pair of abysmal eyes that intrigued Lin Xinyan.

She started collecting Li Zhan’s personal information.

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Li Zhan was born on October 5, 1992, in B City. He's a professional actor and singer.

In 2015, he participated in Youth With You, an audition variety show. He was the champion of the show and had since debuted as a celebrity.

In March 2016, he took part in the production of a web drama – You Are My Destiny.

In 2017, Li Zhan rose to fame after playing the role of Han Tianyu; the character he played in the drama My Soulmate. On May 28, 2018, My Dearest – the drama Li Zhan had taken part in – was aired. It had garnered five hundred million views globally on the premiere. He had played the role of Yu Chengze; the male protagonist of the drama and won the public over.

Li Zhan has been acknowledged as the most influential male celebrity since he rose to fame due to My Dearest that had garnered fifteen billion views globally.

Lin Xinyan's jaw dropped open when she figured out Li Zhan's background. He wasn't even thirty-year-old, yet he was, undeniably, the most influential male celebrity.

First impressions mattered. Lin Xinyan was impressed by Li Zhan and thought he fulfilled the criteria she had set forth.

Therefore, she made up her mind and decided to procure his service as the spokesperson for her brand new series of outfits.

She reached for her phone and called Guan Jing because she needed his aid to get the exact location of the agency Li Zhan was affiliated with.

Lin Xinyan would strike a deal with Li Zhan and his agency on her own.

On the other hand, Guan Jing had just reached Wen Qing's department. He received a call out of the blue before he could hand the folder over to the latter as instructed.

As soon as he picked up the call, he heard a woman's voice instructing casually, "I need you to investigate someone on my behalf."

Guan Jing was dumbfounded because he had just received the instruction from Zong Jinghao to investigate Wen Qing. On the other hand, Lin Xinyan had gotten in touch with him and wanted him to investigate someone else on her behalf.

He couldn't help but doubt because it seemed too much to be a coincidence.

"May I know who is it?" Guan Jing asked in return.

"I need you to figure out the exact location of Li Zhan's agency," Lin Xinyan told Guan Jing.

Guan Jing was utterly confused because one of them was going after the father while the other was going after the son.

Did they talk about this beforehand? If they hadn't, the chemistry between them both is horrifying!

Li Zhan was Wen Xiaoji's alias. In other words, he was Wen Qing and Li Jing's son. He had gotten himself an entirely unrelated alias since he had debuted as a celebrity.

Thus, only a mere few were aware of his actual identity. Guan Jing was one of them. He aware of Li Zhan's actual identity because Zong Jinghao had once brought it up in front of him.

"He isn't affiliated with any agency. May I know the reason you're looking after him?" Guan Jing asked because he was aware Li Zhan wasn't affiliated with any agency. He had a personal manager that would be in charge of his schedule.

"I want him to be the spokesperson of LEO. Do you know how I can get in touch with him?" Lin Xinyan decided to tell Guan Jing the truth and ask for his aid.

"Yes," Guan Jing assured Lin Xinyan.

Knock! Knock!

Someone knocked on Lin Xinyan's door – the receptionist of the company had shown up. She stood at the entrance and told Lin Xinyan, "Someone is looking for you."

Lin Xinyan nodded and took note of the receptionist's words. She told the person on the other end of the call, "Please text me the methods to get in touch with him once you get your hands on it. I've got to go because I have to tend to something else."

As soon as Lin Xinyan hung up the call, she got up from her seat and asked, "Did the visitor announce his identity?"

"No, but he's shown up in a wheelchair."

Lin Xinyan's eyes widened in shock because only one of her acquaintances would travel around in a wheelchair.

That person was none other than Bai Yinning.

Once she returned to her senses, she instructed the receptionist to bring two glasses of water over to the conference room downstairs as she walked down the stairs.

In the meantime, Bai Yinning, who was in the wheelchair, had his back facing the staircase. He turned the wheelchair around the moment he heard footsteps closing in. Immediately, he saw Lin Xinyan walking down the stairs.

Lin Xinyan saw him as well. She figured out what happened since his head was bandaged and his eyes were bruised.

She walked down the stairs but didn't bother expressing her concerns.

Bai Yinning's face darkened as he looked her in the eyes. "Aren't you going to ask me how I hurt myself?"

He felt dejected deep down because he didn't expect her to tell Zong Jinghao the truth behind Wen Qing's accident.

In actual fact, Bai Yinning was certain that Zong Jinghao wouldn't have figured out that he was the mastermind behind the accident should Lin Xinyan keep her mouth shut.

Nevertheless, they had come to a unanimous agreement of not exposing one another.

Thus, Lin Xinyan pretended as if she had no idea the reason behind his injuries. She asked, "Are you okay?"

"Don't worry. I'm still kicking and alive," Bai Yinning replied nonchalantly.

It was evident that he was enraged; Lin Xinyan was aware of his emotions.

She heaved a long sigh of despair deep down because she had long urged him to leave the place, but he had insisted on staying back.

Lin Xinyan took a seat on the couch and served Bai Yinning the glass of water the receptionist had brought her. "Please have a glass of water and calm yourself down."

Bai Yinning refused to take the glass of water Lin Xinyan offered him. He stared at Lin Xinyan with a serious look and asked, "Can you please tell me if you've brought it up in front of him proactively or if you weren't given a choice because he confronted you after getting his hands on some leads—"

"I brought it up in front of him proactively," Lin Xinyan broke the silence, confessing before Bai Yinning could finish his sentence. She looked at him in the eyes and told him, "He's my husband. I can't and shouldn't lie to him."

She told him the things she had been keeping to herself all this while. Although she had her fair share of conflicts back then, she wanted to be honest with Zong Jinghao.

Lin Xinyan didn't want to keep her husband in the dark, and neither did she want to lie to him because she was a firm believer that honesty was the foundation of a healthy relationship.

After all, she had a special relationship with Zong Jinghao.

Sometimes she couldn't help but recall that Zong Jinghao had returned to her because of their children. However, he would occasionally be affectionate whenever he was around her.

Hence, he had caused her to fall head over heels in love with him. Lin Xinyan was now serious about Zong Jinghao and wished to spend the rest of her life by his side peacefully.

If it were possible, she would love to conceive once more. Nevertheless, her physical condition forbids her to complete her goal.

Bai Yinning's heart skipped a beat. Actually, he had long figured out the truth, but he had been hopeful all this while.

He decided to confront her, yet she had let him down once more.

"Weren't you afraid that I would be killed?" He suppressed his emotions and put on a superficial smile.

"I know him better than anyone else. Hence, I was certain he wouldn't go overboard." Lin Xinyan had been by Zong Jinghao's side. He was a calm and collected man, but he wouldn't allow others to take advantage of him either.

"Hahaha!" Bai Yinning burst into laughter abruptly and queried, "How can you be so sure?"

"I have faith in him." One sentence from Lin Xinyan was all it took to render Bai Yinning speechless.

It's unconditional trust; the most crucial thing to maintain the relationship between a husband and a wife.

In the end, Bai Yinning put on a calm front and remarked sarcastically, "I can't wait to figure out the way he would respond the moment he figures out the person, whom he has been looking up to all this while, is his ultimate foe."

Lin Xinyan's expression changed upon hearing Bai Yinning's words.

Does that mean he's aware of the truth?

It sounded like a blunt lie because only a mere few were aware of the truth ever since the evidence of the incident had been wiped out of existence.

She tried her best to calm herself down, looked at Bai Yinning, and asked, "What do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Are you sure you're not lying?" Bai Yinning asked rhetorically with a smirk because he had figured out everything, but he had yet to get his hands on the evidence.

Bai Hongfei's dying wish was to get Bai Yinning engaged to Cheng Yuxiu's daughter. In other words, Cheng Yuxiu was a barren woman.

Nevertheless, no one was aware of the whereabouts of Cheng Yuxiu's child.

"Why would I lie to you?" Lin Xinyan put her glass of water aside and raised her head, looking at Bai Yinning in the eyes.

She was determined to play pretend in front of him.

"The truth shall prevail," Bai Yinning stated.

He was the first to figure out the fact that Wen Qing had dispatched his men to go after the truth behind Tea Silk because Baicheng was, after all, his territory.

Thus, he made use of the opportunity and deceived Wen Qing's men. He spread rumors saying Cheng Yuxiu was a barren woman when they were going after the truth behind Tea Silk.

Since Wen Qing was involved in the incident, the man would definitely investigate Cheng Yuxiu's background if he were aware that she was a barren woman.

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Hence, Bai Yinning was certain the truth would prevail.

Lin Xinyan narrowed her eyes and recalled the time she visited the Wen family. Li Jing removed the cutleries Zong Jinghao had made use of once he finished his meal.

Finally, she figured out the things that had gone wrong; Bai Yinning was the mastermind behind the scene all this while.

“You’re the one behind everything!” Lin Xinyan stated in a callous tone, but she had misperceived things for once.

It was Wen Qing. He had his doubts because Li Jing had told him the content of the conversation Lin Xinyan had with Cheng Yuxiu. Hence, he dispatched his men to Baicheng.

Lin Xinyan had misperceived Bai Yinning to be the mastermind, but the man actually had nothing much to do with it.

No matter what, Lin Xinyan would be irritated because Bai Yinning was insisted on unveiling the truth.

“What do you stand to gain?” Lin Xinyan cast a skeptical gaze at Bai Yinning.

In return, Bai Yinning’s pupils constricted because Lin Xinyan had never once stared at him in such a manner.

Although he felt dejected deep down, he put on a calm front – he didn’t want to be vulnerable in front of her.

He replied nonchalantly, "Is it necessary for you to confront me? I'm sure you're aware of what I stand to gain, right?"

If Zong Jinghao was Cheng Yuxiu's son, he would definitely turn his back against Wen Qing once he figured out that Cheng Yuxiu had been taken into custody by Wen Qing back then.

If that were the case, Bai Yinning could get his revenge easily since Zong Jinghao would stop getting in his way. In fact, he might join him to avenge Cheng Yuxiu.

Indeed, Lin Xinyan was aware of Bai Yinning's scheme.

She found Bai Yinning a selfish man.

"If you want to get your revenge, you should achieve it on your own! It's not very wise of you to leverage on someone else's traumatic experience!" Lin Xinyan didn't want the truth to prevail because she enjoyed things as it was as of now.

She clenched her fists with all her might. Since Wen Qing had started going after Zong Jinghao's background after he started having his doubts, she was worried that the cutleries she had swapped out wouldn't be of much help.

The most she could do was to get Bai Yinning to stay out of it. In fact, it would be better if she could win him over and procure his aid since Baicheng was his territory. Even if Wen Qing had dispatched his men to Baicheng, Bai Yinning could easily distract his men as long as he was willing to get in their way.

She looked at Bai Yinning and requested sincerely, "Can you please stay out of this? Wen Qing has sinned against all sorts of parties back in the day. Eventually, he's going to get what he deserves. Is it necessary for you to rush things through?"

"Do you really believe in karma?" Bai Yinning chuckled and probed further.

“Why shouldn’t I?” Lin Xinyan asked rhetorically.

Bai Yinning stared at her once again and tightened his grip as he held on to the handles of his wheelchair. His palms were sweating profusely.

“I’ll promise you to stay out of this, but it’s not because I’ve decided to stop avenging my father. Instead, you’re the sole reason behind my decision; I don’t want you to have a hard time because of this.”

Once he finished his sentence, he turned his wheelchair around and showed himself out.

In the end, Lin Xinyan was the only one he had in his mind.

Therefore, he didn’t want to put her in a tough position, neither did he want her to be in a foul mood because of it.

He would get his revenge. It was merely a matter of time. After all, he was still young. He could easily plot a great scheme to achieve his revenge against Wen Qing in the upcoming decades.

Lin Xinyan wasn’t feeling great about it either because she had a hunch that someone would shed light on the incident that had occurred in the past in the near future.

She looked at Bai Yinning’s departing figure and muttered, expressing her gratitude, “Thank you.”

As long as she could get Bai Yinning to stay out of it, there would be a chance the truth that had occurred back then wouldn’t prevail.

Bai Yinning replied with his back facing Lin Xinyan, “You know it takes more than that to thank me, right? With that being said, I know you won’t ever grant me the thing I’m seeking. You owe me a favor for that much.”

“Sure. If you need me to do you a favor in the future, feel free to approach me. I’ll definitely offer my help if it’s within my capability,” Lin Xinyan agreed.

“If that’s the case, it doesn’t sound like a bad deal either,” Bai Yinning beamed his reply.

Finally, he brought himself out of Lin Xinyan’s clothing store and got into his ride with Gao Yuan’s aid.

Lin Xinyan sat on the couch statically, losing herself in the process of thought as she stared at the phone on the coffee table.

She thought of getting in touch with Li Jing in an attempt to sound out her views, but she was afraid that Li Jing might get suspicious if she were to approach her out of the blue.

Hence, she felt lost. She couldn’t figure out her next best course of action.

She heaved another sigh out of frustration. Suddenly, a figure could be seen walking into the store just as she was about to head upstairs. The person who had shown up was none other than Li Jing.

Lin Xinyan paused and turned around immediately. She sprinted over to welcome Li Jing, who had shown up, with a bright smile. “What brings you here today?”

In return, Li Jing surveyed the surroundings of Lin Xinyan’s store. Since Lin Xinyan’s store specialized in producing customized outfits, there were a lot of exquisite pieces on display, including evening gowns and wedding gowns. Each and every one of the pieces was one of a kind.

Li Jing had gotten married to Wen Qing – a stick in the mud – at a young age. Hence, she wasn’t allowed to put on any wedding gown. Since traditional wedding gowns weren’t a thing back then, she had gotten married to him in a typical cheongsam.

It was every woman's dream to get married to the man, whom they loved wholeheartedly, in their favorite dress.

"I'm the only one home; your uncle isn't around. Therefore, I've dropped by because I want someone to keep me company for lunch," Li Jing explained the reason behind her visit.

Without a second thought, Lin Xinyan agreed to join Li Jing for lunch. After all, she had wanted to approach her to sound out her views.

"Please tell me I'm not getting in your way... Am I?" Li Jing asked rhetorically.

"No! I'm glad I'm the one you've approached when you need a companion!" Lin Xinyan assured Li Jing everything was fine.

Lin Xinyan noticed that Li Jing had her eyes glued to the pieces that had been put on display in the store ever since she entered. Her eyes gleamed as though she couldn't wait to put them on.

Therefore, she approached her and offered, "Allow me to show you around!"

"Sure!" Li Jing beamed her reply.

The outfits on display were not for sale. Instead, it served a different purpose as a point of reference for the customers.

The customers would procure the designer's service to produce a custom-made piece based on the ones on display.

Nonetheless, there were a lot of customers who had dropped by to procure the service of a particular designer.

Li Jing ran her fingers across the wedding gown that had been put on display. She detected the velvety touch unique to those of a Tea Silk gown; it was a great sensation.

Li Jing wondered aloud, "What's the material of the gown? It feels great."

The material was the improvised replication of the Tea Silk that had been launched. It was pretty similar to the authentic Tea Silk, but the replicated ones would wrinkle, whereas the authentic Tea Silk would never wrinkle.

"Do you like it? If that's the case, I can make you a dress using this material. What sort of dress do you like? Allow me to suggest this design to you." Lin Xinyan pointed at a one-piece dress.

Since it would get warmer soon, Li Jing, who was a conservative woman, had the option to choose whether she wanted to compliment the dress with outerwear or not.

Li Jing was delighted and felt reluctant to execute the plan she had in store for Lin Xinyan.

Actually, she did not drop by Lin Xinyan's store because she needed her to keep her company for lunch.

She was simply there to execute Wen Qing's plan.

Once again, Lin Xinyan failed to hit the bullseye.

Wen Qing and Li Jing had Zong Jinghao's DNA sample, but they didn't compare it against Cheng Yuxiu's DNA sample. Instead, they compared it against the DNA sample that had been left behind by the late Wen Xian.

Since Lin Xinyan had swapped the DNA sample, her DNA sample was the one that had been compared against Wen Xian's DNA sample.

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The result of the DNA test showed that Lin Xinyan and Wen Xian were 99.99% biologically related. In other words, they were mother and daughter.

Since Wen Qing and Li Jing weren't aware that Lin Xinyan had swapped her set of cutleries with Zong Jinghao's set of cutleries back then, they thought the result of the DNA test belonged to Zong Jinghao and Wen Xian.

In short, Wen Qing misperceived Zong Jinghao as Wen Xian's son and no longer doubted his identity.

His only concerns were Lin Xinyan and Cheng Yuxiu's relationship because Li Jing used to bring it up in front of him some time ago.

Wen Qing was determined to take good care of Zong Jinghao, but he couldn't bear the fact that his wife was closely affiliated with Cheng Yuxiu.

In short, Wen Qing was certain that Wen Xian had given birth to Zong Jinghao because the ones who had collected the samples and carried out the DNA test were his most trusted aides.

Hence, he had faith in the result he had obtained.

Little did he know that Lin Xinyan had swapped the cutleries of Zong Jinghao with her set of cutleries because she had been aware of Wen Qing's plan all along.

Lin Xinyan had decided to swap her set of cutleries with those of Zong Jinghao because she was certain the DNA test would be carried out against someone alive since Wen Xian had passed on.

She thought they had collected Zong Jinghao's sample to compare it against those of Cheng Yuxiu. Since Cheng Yuxiu and Zong Jinghao were biologically related, Wen Qing would figure out their relationship once he got his hands on their DNA samples.

Aware of Wen Qing's plan, Lin Xinyan made up her mind and swapped the cutlery in the nick of time. She didn't want him to figure out Zong Jinghao was Cheng Yuxiu's son.

Lin Xinyan's seemingly flawless plan had deviated because they had compared it against the late Wen Xian's DNA sample. In the end, they thought Zong Jinghao was biologically related to Wen Xian.

Little did they know that they had verified the fact Lin Xinyan and Wen Xian were biologically related to one another instead.

Meanwhile, Lin Xinyan wasn't aware that her collected DNA sample had been compared against the late Wen Xian's DNA sample.

In short, none of them was aware of the mistakes.

Wen Qing was certain Zong Jinghao was Wen Xian's son. Thus, he held a grudge against Lin Xinyan because she was closely affiliated with the mistress who had driven Wen Xian and her husband apart.

He disliked Lin Xinyan because he deemed her ludicrous; he didn't want her to be by Zong Jinghao's side.

Lately, he found another better candidate to be Zong Jinghao's spouse and made up his mind to drive Zong Jinghao and Lin Xinyan apart from one another.

The candidate he had in mind was his colleague's daughter. He had been by her side ever since she was young. Due to her flawless appearance, personality, and family background, he deemed her worthy of Zong Jinghao.

He had requested Zong Jinghao to retrieve a folder on his behalf because he wanted him to get in touch with the daughter of his colleague.

Zong Jinghao had never once announced his marriage with Lin Xinyan in front of others. Thus, he had always been known as a bachelor.

Apart from his curious staff, no one was aware that he was married since they didn't have a formal wedding ceremony, neither did they announce their relationship beforehand.

All along, the public had considered Zong Jinghao to be the most exceptional bachelor available.

He was the best candidate as the son-in-law of those from the upper echelon.

Although Wen Qing's colleague from the Chen family wasn't from the upper echelon, his family wielded great influences within the hierarchal system.

In fact, the Chen family was superior to the Wen family.

Wen Qing had never once focused on his own benefits. Zong Jinghao was his sole concern. If Zong Jinghao was able to get married to the daughter of the Chen family, he would have a bright future ahead of him.

Everything about his colleague's daughter was great. She was a brilliant and exceptional young woman. Most importantly, she wasn't closely affiliated with Cheng Yuxiu, unlike Lin Xinyan.

Li Jing had dropped by Lin Xinyan's clothing store because of Wen Qing's plan.

When Li Jing dropped by Lin Xinyan's place to bring her out, Wen Qing had asked Zong Jinghao and Chen Shihan to join him for lunch.

Their ultimate goal was to create conflict amongst Zong Jinghao and Lin Xinyan, driving them apart from one another.

Wen Qing instructed Li Jing to bring Lin Xinyan over to a certain venue. He would bring Zong Jinghao and Chen Shihan over as well. Once Lin Xinyan reached the place, Wen Qing would leave Zong Jinghao and Chen Shihan alone. He was certain he would be able to drive them apart as long as she witnessed and misperceived the sort of relationship Zong Jinghao had with Chen Shihan.

However, Li Jing couldn't make up her mind. She avoided Lin Xinyan's gaze and rebutted, "I'm getting old. I don't think I should put on such an outfit anymore."

"What are you talking about? Don't worry, okay? I'll send the outfit to you once it's ready!" Lin Xinyan assured Li Jing with a bright grin.

Instead of flattering, she had made up her mind to treat Li Jing and Wen Qing courteously, as though they were part of her family because they had been taking great care of Zong Jinghao all along.

After all, she was in no position to judge an incident that had occurred in the past.

Let bygones be bygones. Things are great as it is, right?

Cheng Yuxiu and Zong Qifeng had always been trying their best to keep things as it was.

All of a sudden, an odd expression could be detected on Li Jing's face. She held on to Lin Xinyan's hand and stuttered because she couldn't bring herself to finish her sentence, "Y-You..."

In the end, Li Jing heaved a long sigh and pondered, "Are you aware of Jinghao and Cheng Yuxiu's relationship?"

"Yes." Lin Xinyan tensed up abruptly and nodded.

“If you’re aware of their relationship, why are you keeping in touch with her?”

Li Jing had grown fond of Lin Xinyan because – apart from her relationship with Cheng Yuxiu – the young woman had never once let her down.

She would never drive Lin Xinyan and Zong Jinghao apart if it weren’t because of the grudge her husband held against Cheng Yuxiu.

In the meantime, Lin Xinyan grew anxious deep down because she thought they had figured out the truth.

She tried her best to put on a calm front and replied, “We’re not really close...”

Expressing her frustration, Li Jing heaved a long sigh yet again. If she had not run into Cheng Yuxiu and Lin Xinyan spending time together, she would have bought into her words.

She shared the truth with Lin Xinyan in a serious manner, “Jinghao is Wen Xian’s son. He’s the sole successor of the Zong family. I believe I don’t have to explain the role he plays, right? He’s Wen Qing’s only nephew and the only son to Wen Qing’s biological sister. Hence, we will definitely take good care of him, but it’s not the same when it comes to you...”

Lin Xinyan was one of the Lin family. However, the Lin family had been wiped out of existence for quite some time. She was the only one left. Therefore, she couldn’t rely on her family in any way.

Wen Qing and Li Jing perceived Lin Xinyan indirectly betraying Zong Jinghao because she insisted on keeping in touch with Cheng Yuxiu.

That was the thing that disappointed Li Jing and Wen Qing the most.

If she’s aware of the potential consequences of her actions, she would never have kept in touch with Cheng Yuxiu.

A heavyweight had been lifted off Lin Xinyan's shoulders upon hearing Li Jing's reply. Judging by her words, they seemed to have ascertained the fact Wen Xian was the one who had given birth to Zong Jinghao.

Nothing else seemed to matter as long as she could prevent Wen Qing from figuring out the truth.

"Yes..." Lin Xinyan could vaguely figure out the meaning behind Li Jing's words.

Li Jing made it clear Zong Jinghao was of a crucial existence, whereas she was but a trivial existence.

Since the Lin family had fallen, Zong Jinghao was the only one Lin Xinyan had. Without Zong Jinghao, she would be a nobody.

Although she had figured out the meaning behind Li Jing's words, she failed to comprehend the goal of her visit.

"I'm so sorry, but I have to leave because I have to tend to something else. I'll buy you a meal again in the future, okay?"

She was aware of the potential consequences in store for her if Wen Qing was angry. Nevertheless, Li Jing couldn't bring herself to deceive Li Xinyan because she didn't want to drive them apart.

Lin Xinyan could not stop her in time because Li Jing left immediately after she finished her sentence. She felt as though Li Jing had dropped by for something else instead of a simple lunch session together.

All of a sudden, she detected a strong sense of insecurity and had a hard time breathing because she couldn't figure out if Li Jing had achieved her goal or not.

She held on to her chest and stood by the entrance of her store, staring at the bustling street while recalling the conversation she had with Li Jing.

Everything is fine, right? Our conversation merely lasted a few minutes. She can't possibly tell something is wrong, right?

Even though everything seemed to be fine, Lin Xinyan felt insecure deep down.

It had not even been a year since she made her way back, but a lot of things had occurred over the past few months.

Most of the incidents, including the good, the bad, and the weird ones, had revolved around her.

Lin Xinyan closed her eyes in an attempt to calm herself down.

In the awfully quiet space, she could hear her heart racing.

Suddenly, she detected a pair of warm hands surrounding her from behind. She opened her eyes and turned around instantly.

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She detected the presence of the man whom she loved wholeheartedly.

Although nothing odd had occurred, she had a strong sense of insecurity deep down, as though she had been drained.

Lin Xinyan turned around and wrapped her arm against the man's wrist, placing herself in between his arms firmly, as if she were in desperate need of something to fill the void she detected.

"What's wrong?" Zong Jinghao lowered his gaze and caressed her hair gently as he asked.

It was evident he knew something was wrong with her because she wasn't her usual sprightly self.

She leaned against his chest and stated, "I'll be fine soon. Please allow me to be in your arms for another few minutes."

All Lin Xinyan needed was some time to collect her thoughts.

Meanwhile, Zong Jinghao returned the favor and held her firmly in between his arms silently.

He caressed her back gently with his gigantic and warm palm, providing her a sense of security and pacifying the anxious woman.

"Why are you here?" Lin Xinyan finally returned to her usual calm and collected self.

Zong Jinghao kissed her on the forehead and ran his fingers through her unkempt fringe, stating the reason, "My uncle invited me to join him for lunch. I've dropped by to pick you up and bring you over with me."

Immediately, Lin Xinyan shuddered unwittingly because she knew something was wrong.

Li Jing had dropped by to ask her out for lunch as well, but the woman had changed her mind and departed in a hurry in the end.

Are these two different venues, or has it always been the same?

"Did your aunt call you?" Lin Xinyan decided to probe further.

"No," Zong Jinghao replied and recalled he had received the call from Wen Qing instead.

Lin Xinyan finally figured out the reason Li Jing had changed her mind at the last minute. The so-called lunch might have been a deliberate setup.

If it was a deliberate setup, who's the one Wen Qing's going after?

According to Li Jing, Wen Qing had ascertained Zong Jinghao's identity. Therefore, he wouldn't try to bring upon his misfortune anymore.

If Jinghao isn't the one he's going after...

All of a sudden, Lin Xinyan linked everything together because Li Jing had warned her of the difference between their backgrounds and asked her about the sort of relationship she had with Cheng Yuxiu before her departure.

Is Wen Qing aware of my relationship with Cheng Yuxiu? Am I the target of the deliberate setup?

Lin Xinyan ruled out the possibilities and thought Li Jing must have had left because she couldn't bear to make the call. Perhaps she felt guilty.

Unaware of the things Wen Qing had gotten his hands on, Lin Xinyan behaved like a cat on a hot tin roof.

Did he send Li Jing to divert my attention? Could it be that he has already figured out Jinghao's actual identity?

Her mind was all over the place, yet no one could guide her because she couldn't rely on anyone else.

She tucked her arms and told Zong Jinghao, "I don't want to go. In fact, I don't want you to go either. Can we go home instead?"

Lin Xinyan asked in a husky voice. Involuntarily, her voice quivered.

Without a second thought, Zong Jinghao gave in to her beloved wife's request. "Okay."

Deep down, Lin Xinyan felt her heart warm up and finally regained composure when Zong Jinghao didn't falter.

She could sense the affection he had for her and how much she meant to him.

Lin Xinyan placed her hands on Zong Jinghao's face and queried, "Are you sure you love me? Are you sure you're not in a relationship with me just because I'm Lin Ruixi and Lin Xichen's mother? If I never gave birth to them, would you get married to me?"

Her vision blurred as her eyes brimmed with tears.

Throughout the past two decades, never had she ever confronted another man.

She grew nervous, yet she couldn't wait to figure out his answer.

Lin Xinyan was head over heels in love with Zong Jinghao.

Therefore, she wanted to know if the feelings were mutual.

The more you care about something, the more afraid you are of losing it.

That's a random quote I came across years ago. Does that mean I have reached the stage where I'm afraid of losing him because I care about him that much?

Why isn't Jinghao replying me? Does that mean he isn't serious about me and our relationship?

"P-Please don't take me seriously—" She got anxious and tried to explain herself.

"I don't know." Zong Jinghao broke the silence, interrupting Lin Xinyan before she could finish her sentence.

Zong Jinghao lowered his gaze, casting a shadow over her face and asserting in a serious tone, "I have no idea if I'm serious about you, but I want you to stay by my side. If I don't see you for an extended period, I will start missing you. Sometimes it feels like I've gotten addicted to you. I'm not sure if that's how it feels like to be in love. Even if it's not, I won't allow you to leave my side anymore. I want you to stay by my side forever!"

He was as domineering as always. Even when he had to confess his affection, he did it in an entirely different manner as compared to an ordinary man.

Lin Xinyan's heart started to race furiously. Trembling in fear and excitement due to the unknown that was in store for her, she couldn't pull herself together anymore.

“Have you lost your mind? What are you craving for lunch? Let’s grab something to eat, just you and me.” Zong Jinghao pinched Lin Xinyan’s nose and held her in between his arms.

Lin Xinyan shook her head and counter-offered, “Your uncle wants to treat us lunch, doesn’t he? I think we shouldn’t let him down.”

She would have to take the risk because she needed to figure out the thing Wen Qing was up to.

“Does every woman behave like you? How can you change your mind within a few minutes?” Zong Jinghao asked, frowning in an odd manner.

“Perhaps you’re right. Since you’re aware of that, you may want to treat me better in the future. Otherwise…” Lin Xinyan nodded earnestly and warned Zong Jinghao.

Zong Jinghao was petrified upon hearing her words.

Lin Xinyan turned around and asked, “Are you angry?”

Putting on a fierce front, he glared at her in the eyes and warned her in return, “Don’t you dare! Otherwise, I’ll break your legs and render you immobile!”

Lin Xinyan smiled in return and wrapped her arm around Zong Jinghao’s arm as they made their way out of her store.

Zong Jinghao’s car was at the parking lot across the street. As soon as they got into the car, Zong Jinghao leaned over and buckled the seatbelt on Lin Xinyan’s behalf.

Lin Xinyan, who sat upright next to Zong Jinghao, told him, “Aunt had dropped by my store as well.”

Click!

Zong Jinghao raised his head and exchanged glances with Lin Xinyan once he finished buckling the seatbelt.

Staring at him in the eyes, she told him, “Initially, she wanted to bring me out for lunch, but she left in a hurry in the end. I wonder if she was going to bring me over for lunch with Uncle?”

Zong Jinghao narrowed his eyes because he was equally confused deep down.

He had suspected something fishy going on behind the scenes since the last time Wen Qing had instructed him to retrieve the folder on his behalf.

“She told me—” Lin Xinyan brought herself to half on purpose.

“What?”

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Lin Xinyan deliberately left out Li Jing's intention. Instead, she said, "She told me you're a golden boy, whereas I'm mediocre at best. She seems to imply that we're not well-matched. After all, my family isn't prominent, nor do I have immense riches. Therefore, we're not equal in social status."

Indeed, I don't have all these. Chances are, I will never own any of it. The only thing I can do is to stand by his side. For better or for worse, we'll face everything together.

Zong Jinghao didn't say a word, merely glancing at her. Then, he took the driver's seat and started the car.

At this, Lin Xinyan turned to stare at him. "Don't you have anything to say?"

At her question, Wen Qing looked straight ahead with a tensed gaze.

I can't confirm that Wen Qing was hiding something from me before, but I got the answer now. He can inform me alone if it were to invite us for a meal. There was no reason for Li Jing to go all the way to her boutique. For as long as I could remember, Li Jing was always the one contacting me. In fact, I hardly even receive calls from him.

Truth be told, it wasn't as if Wen Qing felt reluctant to contact Zong Jinghao. But he preferred Li Jing to do the job in his stead, as it had become a habit.

Yet, he's called me personally not once, but twice already. It goes to show that something is off. Moreover, Li Xinyan's recent mood swings have further reinforced my suspicion. She must have known about this matter. Not that I can tell how much she knows.

“I won’t allow anyone to interfere with my life!”

Not even Wen Qing!

He had made himself clear that no one could stop him from getting whatever he liked.

Attempting to change the subject, Lin Xinyan purposely got close to him and leaned against his shoulder. “Do you believe in fate?”

“I don’t.” His answer was resolute as he believed only in himself.

Immediately, she lifted her head to peer at him and declared in a serious tone, “I believe. Don’t you think it was fate that brought us together?”

During that unexpected night, I assumed that we’d never cross paths again. But I’d never imagined him to be the partner of my arranged marriage. What a twist of fate!

In a swift action, Zong Jinghao placed his arm on her shoulder and flashed a smile on his face while revealing his perfect white teeth. “You are right.”

Lin Xinyan glared at him. “What’s with this half-hearted response?”

To reassure her, Zong Jinghao placed her hands on his chest and smiled. “I’m not lying.”

Lin Xinyan lost her will to humor this flippant man. As a matter of fact, she might not win a debate against a garrulous man like him. If he were to become shameless, even the word ruffian was not too far-fetched as a description for him.

After a while, he stopped the car in front of the Chinese restaurant Wen Qing had informed him of.

Wen Qing had a relatively old-fashioned personality. Needless to say, western cuisine was not in his cards. Nevertheless, his suggestions for Chinese eateries were some of the best in B City.

This restaurant was one of them. It was decorated in a one-of-a-kind Chinese-style frame with a modern touch, giving its customers a unique experience. The waiters were in black suits, while the waitresses were dressed in Cheongsam. The sight of them standing together was especially pleasant to the eyes.

As soon as they walked over, the ushers in front of the door opened the door and welcomed them in.

After they entered through the door, a server dressed in a black suit with a bowtie on his collar approached them. "Did you make a reservation?"

Zong Jinghao nodded his head and replied promptly, "We're with Mr. Wen."

"Please follow me." The waiter guided them to the private room politely right after hearing the name.

He stood aside when they arrived in front of the private room. "This one."

Lin Xinyan was a little edgy after it occurred to her that Wen Qing was just one door apart, so she grasped Zong Jinghao's arm.

To comfort her, Zong Jinghao placed his palm on the back of her hand, got hold of it firmly, and said in a low voice, "I'm here with you."

At that, Lin Xinyan pursed her lips and nodded.

Once the door was pushed open, Wen Qing could be seen sitting in the middle of the spacious room with a beautiful woman right beside him.

The two seemed to be exchanging chatter in a great mood, with smiles on their faces.

Both of them looked toward the door at the same time.

The woman fixed her eyes on Zong Jinghao for a while before scrutinizing Lin Xinyan.

The smile on Wen Qing's face faded almost immediately when he caught sight of Lin Xinyan; the look of his face was frigid and grim.

The drastic change in his mood was impossible to be missed by Zong Jinghao.

A hint of vexation flashed across Zong Jinghao's eyes, but he got a grip of himself straight away and walked in with Lin Xinyan.

However, Chen Shihan greeted them passionately, "We were just talking about you two."

When Lin Xinyan glanced at Chen Shihan, her woman's intuition hinted to her that the latter was only putting on an act to get close to them. Specifically, Zong Jinghao.

"What were you talking about?" Lin Xinyan queried with a smile.

"You are Mrs. Zong, am I right?" Chen Shihan ignored her question. Then she added, "You look so young and pretty."

Chen Shihan was good with her words.

Lin Xinyan remained smiling and replied, "You're flattering me. My kid is turning six this year. I'm no longer in the bloom of youth; you're much younger than me."

The corners of Chen Shihan's lips twitched a bit. *I thought Wen Qing said that their marriage was a secret? Where did the child come from?"*

Wen Qing had planned to inform her about this but hadn't managed to find the right time.

Then he patted her shoulder, and they remained silent for a while. They only exchanged a few glances, which seemed to imply he would fill her in on the details next time.

Wen Qing was frustrated with Li Jing, who had done such a sloppy job. Nonetheless, he couldn't turn the situation in his favor anymore, seeing that they were already here.

He didn't bluntly ask Zong Jinghao to divorce Lin Xinyan as he knew that the man cared a lot for his wife.

If my memory serves me right, he covered for her exhaustively the first time he visited our family. The man doesn't even mind if the children don't take his last name. With my understanding of his character, I can't risk telling him about this. Otherwise, there's nothing I can do if he disagrees. It'd be too late to pull any tricks by then. If I were to make a move after that, he'd know for sure that I was the one pulling strings behind the scene. Now, I can only hope to make her leave discreetly. No, that won't do... When push comes to shove, I have to play the same old trick again. I won't allow her to get any closer to Cheng Yuxiu.

"Let me introduce you to Chen Shihan, the daughter of my colleague." Wen Qing stared at Zong Jinghao and mentioned purposely, "I believe you met each other in the hotel the other day."

Lin Xinyan's heart skipped a beat at his words.

He met with this woman... in a hotel?

“Uncle Wen, there’s no need for that. Everyone in B City knows about Zong Jinghao, perhaps even the whole country. Besides, we’ve already met...”

She intentionally skipped her gaze over Lin Xinyan’s face when she spoke.

With that, Lin Xinyan clenched her fists under the table, and her palms became sweaty. Yet, she remained a calm expression on her face. “You’re right, Ms. Chen. Many people know about him, so it’s not strange for you to know each other.”

Chen Shihan was at a loss for words, and the smile on her face became awkward.

Right then, Zong Jinghao turned to look at his wife. *I still remember she was sharp-tongued back when we got in our first fight.*

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Zong Jinghao narrowed his gaze while a hint of joy hid in his eyes.

Did she get jealous? You'll only feel that way when you really care about someone.

Chen Shihan felt a little embarrassed as she was a daughter of a prominent family. Naturally, most people would try to fawn on her and please her. Even her circle of friends were people who were her cliques. No one had ever dishonored her in her life.

She suppressed her emotions and stated, "Why? Are you upset, Mrs. Zong?"

Lin Xinyan responded eloquently, "I don't know what you mean, Ms. Chen. Why do I have to be upset? Did you do something that might irk me? Considering that you're from a distinguished family, I doubt you'd do anything unscrupulous that might make me unhappy, right?"

After seeing Lin Xinyan's pure and innocent face, Chen Shihan thought the former was like a harmless rabbit that could be easily teased. But by no means, the latter knew she would be retaliated by the first-mentioned.

At last, Chen Shihan's smile vanished. Her face turned ashen at Lin Xinyan's words.

Even Wen Qing looked somewhat surprised, as Lin Xinyan had always carried herself with modesty and was the quintessence of a homemaker.

I thought Chen Shihan was enough to deal with her. But she's way beyond my expectations. It seems like I've underestimated her.

To break the awkward tension, he declared, "Alright, it's my treat today. Let's enjoy ourselves here, okay?"

Without delay, he beckoned to the server to take the order, then passed the menu to Chen Shihan and said, "Order whatever you want."

He then flipped through the menu and ordered a few dishes that were to Zong Jinghao's liking. He was deliberately neglecting Lin Xinyan.

Chen Shihan finally saved her skin, so she glared at Lin Xinyan while raising a smirk on her face. *So what if you're good with your words. Hmph!*

Wen Qing had never liked her. Furthermore, he had openly expressed his negative feelings about her and wished for her to leave Zong Jinghao.

The other day, Chen Shihan had overheard Wen Qing's conversation through the phone with her father about his desire for Zong Jinghao to get a divorce from Lin Xinyan.

At that time, she was rather shocked to know that Zong Jinghao was married. Her father, however, wasn't taken aback. Her surmise was that Wen Qing had him notified in advance.

Later on, Wen Qing suggested to her father that she should be married to Zong Jinghao. After a momentary contemplation, the latter finally agreed to his proposal.

Since Zong Jinghao's marriage with Lin Xinyan was a secret, Chen Shihan could be married to him in an open and aboveboard manner. Their marriage would fortify the standing of the Wen family as well.

It involved the interests of several notable families. Apart from that, Zong Jinghao was an accomplished young man. It wouldn't be a loss for her father if Chen Shihan were married to that man. It would be a practical choice, no matter how anyone views it.

Even so, she was against the idea in the beginning. The only reason she had agreed to deliver the documents to the hotel was so that she could reassess her decision after meeting him in person.

Yet, after getting to know him personally, she came to realize that he was different from what was portrayed on television.

Before she met him, the only two things she knew about him were his immense wealth and good looks. But she soon noticed that beyond the materials and appearances, he was a matured man who had been through countless hurdles in life – it increased his masculinity.

Thus, she agreed to Wen Qing and her father's arrangement out of curiosity.

She wanted to see if this man could remain unmoving and resist the temptation in the face of a beautiful woman.

Additionally, Chen Shihan was convinced that she was better than Lin Xinyan in every aspect.

Just then, she intentionally raised her voice to order several dishes that were palatable to her, while some were not. Her motive behind all these farces was so she could be deemed as a well-respected person.

"Is that all?" The waiter asked.

Chen Shihan handed over the menu and answered, "Yes, that will be all. Serve the food at the earliest."

"Okay, sure!" The waiter put the menu away politely. Zong Jinghao called out to him right when he was about to exit the room.

Then, he came to a halt, walked over, stood beside Zong Jinghao, and inquired, "Is there anything you need, Sir?"

Zong Jinghao took a sip of water from his glass without looking up. After putting his cup down, he ordered, "I would like to have a sweet and sour fish, and I want it prepared with a reeves shad."

The reeves shad was a highly rated ingredient, and it was recognized as the best among the three famous fish species of the Yangtze River. It was also used as a tribute during ancient times. The taste of its meat was said to be savory, full of umami, and succulent.

"A sauteed pumpkin with salted egg and a crispy sweet and sour pork."

After that, he lifted his eyes to look at the server. "My wife likes sweet stuff. Do you have any sweet specialty?"

As an experienced server in the restaurant, the server knew all the dishes like the back of his hand.

"Yes. We have sweet and sour pork ribs, griddle shredded cabbage, and Cola chicken for the main dishes. As for dessert, we have milk jelly cake with desiccated coconut, candied banana fritters, and Chinese yam with blueberry sauce. These are our sweet specialties which are also a little sour."

"I would like to have those," Zong Jinghao stated.

"Sure! Right away, Sir!" After the waiter spoke, he gave a slight bow of his head, then exited the private room.

After living together with Lin Xinyan, he knew more about her preferences and that she had a sweet tooth. On top of that, she had the kind of physique that would make anyone jealous, the one that wouldn't gain weight regardless of how much she ate.

Lin Xinyan turned to glance at him but remained silent. After a while, she shifted her eyes back to her glass.

On the other side of the table, Wen Qing and Chen Shihan had a sullen expression on their faces.

Chen Shihan was feeling infuriated as her plan to humiliate Lin Xinyan had been thwarted. Also, what she least expected was Zong Jinghao's covering for the woman.

Feeling exasperated, she clenched her fists tightly. If it wasn't for her barely sustaining reason, she would've left the restaurant already.

If I leave now, that would basically mean I've admitted my defeat. No, I'm not such a miserable person. I will never back down. With my strong family background and Wen Qing's support, it would be unthinkable that I will lose to a woman with nothing.

When the thought crossed her mind, she lifted her head arrogantly. Her confidence was built on the foundation of her powerful family background.

The private room door was pushed open a while later, and a group of waitresses dressed in cheongsam stood in a row. At once, they took turns placing the dishes in their hands onto the table.

Soon, the huge dining table was filled with assorted delicacies.

Wen Qing's original plan was to wait for Zong Jinghao's arrival, then make up a reason to leave them alone. But Lin Xinyan's presence had thrown him off and disrupted his scheme. He couldn't leave anymore since she was here, as he was afraid that Chen Shihan couldn't handle her and gave herself away in front of her husband.

All of them were distracted by their personal agendas, which caused them to lose appetite for the sumptuous food in front of them.

The sound of chopsticks coming into contact with the plates could be heard from time to time.

Chen Shihan was chewing food in her mouth with her eyes locked on Lin Xinyan.

The person who enjoyed the meal the most among the ones at the table was Lin Xinyan.

All the dishes that Zong Jinghao ordered were placed in front of Lin Xinyan. Yet, he ate only a little, focusing merely on picking up the food for her.

Are we transparent? They don't even care about us!

“I didn't know you both have such a good relationship. I feel like I'm playing gooseberry here. I'm put in a dilemma of deciding if I should leave you alone or not,” Chen Shihan remarked in a rather sarcastic tone.

At her remark, Zong Jinghao set his chopsticks down and lifted his head.

Without hesitation, Lin Xinyan clutched his hand from under the table, by which he turned to peer at him. Immediately, she raised a smile to show that she could handle Chen Shihan – he didn't need to speak up for her.

Since I'm his wife, it should be my job to take care of women with ulterior motives.