

Stealing Your Heart Chapter 381

Lin Xinyan had seen the work Li Zhan was famous for, and she could recite a few movies he'd been in even though she had never watched any of them before.

There was no way she could answer that question.

"Looks like you're too tense to answer the question," the host joked.

"Yes. I am indeed tense." Lin Xinyan forced a smile. "I can't believe I'm standing next to my idol."

Li Zhan tilted his head up slightly as he was satisfied with the answer.

"So, which character do you prefer the most?"

"All of them," Lin Xinyan replied and won the applause from the crowd.

"I see. Please, show us your right hand," the host smiled.

Lin Xinyan looked at the host puzzlingly as she wondered if there was another gift. "I don't need another gift," Lin Xinyan quickly declined. "I'm happy enough to be able to stand this close to him. Please, give the gift to another fan."

"This is something only you can get."

Realizing that she had no choice but to accept it, she reached her right hand out. Before she could see what the host was holding, a cuff was locked on her wrist.

“To prove that the surprise gift is real, we’ll be locking Mr. Li up with the lucky winner together for twenty-four hours. She’ll get the key once the time has passed,” the host announced.

“Wow!” the crowd gasped.

Li Zhan also reached his hand out, but his expression told everyone that the handcuff was a surprise to him as well.

It was too late for him to back out even if he wanted to.

“Let the twenty-four-hour countdown begin!”

From that second onward, the game would last for twenty-four hours until the handcuff was taken off.

Lin Xinyan thought they were only doing it as a form of advertising. She thought would be let free after the event had ended. As the event went on, the fans got even crazier. Some even asked Li Zhan to kiss the lucky winner.

Even Li Zhan thought they would unlock the cuff after that. When the event ended, he turned to ask the host, “Can we take this off now?”

Surprisingly, the host shook his head. “No. You two will have to wait a whole day.”

“Why didn’t you notify me about this beforehand?” Li Zhan got angry, not because he was cuffed up with Lin Xinyan, but because he hadn’t been told of it.

“It’s on the contract. Did you not read through it?”

Li Zhan immediately went silent. The host was right, he had not paid extra attention to the contract as it wasn’t a formal event.

In the end, the actor had no choice but to go with it. Lucky for him, he was acquainted with the woman who was cuffed to him.

As for Lin Xinyan, her head was in a complete mess. All she could think of was how she should explain the situation to Zong Jinghao, a man who had strong possessiveness.

“This is unacceptable! Please, unlock the cuff now.” Lin Xinyan could not accept it. *How am I supposed to use the loo? Or the shower? Heck, people will think I’m a criminal or something!*

She couldn’t not accept such an ordeal.

“I’m sorry, but there’s nothing I can do. See you guys in twenty-four hours.” The host left after that. Lin Xinyan, Li Zhan, and his manager, Fatty Long, were then the only three who remained at the event.

On a side note, Li Zhan addressed his manager in such a way because he was overweight.

“We’ve messed up. Who knew they would do such a thing...” Fatty Long sighed.

Lin Xinyan was completely speechless at her situation.

“Well, what done is done. Lucky for us, it’s only a day. All you two have to do is watch a movie, drink some tea, and it’ll be over in a jiffy,” Fatty Long comforted. “Be happy. This is something every fan wants to experience.”

Lin Xinyan smiled wryly. *Yes, I’m very lucky to be cuffed with someone without knowing why for a whole day! Very lucky indeed!*

Li Zhan was a little disappointed at Lin Xinyan’s rejection. “Come on; this is not the place to talk.”

In order to avoid the paparazzi, Fatty Long had arranged for them to be picked up by a car in the underground parking lot.

Once they were in the car, Li Zhan stared at Lin Xinyan and asked, "You really don't recognize me?"

Lin Xinyan shook her head.

"Fatty Long, give me that thing." Li Zhan reached his hand out.

The manager quickly parked the car by the roadside and went to get a case out from the boot.

Li Zhan used his free hand to open the case and used the comb inside it to straighten his hair down before putting on black round glasses.

"How about now?"

Lin Xinyan's eyes widened; Li Zhan resembled Lin Xichen's teacher at AC.

"A-aren't you my son's teacher?" No matter how hard Lin Xinyan tried, she could not picture the teacher and the actor as the same person.

"How else would I recognize you?"

Lin Xinyan was completely astounded. *They are two different people living in two different worlds, yet, they are the same person?*

"You two might seem to have different personalities, but I can guarantee that you two only have a slight difference in appearances," Li Zhan spoke in his usual teacher manner, which finally convinced Li Xinyan.

It was the same tone and voice she was used to hearing from her son's teacher.

“Didn’t Xichen tell you about me?” Li Zhan asked. The reason for his question was that he’d told the little boy his secret before returning. When he asked Lin Xichen to keep it a secret, he was only trying to test how tight lipped the little boy was.

“No...” Lin Xinyan recalled the conversation when her son was about to say something but stopped midway.

Li Zhan was happy with Lin Xichen’s performance.

Lin Xinyan finally understood why her son had matured so quickly, and why he would do something out of the blue suddenly. It was all thanks to having him as a teacher.

“So, what’s your hobby? Working as a teacher or a celebrity?” Lin Xinyan really wanted to know which job Li Zhan would choose. Both were completely different.

After a moment of thought, Li Zhan finally answered, “I became a celebrity to annoy my father and a teacher because I like it.”

Lin Xinyan was dumbfounded by his answer. *He became a celebrity just to annoy his father? What kind of reason is that?*

Yet, she had to acknowledge his talent for achieving such popularity. Being handsome alone would never be enough for a person to achieve success in an industry that was full of good-looking people.

Li Zhan lay back on the seat and sighed. “I’m successful because my brother is rich.”

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Everything could be settled with money. If he wanted to be an actor, all he had to do was invest in a movie, and he would land the main actor spot. It was that simple.

Lin Xinyan couldn't help but change her opinion towards Li Zhan.

She began to wonder how rebellious a child had to be to seek out the path of an actor to annoy his father.

The thought of it made her shiver. She knew she could not let her son follow such a teacher as he might turn up like the man in front of her in the future.

Even though that was what Lin Xinyan thought, she didn't show it on her face.

Back at the company, after hanging up Lin Xinyan's call, Guan Jing was called into Zong Jinghao's office.

After working for the chairman for such a long time, Guan Jing knew what the man was going to ask.

"Sir, your wife called me because she asked me to look up Li Zhan's address for her," Guan Jing reported before Zong Jinghao could even ask.

The man sitting on the chair frowned immediately. *Why is she looking for Li Zhan?*

"I told her Li Zhan's address not long ago. She should be with him by now," Guan Jing continued, unable to tell if his boss was happy or not. "Did you not tell her who Li Zhan is?"

That wasn't what Zong Jinghao was worried about the most – it was the reason why Lin Xinyan would seek Li Zhan out that worried him.

“I see.” Zong Jinghao waved his hand, and Guan Jing bowed before leaving the office.

Once he was alone, the chairman took his phone out and called a number.

Since Li Zhan was still cuffed up with Lin Xinyan, he could not reach his phone in his jacket pocket when it rang.

“Can you help me take it out?” Li Zhan asked.

Lin Xinyan glanced at him before helping him. “I also have a request to ask.”

She was going to take the chance to pop the question as she hadn't found the right timing before that.

Li Zhan took a peek at his screen and frowned. It was as if he was afraid of the caller but respected him at the same time.

“Let me answer this call first,” Li Zhan replied.

Lin Xinyan nodded.

He answered the call and spoke first. “To what do I deserve the honor for you to call me?”

Usually, it was the other way around. The caller rarely called him, so such an occasion made Li Zhan shiver.

Did I mess something up?

“Where are you?”

Li Zhan looked out the window but couldn't recognize where he was. So, he turned to Fatty Long instead. "Where are we?"

"I'm bringing you to your new place. You can't stay at Tongling..."

"I asked where we are!"

Before Li Zhan could find out, Zong Jinghao spoke on the other side of the phone. "Come to the company."

The chairman hung up the call after that.

Li Zhan blinked as he could clearly hear the upset in Zong Jinghao's tone. His orders were absolute, and Li Zhan had no idea but to abide by them.

The actor leaned forward and told Fatty Long, "Change of course. We're going to my brother's company."

Being Li Zhan's manager for quite some time, Fatty Long naturally knew who his brother was and made a U-turn.

"So, what's your request? If it's about Xichen, then you don't have to worry about a thing," Li Zhan said.

"No." Lin Xinyan quickly shook her head. There was no way she was going to let her son be taught by him any longer. She'd been wondering why the little boy was so mature for his age, and she finally found the answer. "You should know my job, right?"

Li Zhan immediately realized what the request was and laughed. "Wait, when did your shop need a male model?"

“My boutique is indeed focused on female clothing, but I’m thinking of putting my foot in the male clothing market as well. I know it’ll be expensive to hire you to help endorse my products, so can I ask for a discount?”

Li Zhan scratched his nose. Lin Xichen had always been his favorite student, and he knew Lin Xinyan well enough to know that she was a decent person. There was also the fact that she was raising two children on her own. Amongst all the women he knew, Lin Xinyan was one of the few that left a good impression on him. Not only was she gorgeous; she was also independent and strong.

“Hold up!” Fatty Long cut in. “What’s your relationship with Li Zhan? Do you know how much he costs right now?”

Seeing that Li Zhan wasn’t replying, the manager thought he found the situation awkward and decided to step in.

Lin Xinyan knew it would be expensive for a famed actor to endorse her products, and she wasn’t going to take advantage of their relationship. Instead, she was trying to bargain a better price, just like people would do when they were doing business.

“What would the cost be if he were to endorse my products?” she asked with a smile.

Fatty Long turned to look at Li Zhan, asking for his boss’ confirmation.

Li Zhan sighed and stared at his manager. “Do you need money now? Don’t tell me I don’t pay you enough.”

Lin Xinyan was completely stunned as Li Zhan had a completely different attitude compared to when he was out in public.

Even Fatty Long was confused as he thought his employer had kept his mouth shut because he found the situation awkward.

“Of course not. The decision is yours,” Fatty Long sighed.

Even though he was Li Zhan’s manager, he still had to ask his employer’s permission before accepting any job or event offer. No amount of price could ever move the actor’s decision if he didn’t like what he was hearing.

Since Lin Xinyan had no idea what was going on, she didn’t want to pressure Li Zhan since they were acquainted. “It’s fine. If you aren’t free, then...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Li Zhan cut in. “Can you find someone else who’s better looking than me?”

Lin Xinyan couldn’t help but laugh. She admitted that Li Zhan was extraordinarily handsome, but he was too immature. Compared to his fans, he wasn’t someone she found attractive.

“Then, about your price...” Lin Xinyan paused when she realized the car was driving into Wanyue Group’s underground garage.

Since she’d been too focused on her conversation with Li Zhan, she had not realized that the car was driving in this direction. The woman lowered her head to look at her cuff and frowned. “What are we doing here?”

Li Zhan never wanted to bring Lin Xinyan here, but he wasn’t given a choice since it was Zong Jinghao’s order.

“I don’t need money. If you want me to endorse your products, then come with me to meet someone.”

Lin Xinyan recalled Li Zhan telling Fatty Long that he wanted to meet his brother, and now that they were at Wanyue Group, she quickly came to a conclusion that his brother was working here.

She never suspected that Zong Jinghao was Li Zhan’s brother as she had always thought that the former was an only child.

She didn't even think that Li Zhan belonged to the Wen family since his last name was Li.

Little did she know that Li Zhan was just a stage name. His real name was Wen Xiaoji.

Lin Xinyan sat in the car worriedly. Ever since Zong Jinghao announced their relationship to everyone, his employee would recognize her face. If she were to appear at the company with another man cuffed together, she couldn't begin to picture what the others would think of her.

What would Zong Jinghao think?

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Lin Xinyan rejected his proposal immediately. “Even if you aren’t going to charge me, I’m still not going in with you.”

“Do you think you have a choice?” Li Zhan raised their hands to show the cuff.

“I can’t go with you no matter what.” Lin Xinyan stood her ground.

Li Zhan was confused by her action as he wasn’t asking her to do anything indecent.

“Is there someone you know who works here?” Li Zhan questioned. “Someone you don’t want to meet?”

Since she barely knew Li Zhan, Lin Xinyan did not want to disclose the information about her private life.

She averted her gaze and lied, “I don’t want to go out into public with the cuff still on. People might think I broke the law or something.”

Li Zhan looked at the cuff and frowned; it was his first time in such a situation. Even though he agreed that it was embarrassing and awkward to appear in front of others in such a state, what was done could not be undone.

“The person I have to meet is a very important person to me. I really have to go...” Li Zhan groaned and suddenly thought of an idea. “If all you want is for other people to not recognize you, I’ll borrow you something.

He took off his glasses and grabbed a face mask from Fatty Long. “Here, put these on.”

Lin Xinyan stared at the items speechlessly.

“You have to understand. I have to meet this person no matter what.” Li Zhan stood his ground. If Lin Xinyan still insisted on not going, he would drag her with him.

Without many choices left, Lin Xinyan nodded. After putting on the mask and glasses, she checked herself in the mirror, letting out a sigh of relief when she saw that most of her face was covered.

“Are you serious about endorsing my products for free?”

She wasn't being a cheapskate, but the endorsement fee wasn't a small number. She wanted to save as much money as possible. Of course, she wasn't going to let Li Zhan do it for free. She still planned to pay him an adequate amount when it was all over.

“As long as you come with me, I'll do it for free! Do you trust me?”

Lin Xinyan nodded. “I'm not going to let you work for free. I've checked; the price starts from a million. I'll pay you that much. Just think of it as you giving me a huge discount.”

“You sure are good with numbers,” Li Zhan laughed.

“It's to make sure I don't lose anything.”

Lin Xinyan wasn't the type of person who would use her friendship as leverage in business negotiations, nor was she the type who would take advantage of others. She believed in setting things straight right from the beginning to avoid any complications in the future.

“Deal. Come on.” Li Zhan pushed the door open, and they got off the car.

Before they went up the elevator, Li Zhan took Fatty Long's jacket to cover the cuff. As they went up in the elevator, Lin Xinyan noticed which floor they were heading to and frowned.

"Who are we meeting again?"

"My brother."

"Is he a manager here?"

"Have you ever heard of Zong Jinghao?"

Lin Xinyan's heart skipped a beat at the mention of that name as she stared at Li Zhan. "He... He's your brother?"

"You know him?"

Lin Xinyan didn't know how to react to the situation.

"You should have seen him once or twice in financial magazines," Li Zhan clarified. "He's in his thirties and carries a cold expression every time. Tell me, why does a man like him still stay single until now? Shouldn't he get a wife or something? Heck, even if he doesn't get married, he could still have a few lovers with the money he has. It's like he's a monk or something."

The actor only knew of Zong Jinghao's relationship with He Ruilin and was very surprised when they called off their engagement. He always thought his brother loved his ex until their breakup. Zong Jinghao had been single ever since – at least that was what Li Zhan believed.

Li Zhan was a busy person. Most of the time, he would be traveling to foreign countries for TV shows and advertisements. When he wasn't acting, he would go back to school, put on his glasses, and work as a lecturer.

He wasn't exactly on good terms with Wen Qing, and he would only call Li Jing from time to time to update her on his status. He rarely asked about Zong Jinghao as he always thought of the man as a boring person who simply made a lot of money.

"That's how you think of him?" Lin Xinyan asked.

Li Zhan mulled over the question in his head for a few seconds and nodded.

"He's a boring person. What's the fun in making so much money when you aren't going to splurge a little? Aren't all rich men supposed to be the same? They earn money and have fun with girls."

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“Is it compulsory for the wealthy to have multiple women?” Lin Xinyan lowered her voice.

“Not really. You see, he has desires and physiological needs no matter what. Back then, he had a fiancée. He called off the engagement, but he didn’t have any other women.” Li Zhan leaned closer and whispered, “According to an article I’ve read before, if a man didn’t vent his frustrations for a long time, his thoughts will become distorted. Soon, he will become ill-tempered, and I figure that may be the case. When we meet him later, don’t be afraid. I’m with you.”

Ding! The door of the lift opened.

Lin Xinyan wanted to know who Li Zhan was, but she lost the chance to ask. The door of the lift opened, and they arrived on the floor of the higher-ups’. Moreover, Zong Jinghao’s office was located there too.

She could feel the overwhelming tension of the workplace as it was so intense.

Lin Xinyan hesitated in her tracks. Never would she have thought that Li Zhan would bring her to meet Zong Jinghao.

She did not dare picture the expression of Zong Jinghao when he saw her.

Li Zhan mistook her hesitation as fear. He comforted her by saying, “ You have me, so don’t be afraid. Let’s go.”

Before Lin Xinyan could express her thoughts, Li Zhan dragged her off the elevator.

A worker saw Li Zhan taking the hand of a woman who was covered from head to toe. He took another glance at them as he was felt something was off.

Everyone knew Li Zhan's status in the company. However, no one dared to gossip as Zong Jinghao had given his orders.

"What are you looking at?" Li Zhan shot a glance at the worker who was staring at Lin Xinyan.

That man laughed politely and asked, "Is this your girlfriend?"

Li Zhan was taken aback by that man's assumption, but he smiled and replied, "Yes, she is."

The corners of Lin Xinyan's eyes twitched when she heard the bold answer of Li Zhan.

The worker did not respond, but he looked at Lin Xinyan again out of curiosity.

Lin Xinyan was wearing Li Zhan's black-framed glasses and a face mask. As most of her features were covered, no one could recognize her. However, it was hard to say for those familiar with her.

The door of the lift closed. This shielded Lin Xinyan from the worker's stares.

Li Zhan dragged Lin Xinyan all the way to Zong Jinghao's office. The woman did not have the time to compose her thoughts when Li Zhan knocked on the door.

A deep voice was heard coming from the inside, saying, "Come in."

Li Zhan was ready to go into the room. However, Lin Xinyan held onto the door frame tightly with her other hand, reluctant to go in.

Li Zhan creased his eyebrows. *We have arrived. She has to go in no matter what.*

Using the handcuff to his advantage, Li Zhan forcefully yanked her into the room.

Zong Jinghao was standing in front of the tall French windows. He was a tall man with broad shoulders and a small waist. His sleeves were folded, revealing his muscular forearms.

“What’s the matter?” Li Zhan was the first to speak.

Zong Jinghao slowly turned to face them.

The sunlight reflected into the room through the French window blinded Lin Xinyan’s vision. She wasn’t able to see Zong Jinghao’s expression, but deep down, she was nervous.

She couldn’t help but clench her fists, unable to phrase the bizarre events that had happened in her life.

Jinghao narrowed his eyes slightly as he strode over to her.

He stopped his tracks in front of Lin Xinyan.

Li Zhan grinned. “Meet my girlfriend.”

It has to be done. It’s the only reasonable explanation as to why I brought a woman here. Not to mention, we are even ‘holding each other’s hands’.

“Really?” Zong Jinghao took a glance at their “intertwined hands”.

“Of course. If not, why would I bring her with me? You called me here. What’s the matter?” Li Zhan asked as he continued smiling.

Jinghao did not give Li Zhan an answer. In fact, Jinghao was very interested in his “girlfriend”.

Lin Xinyan felt threatened. She felt like saying something, but she did not know how to start the conversation or what to say.

Her mind was in a mess.

“She had an allergy, so...” Li Zhan explained. He thought Jinghao was curious as to why Lin Xinyan was covered from head to toe.

Zong Jinghao didn’t bother listening to Li Zhan. He reached out to take off the glasses worn by Lin Xinyan.

Li Zhan immediately pulled her backward and said, “She had a serious allergy. Her face is pretty bad right now, so you shouldn’t see it. I don’t remember you being such a busybody. What’s wrong with you today?”

Zong Jinghao did not avert his gaze from Lin Xinyan. “Take it off yourself, or do you want me to do it?”

He did not get to see Lin Xinyan’s face before, but her figure and the feeling she gave off made him suspect that this woman was indeed Lin Xinyan.

Lin Xinyan felt her heart tighten as she took off the glasses and face mask. Before Zong Jinghao asked her anything, she explained, “I met up with Li Zhan for him to endorse my products. I didn’t intend to go to his fan meeting, but I ended up participating in a show with him. So...”

Lin Xinyan looked like a child who had made some mistakes.

Zong Jinghao closed his eyes and felt his head throb painfully.

My goodness!

Isn't she a grown-up already? Can't she act like one?

“Wait a minute. You guys know each other?” Li Zhan asked in a daze.

It does seem like they know each other.

“You met with him just for the endorsement?” asked Zong Jinghao.

Lin Xinyan nodded truthfully.

“Do you know who he is?”

Lin Xinyan shook her head in response.

It seems that she doesn't know Li Zhan is Wen Qing's son. Zong Jinghao heard from Guan Jing that Lin Xinyan was inquiring about Li Zhan's residence. He had thought it was all because of Wen Qing.

“Holy crap! You guys really know each other.” Li Zhan looked like he had discovered something incredible. “How do you guys know each other?”

He was completely baffled.

Although Li Zhan hadn't worked as the teacher of Lin Xichen for a long time, he knew the boy lived in Country A.

Lin Xinyan and Zong Jinghao know each other.

What's the relationship between them?

More and more questions flooded Li Zhan's brain.

“What kind of relationship do you two have? How do you know each other?”

Zong Jinghao ignored him while staring at their “intertwined” hands.

“Our hands were cuffed together,” explained Lin Xinyan hurriedly. As proof, she removed the clothes covering their hands. She didn’t want to hold hands with Li Zhan. It was all because of the handcuff.

Zong Jinghao frowned.

“Answer me, please,” Driven by his curiosity, Li Zhan was going crazy.

Zong Jinghao shot him an icy glare. Terrified, Li Zhan immediately shut his mouth.

Although he was curious, he didn’t dare ask any further.

Zong Jinghao walked to his work desk and gave Shen Peichuan a phone call. *Handcuffs? Shen Peichuan’s familiar with them. It wouldn’t pose a problem for him to remove it.*

Shen Peichuan was shocked. “Handcuffs? Who got cuffed?”

“I’ll be waiting for you at the company.” Zong Jinghao did not bother explaining the situation. All he wanted was for Shen Peichuan to remove the handcuffs.

Shen Peichuan fell silent as he was clueless about anything that had happened.

Zong Jinghao hung up on the call and turned back to look at them. His headache had become worse.

“Jinghao...”

“Shut up! Is it fun for you? You’re a grown-up, no?” Zong Jinghao lectured Li Zhan.

“I’ve been too rash this time. It seems like I’ve fallen for their schemes. I didn’t expect them to plan these bizarre games.” Li Zhan scratched his head, feeling remorseful.

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Li Zhan isn't afraid of anything in this world except Zong Jinghao.

When he was young, Zong Jinghao always stood up for him whenever he faced troubles. He did not understand their bond in the past as he only liked to follow him around.

As time passed, Li Zhan developed a respect for Zong Jinghao.

If not for Zong Jinghao's support, Li Zhan wouldn't be able to do whatever he wanted and the life he had then.

"I'm really sorry." He was quick to apologize, but deep down, he was still curious about Lin Xinyan's relationship with Zong Jinghao.

"Jinghao, what kind of relationship do you have with Lin Xinyan? You guys look close." Li Zhan grinned.

Even though Zong Jinghao was displeased with Li Zhan, hitting him right after accepting his apology wouldn't be good too.

So, Zong Jinghao avoided his question and instead asked, "How do you know her?"

Li Zhan's and Lin Xinyan's relationship doesn't seem like it's the first time they've met.

In fact, they seem close.

“You should already know as you were the one who got me the job as a teacher in AC. I am her son’s teacher. That’s how we know each other.” Li Zhan didn’t think twice and answered.

Lin Xinyan was standing at the side, her eyes averting their gazes. She had some ideas of Li Zhan’s identity after all this while.

Jinghao does not have a little brother.

Then, it must be the Wen family. Li Zhan’s age matches with Wen Qing’s son, so he must be his son.

As for why he was called Li Zhan, it must be his stage name. After all, idols get their names from fortune-tellers to aid them in their careers.

Li Zhan walked up to Zong Jinghao and whispered, “She looks so young, yet she’s already given birth to two kids. Jinghao, tell me the truth. How do you know her? You didn’t have an unhealthy relationship with her, right?”

Li Zhan liked Lin Xichen and admired Lin Xinyan. However, his bond with Zong Jinghao surpassed those of relatives. What they have was bromance so, he would choose to side with Zong Jinghao no matter what.

For him, Lin Xinyan gave birth before, so she did not deserve Zong Jinghao.

Zong Jinghao looked at him indifferently.

He, too, was surprised with the relationship they had.

What a coincidence!

Li Zhan panicked. “Jinghao, say something!”

Thud!

There was a knock on the door. The noise interrupted Li Zhan and lifted the tension in the atmosphere.

Zong Jinghao looked at the time and realized that Shen Peichuan would be arriving anytime soon. "Come in."

The door of the office was pushed open. Shen Peichuan was holding a bunch of keys in his hand as he stepped in and immediately asked, "Who got cuffed..."

Before he could finish his sentence, he saw Li Zhan and Lin Xinyan.

He walked towards the three of them and scanned Li Zhan and Lin Xinyan. *Now, what do we have here?*

"Sister-in-law, what are you guys doing?" asked Shen Peichuan nonchalantly.

Before Lin Xinyan could express her thoughts, Li Zhan said, "Who are you calling sister-in-law?" His eyes widened as he frowned.

"Is there another woman in here?" Shen Peichuan looked at him as though he was looking at a fool.

Li Zhan knew Zong Jinghao had two well-acquainted buddies. They were Su Zhan and Shen Peichuan.

Zong Jinghao was the oldest among them.

Shen Peichuan was the second-oldest, while Su Zhan was the youngest.

He calls her sister-in-law?

Li Zhan could not figure it out, yet he was scared of the truth. *Could it be that Zong Jinghao and Lin Xinyan are dating?*

Does he know everything about her?

I hope he isn't being tricked by her young appearance.

“Shen Peichuan, unlock my handcuffs, quickly.” Li Zhan refused to call anyone “bro” except Zong Jinghao.

Shen Peichuan did not unshackle Li Zhan on purpose and said, “Show me some respect, and I’ll do it.”

He knew Li Zhan’s personality and temper, so he teased him deliberately.

Li Zhan’s face drooped. “I have important matters to attend to. Unshackle me now.” He had a stern expression on his good-looking face.

He wanted to speak to Zong Jinghao alone, but he was cuffed together with Lin Xinyan. He couldn’t freely say what he wanted as it was all about the latter.

Shen Peichuan took a glance at his anxious demeanor and decided to stop making fun of him. He walked towards Li Zhan and analyzed the model of the handcuff. Then, he used the compatible key to free the duo from the shackles.

Once Li Zhan got a taste of freedom, he drove Shen Peichuan out of the room and closed the door.

Shen Peichuan stood at the entrance dumbfounded. “What the hell’s going on?”

Lin Xinyan was calm. *Now that they’re alone, Li Zhan will tell Zong Jinghao everything about me.*

“Li Zhan and I know each other, but it appears that he had no idea about my relationship with Jinghao. After knowing my connection with him and with the way you addressed me, he must be shocked.”

Shen Peichuan understood everything then. "Let's sit on the sofa," he suggested to Lin Xinyan.

To which Lin Xinyan nodded in agreement.

Li Zhan had locked the door in the office.

Zong Jinghao did not stop him as he was waiting to hear what Li Zhan wanted to say.

Currently, Li Zhan's head was a mess.

He regained his composure and asked, "Why did Shen Peichuan call Lin Xinyan sister-in-law? What's the meaning of this?"

"You should call her sister-in-law too," Zong Jinghao replied nonchalantly as he leaned on the desk with one of his hands in his pocket while another unbuttoned his shirt.

The corner of Li Zhan's lips twitched. *The underlying message is, he's dating Lin Xinyan.*

"You, you guys..." Li Zhan gasped for air and asked, "Do you know her well?"

"It's true. She looks young and beautiful. To be honest, I don't hate her. I do admire her. However, she's not the one for you..."

"Why?" Zong Jinghao interrupted him and gave him a faint side-eye.

"She has two kids. They... They are six years old this year, six years old!" Li Zhan gesture the number six with his fingers, emphasizing their age.

"Furthermore, her son told me that they don't have a father. She's a single mother."

“So?” Zong Jinghao replied, unfazed by his words.

Li Zhan facepalmed. *What happened to my wise bro?*

Why won't he get it?

“Her kids don't have a father. It's so obvious that she's either someone indecent or a divorcee. It could also be that her ex-boyfriend left her pregnant, to begin with. To sum it up, she had a lover and gave birth to kids. How can such a woman be worthy of you? How can a person like her become my sister-in-law?”

For Li Zhan, the woman worthy of Zong Jinghao should at least have a pure body. It didn't matter if she didn't have the talent nor status to stand by his side.

What does Lin Xinyan have to offer?

Nothing.

“She's definitely not the one for you,” Li Zhan insisted.

It would've been better if Lin Xinyan did not have kids and ex-lovers. Moreover, even if she isn't from a wealthy family, I wouldn't interfere.

Zong Jinghao lowered his gaze. His emotions were hidden away by thick lashes as he asked indifferently, “What if I like her the way she is?”

Li Zhan widened his eyes. *Is he crazy? Or are all the women in this world dead?*

“You're dating a woman who's given birth before, uncle...” Li Zhan didn't finish his sentence as he knew no one would be able to hinder Zong Jinghao's decision, not even Zong Qifeng.

“Are you going to be her kids' stepdad? Jinghao, this isn't like you. Do you love her that much, to the extent of accepting her kids?”

“What if I tell you that they are my kids?” Zong Jinghao lifted his head.

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Li Zhan was stunned.

Lin Xinyan's children are his?

How can that be?

He must be kidding.

“It’s not funny at all.” Li Zhan straightened his face. “Don’t joke about this, Jinghao.”

It was unbelievable.

Zong Jinghao’s expression was more solemn than Li Zhan’s. “Do I look like I’m joking?”

Li Zhan grimaced. “Xichen is your son?”

He was baffled. *How can this be possible?*

If Lin Xichen is Zong Jinghao’s son, then the man Lin Xinyan had a relationship with is...

He looked at Zong Jinghao, and his pupils dwindled.

That means the man Lin Xinyan was talking about is him.

With a gulp, he sank into his thoughts again. *Lin Xichen is already six years old. That would mean he had a relationship with Lin Xinyan since around seven years ago. But wasn't Bai Zhuwei the one who was with him then?*

How did he and Lin Xinyan have a relationship?

All of a sudden, his eyes widened in surprise as he began to realize something. *Back then, it was because of Lin Xinyan that he abandoned He Ruilin.*

This was why even though they were engaged, it was called off.

There might still be other entanglements unknown to him, but he was quite sure that that was generally the case.

Lin Xinyan had given birth to his children. If he were to marry another woman, the children of him and Lin Xinyan would become illegitimate.

After understanding the truth, it wasn't very unacceptable to Li Zhan anymore since the man who had a relationship with Lin Xinyan was Zong Jinghao.

But there was still something else he couldn't figure out.

Lin Xichen had told him that he did not have a father; he did not know who his father was.

He had been living abroad all those years.

Does Zong Jinghao know about that?

"Jinghao, do you know that Lin Xinyan brought the two children abroad?" Li Zhan asked meticulously.

The only person helping Lin Xinyan to take care of the children was Zhuang Zijin. Lin Xinyan needed to work, and they didn't hire any maids. Their life there was bearable, but it wasn't easy.

If Zong Jinghao knew about it but didn't lend a hand, is he even human?

After all, the children were his.

If he didn't know about it, then it was all the weirder.

Could Lin Xinyan have given birth in secret?

It was not a good topic for Zong Jinghao.

He didn't know about the birth of his two children. What was even more regrettable was that he didn't have the opportunity to participate in their lives before the age of five.

In response, Zong Jinghao stood up straight and replied, "It's about time you go back and see your father."

With that, he walked towards the door and opened it.

Lin Xinyan was sitting on the sofa talking to Shen Peichuan.

The former wasn't looking very well.

It was because they were talking about Zhuang Zijin.

She had not visited Zhuang Zijin since that day.

She was afraid.

She blamed herself for not finding out that Zhuang Zijin had remarried Lin Guoan just to avenge herself earlier.

“When?”

Shen Peichuan was telling her that Zhuang Zijin’s wasn’t feeling well. He had advised her to go to the hospital but she refused.

“I’m sorry, I’ve overlooked. I heard from the officer on duty that it’s been a while.”

“It’s not your fault.” Lin Xinyan knew Shen Peichuan had to work and was not able to watch over Zhuang Zijin from time to time. Besides, with him managing things internally, it was already much easier for Zhuang Zijin.

At least no one dared to give her a hard time.

“If you have time, do visit her and try to convince her to go to the hospital. The officer on duty said she was coughing very badly – over ten to twenty times per night. Even her inmates were complaining that it was disturbing. I have just arranged to switch her to a single-occupancy cell.”

There was actually no cell with single-occupancy within. The original cell Shen Peichuan had arranged for Zhuang Zijin had only three occupants, which was already one of the cells with the least number of people. He had planned to arrange for a single-occupancy cell for her from the beginning, but they were short of cells, so he had no choice.

Lin Xinyan lowered her head as a thin layer of mist clouded over her eyes. “Can you make an arrangement for me? I want to see her today.”

She was worried about Zhuang Zijin’s health.

It’s only for a few years. When she comes out, she still has years of freedom, and I still have a lot of time to take care of her.

Shen Peichuan assured her to leave it to him.

When he saw Zong Jinghao walking over, Shen Peichuan changed the subject to the trouble caused by Lin Xichen.

There had been a hue and cry due to this matter.

“The secret lover of the deputy mayor has been caught,” he said.

Zong Jinghao sat down next to Lin Xinyan. “Where was she caught?”

“In a private property. It was bought for her, but it’s now been seized. All the relevant parties and staff were arrested,” replied Shen Peichuan.

Zong Jinghao nodded and turned to Lin Xinyan. He could obviously sense that she was upset.

He asked lightly, “What’s the matter?”

Li Zhan, who just walked out, quickly came over and interrupted, “Jinghao, can I stay with you? I miss Xichen.”

He had said something bad about Zong Jinghao in front of Lin Xinyan because he did not know about the relationship between Lin Xinyan and Zong Jinghao.

He thought that was why Lin Xinyan was upset.

He was afraid that Lin Xinyan would tell Zong Jinghao.

Hence, he came over to join in their conversation.

Zong Jinghao squinted his eyes at the man. He could tell what was in his mind.

Li Zhan conceded quickly and said, "I didn't mean it." He then sighed and added, "I didn't know about your relationship with her, so I said something about you. But it's not something bad. I said that you're loyal, you're young and handsome, and that you're even-tempered, right, Xinyan?"

Li Zhan was fearful. He even looked at Lin Xinyan with a begging gaze.

Lin Xinyan's mind was occupied entirely by the matter concerning Zhuang Zijin, so she didn't really hear Li Zhan's words, simply replying with a brief "yeah."

Li Zhan breathed a sigh of relief. *Luckily.*

He patted his own chest.

Shen Peichuan interrupted from the side, "Your reaction makes it seem like you've done something bad."

"What nonsense." Li Zhan sat down next to Shen Peichuan and put his arm around his shoulder. "Do you have any extra room at your place?"

Shen Peichuan looked at him with caution. "What are you plotting?"

Li Zhan answered pitifully, "I'm left without a place to stay again."

When his private residence was discovered by fans, there would definitely be someone "lurking" in front of his door. He wouldn't dare stay there anymore in fear of the invasion of his privacy.

"No." It was an outright rejection from Shen Peichuan, who treasured tranquility. As a public figure, Li Zhan had too many fans. He was afraid that he would be affected.

He wanted a quiet and safe life.

One that would not be disturbed and troubled.

Shen Peichuan stood up to leave. "Xinyan, I'll give you a call when it's arranged."

Lin Xinyan nodded.

Shen Peichuan was worried that he would be tangled up in Li Zhan's search for a room, so he quickly left.

Zong Jinghao could roughly tell the reason behind Lin Xinyan's disturbed emotion, so he reached out to take her hand and said, "I'll go with you."

Lin Xinyan turned around to look at him. At that moment, she really needed someone to be with her, so she agreed.

Li Zhan, who witnessed what happened between the two people, blinked his eyes in disbelief. For a moment, he thought he was hallucinating.

He had never seen Zong Jinghao be so gentle to any woman before. Even when it was He Ruilin, the man had never shown such delicate care and gentleness.

"Err... Well, I shall leave." Li Zhan stood up.

Zong Jinghao glanced over at him.

Li Zhan flinched at his stare, maybe because he had done something wrong and was guilty.

He was scared even though it was just a glance from Zong Jinghao.

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“It’s time to go home.”

Li Zhan thought Zong Jinghao would scold him, but he only asked him to head home.

He was instantly relieved.

“Sure, sure.” Li Zhan smiled from the bottom of his heart.

He had not gone back home for a long time. Indeed, it was time for him to go back and take a look.

After all, Wen Qing was his father; he should also go back to see how Li Jing was doing.

Li Zhan turned to Lin Xinyan, looking like he had something to say. He wanted to explain what he said in the elevator, but Zong Jinghao was there, so it was not convenient for him to explain in detail. *Forget it. I’ll save it for another time.*

Fortunately, he had agreed to the product endorsement requested by Lin Xinyan without asking for a price. Otherwise, it would be more awkward.

He sighed silently. *This world is too small.*

Lin Xinyan and Zong Jinghao?

Li Zhan smiled and walked into the elevator, where he happened to bump again into the man he had met when he arrived.

He saw Li Zhan alone, so he asked, “Where’s your girlfriend?”

Li Zhan glared at him and replied, “Which eye of yours saw that I have a girlfriend?”

“I saw with both my eyes. You were holding hands and looking very sweet together,” the man replied without thinking.

Li Zhan’s expression turned fierce. “Bullshit again, and I’ll gouge your eyes out.”

The man was baffled. He thought Li Zhan was just kidding, but his ruthlessness at that moment didn’t seem fake. *How can this man change so quickly?*

Li Zhan was afraid he would spread the rumors around and cause a misunderstanding.

After all, Lin Xinyan is...

He had spoken recklessly just now because he didn’t know about it. Since he had already found out the truth, how could he still crack such a joke?

Fatty Long saw that Li Zhan was alone when he returned, so he blinked and asked, “How come you’re alone?”

What happened to the handcuffs? How were they opened?

Without explaining, Li Zhan opened the car door and got in. “Head home.”

Fatty Long knew that the relationship between Li Zhan and Wen Qing was sour. He wasn’t sure what the man meant by “head home”, so he asked carefully, “Back to the Wen family?”

Li Zhan looked up with a grimace on his good-looking face. “How many homes do I have?”

Fatty Long knew him very well, so he wasn't bothered by his attitude. He started the engine and drove off.

Go back to the Wen family. Well, then off we go.

That will save me some extra works, too, in addition to freeing me from worrying about the paparazzi.

The neighborhood the Wen family was staying in could not be entered by outsiders – the security was perfect.

On the other hand, Zong Jinghao and Lin Xinyan had returned to the office. The secretary came in with two glasses of water. Lin Xinyan took one of them and took a sip. “Li Zhan is Wen Qing’s son?”

Even though it was a question, her tone was certain.

Zong Jinghao replied with a light “mhmm”.

Lin Xinyan lowered her eyes. *What a coincidence.*

“Unexpectedly, Xichen’s teacher is related to you.” Lin Xinyan sighed with mixed emotions. *What a small world.*

Anywhere you go, there will always be people from the same circle.

Zong Jinghao held on to her. “What did he say to you?”

It was obvious Li Zhan had a guilty conscience. He must have said something before he found out about Lin Xinyan’s identity.

Lin Xinyan turned around to look at him. Zong Jinghao was standing too close to her. Her eyelashes brushed across his face when she turned, tickling him gently.

He drew himself nearer and spoke into her ears, tickling them softly, "What did he say about me?"

Lin Xinyan thought for a while and replied on purpose, "He said you're a playboy."

"Nonsense."

Lin Xinyan smiled. Her mood was previously affected by the news about Zhuang Zijin. "Did he say anything wrong?"

He held her waist and drew her closer. Lin Xinyan lost control of her body and bumped into his arms, hurting her chest. She pushed him away, but he was too rigid. His body was tough and stiff like an unmovable mountain.

His eyes were burning with ardent longing. "I only want to sleep with you."

Lin Xinyan was speechless.

Her face turned red-hot. *This man...*

Zong Jinghao laughed lightly and lowered his head to peck on her lips lightly. "You know what? Your blushing face is so tempting. I'm aroused just by looking at it."

She was left speechless once more.

"If you don't believe me, try it." He took her hand and put it on his groin.

Lin Xinyan was completely befuddled. *This man is shameless regardless of the occasion.*

And what did Li Zhan say? He does not like women?

Complete bullshit.

He's almost turning into a pervert.

Lin Xinyan pushed him again. "You need to save face."

Zong Jinghao gave her an even lighter smile, answering in a hoarse voice, "I have given you even my life. What do I need face for?"

Lin Xinyan's heart was racing, and her cheeks were flushed.

Zong Jinghao kissed her neck. "Should we try doing it once in the office?"

Boom! The burning heat spread from her face to her neck. Puffing mildly, she replied, "I'm going to get mad if you don't stop it."

Her heart was throbbing fast upon being wooed by him. However, the remaining rationality within her made it unacceptable to her to couple in daylight and even in his office.

"My mom is sick. I'm visiting her later." She deliberately changed the subject, cutting off the ambiguous atmosphere in the office.

If they carried on, something would definitely happen in this office.

Sure enough, Lin Xinyan's words had caused the previous heat to die down.

Zong Jinghao stroked her hair gently. "So this is why you were upset just now?"

Lin Xinyan nodded.

Zong Jinghao hugged her tight and comforted her, "Don't worry, I'm here. I can find her the best doctor."

Lin Xinyan lay in his arms.

She could feel her nose prickle. Growing up, no matter how much suffering she had gone through, no one had ever said “I’m here.” to her.

Yes. *He’s here.* She had plunged too deeply in his affection.

She doted on him so much.

Buzz buzz—

The phone in Lin Xinyan’s pocket was vibrating.

She took it out and saw Shen Peichuan’s number on the caller screen.

The two looked at each other and knew that this call signified that the arrangement to visit Zhuang Zijin had been done.

Lin Xinyan answered the phone, and it was as expected. “It’s been arranged. You may come now.”

Lin Xinyan agreed.

After hanging up the call, Zong Jinghao spoke before she could say anything, “I’ll go with you.”

Lin Xinyan nodded.

Zong Jinghao smoothed out her collar, which had been crumpled by him earlier when he held her. After that, Zong Jinghao walked out of the office with his arm around her.

This was the first time she had appeared in the company since Zong Jinghao announced her identity.

When they didn’t know about her, the staff were very curious.

And now, they were all the more interested. What kind of a woman would Zong Jinghao so dearly treasure?

A woman who was able to deal with Zong Jinghao must be really something.

When everyone saw Zong Jinghao coming out with her in his arms, they were all respectful and even more inquisitive at the same time.

“Mrs. Zong.” After knowing her identity, it was impossible to address her like how they used to.

To show their respect, they must greet her accordingly.

Lin Xinyan smiled in reply, not being overly modest or pretentious, but decent and elegant.

Someone was bold enough to ask, “President Zong, are there no wedding candies for us?”

Zong Jinghao smiled. “I’ll make up for that next time.”

He walked into the elevator with Lin Xinyan in his arms.

Coming out of the elevator, they got in the car. Zong Jinghao was driving while Lin Xinyan sat in the passenger seat. The latter leaned back, touching the necklace which had been passed to her by Zong Jinghao from Zhuang Zijin.

Zong Jinghao had one hand on the steering wheel, and he reached out to hold hers with the other.

Lin Xinyan turned around.

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She felt warm and fuzzy, delighted that someone was there to give her strength when she needed it most. She let out a small smile.

Twenty minutes later, someone arrived at B City's penitentiary, a looming fortress built in the middle of nowhere. Its steel gates were tough, imposing, and impenetrable.

The last time Lin Xinyan was here to see Zhuang Zijin, her sentence wasn't out yet.

As he stood before the gates, Lin Xinyan could feel his heart tremble. Her mother was right behind these gates, locked up for her crimes, doomed to have a stain on their life after she was released, like all the ex-cons. From then on, society would look at her like she was trash.

Zong Jinghao stood beside her, holding her freezing hand. "Let's go in."

Lin Xinyan nodded in assent.

Shen Peichuan was waiting for them at the guard's pitstop. When they came, he went to welcome them and led them inside. Thanks to Shen Peichuan, nobody stopped them when they entered.

Zhuang Zijin was placed in a solitary meeting cell with nobody standing guard outside. It was the perfect place to meet Lin Xinyan alone. Well, as perfect as a jail cell could be.

They went past the corridor, where layer after layer of steel doors awaited them, but finally, they reached their destination.

“She’s in there,” Shen Peichuan said.

Lin Xinyan took a deep breath, preparing herself mentally one last time before the meeting. She looked back at Zong Jinghao. “I’m fine. Let me meet her alone.”

Zong Jinghao pursed his lips. He didn’t like the idea, but still, he let her go. “I’ll be waiting outside then.”

“Thanks.” She went to the door and took another deep breath. She then opened the door.

The room was stark. There was one fluorescent light on the ceiling and a rectangular table in the middle in the full white room. Aside from Lin Xinyan, there was only one other person there—Zhuang Zijin. She was sitting behind the table. When Lin Xinyan entered, the woman looked up.

The sight of her mother made Lin Xinyan’s heart skip. Contrary to the old her, she was gaunt. Her face had darkened and she had visibly aged. Lin Xinyan used to think she looked young for her age, but not after she saw her this time.

“You’re here.” Zhuang Zijin smiled.

Lin Xinyan sat on the chair across from her and stared at her mother’s face. “I missed you.”

Zhuang Zijin’s started crying, but she quickly wiped her tears away. She missed her children too. Ever since they were born, she was always there for them. Never once did she get separated from them for this long.

“I heard you’re sick.” Lin Xinyan thought she would be crying inconsolably when they met, but her resilience proved to be stronger than she thought.

Zhuang Zijin wiped her tears away. “I’m fine. I think I know my condition the best.”

“But you don’t look fine. Let’s take you to the hospital for a checkup.”

“I am fine, girl. I just—” Zhuang Zijin covered her mouth and started coughing.

“You’re going to the hospital today,” Lin Xinyan stated adamantly.

Every time she coughed, Zhuang Zijin could feel her chest bursting in pain. She calmed herself down after another bout of coughing before asking, “I want to see Ruixi and Xichen before that.”

She knew her body better than anyone. Even though she never went for a checkup, Zhuang Zijin could feel herself slowly wasting away. She knew her days were numbered, but she wasn’t afraid. She did have one regret though – not being able to see her grandkids grow up.

Lin Xinyan agreed to her request. “I’ll ask Shen Peichuan to do it. You’ll see them today.” She then left the room and saw Shen Peichuan talking to Zong Jinghao.

It was about the case of the deputy mayor’s crime – everyone involved had been arrested. “Don’t worry. Nobody can pull anything now,” Shen Peichuan reassured.

Zong Jinghao was worried that someone might get back at them. Even though all traces of Lin Xichen had been erased, she did see Lin Xinyan before her arrest.

That woman didn’t know that Lin Xichen was the one who had uploaded the video, but she knew her confrontation with Lin Xinyan started the whole ordeal, so she would try to get back at Lin Xinyan.

However, Lin Xinyan had reacted calmly and tried to call the police, so she had no choice but to hide. She had never expected the police to locate her hiding place that quickly.

“Those guys are doubling down on crime and corruption, so he’s unlucky to be arrested this time. They aren’t going to let him off easily.” The light overhead shone on Zong Jinghao, creating a long, slender shadow behind him.

They didn’t notice Lin Xinyan come out until she called out to Shen Peichuan.

They looked back at her, and she closed the door before coming up to them. “I need your help.” She looked at Shen Peichuan expectantly.

“Anything you need,” Shen Peichuan replied readily.

“I want to take her with me on a little excursion.” Lin Xinyan couldn’t bring the kids here, but she needed her mother to get a checkup.

The woman looked gaunt and pasty, almost deathly even. Lin Xinyan was worried for her health.

Shen Peichuan had asked her to come for this visit to persuade Zhuang Zijin to go for a checkup, so he had prepared for this. “You can take her for the checkup right away,” he said.

“Thank you,” she thanked him genuinely.

“Don’t mention it.” He smiled. Zong Jinghao was his buddy, so helping him this much wasn’t a problem.

Lin Xinyan took Zhuang Zijin back home with her that very same day, and she called Cheng Yuxiu to ask if the kids were at home.

She was worried Cheng Yuxiu might take the kids on some fun trip since that would mean Zhuang Zijin wouldn’t see them when they got home.

“They are. Do you want to see them?” she asked.

“Yeah, and my mother too. I am bringing her back.”

Cheng Yuxiu could understand why. “I see. I’ll make the arrangements then.”

“Thank you.” Lin Xinyan hung up after that.

A short while later, they returned to the Zong residence. Zhuang Zijin knew this was Zong Jinghao’s villa, though it was her first time coming here.

The fact she was a convict made her feel inferior, but Lin Xinyan went to hold her arm reassuringly. “This is where your kids live. Feel at home.”

As Zhuang Zijin looked at her daughter and Zong Jinghao, she teared up. “Thank you.”

Thank you for giving my daughter a home.

Zong Jinghao still looked stoic as ever, and he pushed a strand of hair out of Lin Xinyan’s face. “I should be the one thanking you for entrusting your daughter to me.”

Lin Xinyan smiled. She loved it when he was gentle.

Zhuang Zijin was happy to see her daughter smiling in bliss. Her last, lingering concern was finally gone. Lin Xinyan and her husband seemed loving, and that was all she wanted – for her daughter to find a good husband, and for her kids to grow up safely.

The villa’s door groaned open, and out came Cheng Yuxiu. “Come in, you guys. We’ll be alone. Most of the guys aren’t here.”

Zong Qifeng and the servants had gone out thanks to Cheng Yuxiu, so only the kids were in the villa. Zhuang Zijin was thankful for that. She didn’t want too many people to be around, for being a convict was shameful.

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. We’re family.” Cheng Yuxiu gazed at Zhuang Zijin. “If anyone should be saying thank you, it’s me. You raised a good daughter.”

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Lin Xinyan was married to Zong Jinghao, and she bore children for him. Zhuang Zijin was younger than Cheng Yuxiu, but she looked older in comparison. As fate would decree, Zhuang Zijin didn't marry a good husband when she was young, and her life had been miserable. After coming back, she chose to embark on a path of darkness.

Cheng Yuxiu's early life wasn't easy, but after marrying Zong Qifeng, she at least had some security in life. Compared to Zhuang Zijin, she had it easier.

Her son eventually became successful and had his own family, so there were no regrets left for her. "Come in. They must have been waiting," Cheng Yuxiu invited her in. *She must be dying to see the kids.*

Lin Xinyan chimed in, "Let's go in, mom."

Zhuang Zijin nodded. Instead of going with them, Cheng Yuxiu went out alone. She knew it must be hard for Zhuang Zijin to meet the children since she was a convict.

And for the first time, Zong Jinghao looked directly at Cheng Yuxiu. *So she's actually decent, huh? I guess the only thing she did wrong was marry my father at the wrong time.* Then he looked away.

The first thing that greeted them after coming in was the living room, where the children were in. Cheng Yuxiu must have told them their grandmother would be coming today, so they had been waiting right there. Once Zhuang Zijin made her appearance, they darted toward her.

"I've missed you, grandma." Her grandchildren hugged her legs and rubbed their faces against them.

Zhuang Zijin immediately teared up. She stared down at the children and patted their heads. "I've missed you too."

Thanks to the Zongs' meticulous care, the children seemed to have grown taller. Lin Xichen was growing to be a spitting image of his father. *He's a handsome little boy.* On the other hand, Lin Ruixi looked like her mother.

Zhuang Zijin wanted to pick them up, but they had grown to be a bit too heavy for her.

Lin Xichen held her hand. "Come in, grandma."

"Grandma, what took you so long?" Lin Ruixi grumbled. "Did you forget about us?"

Zhuang Zijin caressed Lin Ruixi's face. "I didn't, my dear girl. I've watched over you for as long as I could. You were only this big when you were born." Zhuang Zijin gesticulated. "Just like a kitten, you see. Now you're all grown up, and I can't even hold you anymore."

Lin Ruixi giggled and lingered around her grandmother. "Grandma keeps feeding me my favorite food, so I've been growing quickly." She pinched her face.

Lin Ruixi's face was perfectly smooth and chubby, her eyes big and bright. *Oh, she looks so cute. They've been taken good care of.*

She gazed at the children. "I'm happy knowing you kids are living well."

Lin Ruixi leaned against her arms. "We have a big house here, grandma. Why don't you stay with us too?"

Zhuang Zijin's heart skipped a beat. If she hadn't been overwhelmed by her hate, she would have been living with her grandchildren by now, watching over them as they grew up.

She didn't regret her actions even when Lin Xinyan cried in front of her, but everything came undone after seeing her grandchildren.

She hugged Lin Ruixi tightly. If she could, she wanted to stay with them, but alas.

"Here, grandma." Lin Xichen peeled a banana and handed it to Zhuang Zijin. He knew his grandmother loved bananas.

She took it from him and hugged him tightly. She wanted to cry, but she held her tears back, not wishing her grandchildren to see her break down.

Ever since they came in, Lin Xinyan never moved from the doorstep. Even though the sight before her was supposed to be heartwarming, it felt heavy and brooding.

Zong Jinghao hugged her. "It'll get better." He caressed her arm, consoling her.

Zhuang Zijin had been sentenced for accidental injury, and since it was the talk of the town back then, Zhuang Zijin had to be imprisoned, but it wouldn't be for too long. She would be on parole and get released in a year or two.

Lin Xinyan knew that, but she still prayed for her health. She still wanted to spend many years with her mother.

She leaned against him tightly, hugging him. "I love you so much." That was the first time she expressed her love in such a straightforward manner.

Zong Jinghao leaned down and kissed her forehead while she closed her eyes to feel his touch.

Zhuang Zijin saw what they were doing through the floor tiles' reflection, and she smiled, feeling happy for her daughter.

Zong Jinghao was a mature, responsible, and successful man. He was also nice to Lin Xinyan; she didn't have to worry about her happiness.

Zhuang Zijin spent a couple of hours with her grandchildren before Lin Xinyan came up to call her. If they didn't hurry, the hospital would close for the day. "This is it for today."

Lin Xichen looked at his mother. "Is grandma leaving again?"

Before Lin Xinyan could answer, Zhuang Zijin said, "I'm going to a place that's far, far away, and I don't think I can come back anytime soon. This is goodbye then, children."

"Can't you stay, grandma?" Lin Ruixi tugged on the hem of her shirt.

Zhuang Zijin looked down and cupped the young girl's face before she kissed her forehead. "I'll miss you, cupcake, but I have to go, just like how you have to go to school."

Her grandmother's message flew over Lin Ruixi's head, but she didn't want Zhuang Zijin to go. She was worried this might be the last time they met. The girl felt a special bond with her grandmother, for the woman had taken care of her when she was a baby.

"Be good, children. Don't make your mother angry." Zhuang Zijin gazed at her grandchildren.

Lin Xichen nodded. "We'll take care of mommy, grandma. When I grow up, I'll take care of you too."

Zhuang Zijin smiled. *Still as precocious as ever.* Then she stood up. No matter how reluctant she was, leaving was necessary. If she stayed here for even a moment longer, it'd be that much harder to say goodbye. "Goodbye, children."

Lin Ruixi stood before the sofa and saw her grandmother off. "Don't forget to come back, grandma."

"Of course." Zhuang Zijin smiled.

Since there wasn't anyone else at home, Lin Xinyan asked Zong Jinghao to stay back and look after the kids. "I can do this."

Zong Jinghao handed her the car keys. "Call me if you need anything."

"Sure." She took the keys and went out with Zhuang Zijin.

After getting into the car, Zhuang Zijin stated, "I don't want to go to the hospital."

Lin Xinyan stopped halfway through buckling herself up. "No," she refused. "You have to go. Don't you see how sick you look? What if you're down with something? It's better if you get a checkup and get yourself treated."

Zhuang Zijin held her daughter's shoulders. "I'm glad you care about me this much, Xinyan."

Lin Xinyan looked away to hide her tears from her mother, and she revved the car up. "If you really think so, then get yourself checked. I want you to stay with me for a long, long time." She drove away, and Zhuang Zijin didn't say anything further.

After stopping at the hospital, somebody walked toward Lin Xinyan's car.

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“Mrs. Zong.” Guan Jing opened the car door for Lin Xinyan.

Lin Xinyan was startled by the man’s appearance. “What are you doing here?”

“Mr. Zong ordered me to come,” Guan Jing answered.

Zong Jinghao had instructed Guan Jing to come to the hospital and set up an appointment with a medical specialist for Zhuang Zijin. Hence, there was no need for her to queue.

“Come with me. I’ve already made an appointment for you,” Guan Jing said and led the way.

Lin Xinyan held on to Zhuang Zijin and followed him into the hospital. Instead of queueing downstairs, they headed up to the outpatient hall. At that moment, several people were seated at the lounge. Guan Jing went straight into the doctor’s room and had a few words with the doctor before letting Zhuang Zijin into the room.

Zhuang Zijin did not have much time to spare when she was out of prison, which was why her medical checkup had to be done quickly.

Guan Jing had spoken to the Dean of the hospital and made necessary arrangements earlier on. Therefore, Zhuang Zijin was attended to immediately after a word with the doctor.

Zhuang Zijin was very cooperative. However, she requested to be alone with the doctor in the consultation room.

She wouldn’t even allow Lin Xinyan to be in there with her.

“Mom, why can’t I be in there with you?” Lin Xinyan was puzzled and asked, “Are you hiding something from me?”

“What’s there for me to hide from you?” Zhuang Zijin looked at her daughter nonchalantly. “Don’t you know that others do not know of my identity? I only ask to have a one-on-one consultation with the doctor about my condition. Haven’t I come to the hospital with you? What more can I hide?”

“That’s not what I meant,” Lin Xinyan tried to explain.

“Well then, you can wait outside,” Zhuang Zijin said plainly, showing no signs of anger. But, she had a rather uncomfortable look on her face.

Lin Xinyan did not argue with her any further and walked out of the room.

As of now, Zhuang Zijin was laden with guilt. Lin Xinyan had thought she was only willing to come out because she was under an emotional burden.

When the door shut, Zhuang Zijin sat on a chair and faced the doctor. “I’m sorry for taking up your time.”

The doctor replied, “That’s what I’m here for.”

“I know my body well.” Zhuang Zijin was willing to come to the hospital because she wanted Lin Xinyan to be at ease. “I have an older brother who died of lung cancer.”

The doctor made a note of Zhuang Zijin’s family medical history. “What about your parents?”

“My dad too.”

Which was why she guessed that she could be having cancer when she started feeling unwell.

The doctor looked at her and asked, "In other words, you suspect that you might have it too?"

Zhuang Zijin nodded her head.

"The woman who was with me just now is my daughter. I don't want her to know about this. So, in the event the result comes out positive, could you give her a copy of a falsified negative test result?"

The doctor did not dare call the shots, having no other choice but to agree. "I can do that."

"Then I will write you a medical report." The doctor started making notes on various report forms.

"How soon will the result be out?" Zhuang Zijin asked.

The doctor thought over her question. There were going to be numerous checks involved due to her suspicion of having cancer. Some of the reports could take a while to be out, but considering what they had discussed earlier, they could speed up the test results for her. "At least a week."

"No matter what the result is, please give my daughter a copy of a result stating that I am in good health," Zhuang Zijin reminded the doctor again.

The doctor nodded and handed her the report forms. "You can go for the checkup now."

Zhuang Zijin took the forms from the doctor and nodded. "Thank you."

She opened the door and stepped out. Lin Xinyan was waiting for her right outside the room.

Upon seeing Zhuang Zijin exiting the room, she walked over quickly.

Zhuang Zijin smiled lightly and said, "The doctor said there's nothing serious and has asked to proceed for a checkup. Let's go, come with me for the checkup."

Lin Xinyan nodded.

Guan Jing followed behind them. Since she had the appointment, she was given priority for the checkup. Firstly, she went to get her blood drawn and then an X-ray.

The checkup itself took two hours to complete.

All they had to do now was to wait for the result.

"You can go back first. I will collect the report forms," Guan Jing said.

Lin Xinyan thought about the suggestion for a while. It made no difference if Guan Jing or herself were to collect the result.

"Alright, let's go back then."

Lin Xinyan left with Zhuang Zijin.

Guan Jing waited for a medical report that was to be released on the same day. Just as he was about to collect the report, he bumped into the doctor who had consulted Zhuang Zijin.

Not intending to hide the truth, the doctor decided to have a talk with him.

"I'd like to talk to you about the patient just now."

Guan Jing froze in his tracks and asked, "What about her?"

“The patient suspects she has cancer. Both her father and her brother had a history of this disease. Moreover, her brother died of it. So, it’s likely she has inherited the cancer gene,” the doctor said.

“So it’s hereditary?” Guan Jing asked solemnly.

The doctor replied gravely, “If she’s tested positive, then the hereditary rate is high.”

Guan Jing nodded.

He now understood why Zhuang Zijin had dismissed Lin Xinyan in the doctor’s room.

“One more thing, she asked to hide this from her daughter...”

“I understand. I will handle it,” Guan Jing stated.

“Good.” The doctor turned to leave. “I have patients waiting for me, so I’ll take my leave now.”

“Thank you,” Guan Jing said.

The doctor inserted both hands into the white coat’s large pockets and walked towards the consultation room.

Guan Jing walked to the stairwell, knowing that there were no people there and it was quiet. He began to make a phone call to Zong Jinghao.

He had to inform Zong Jinghao about this, regardless of the outcome.

Zong Jinghao leaned back on the sofa, and Lin Ruixi sat facing him on his chest. Her small hands hooked around his neck as she talked to him.

“Daddy, can grandma stay here the next time she comes over?”

The little girl cocked her head to the side, looking serious.

Zong Jinghao pinched her small nose. “Anything you say.”

“Then grandma will stay with me. This way, I can be with everyone, and I will be the happiest kid in the world.”

Just then, Zong Jinghao’s phone rang.

One hand around his daughter, he took out his phone with the other hand. Guan Jing’s name was displayed on the screen. He answered the call and held the phone to his ear.

“Mrs. Zong has left with Zhuang Zijin,” Guan Jing reported.

Zong Jinghao responded in acknowledgment.

“Zhuang Zijin...” Guan Jing did not know how to break the news. “She has a family history of inherited cancer genes. If she’s tested positive for cancer, it would mean that the hereditary rate is high. That would mean, Mrs. Zong...”

If it was hereditary, then Lin Xinyan... and her children...

Zong Jinghao gripped the phone tightly. This was an unexpected piece of news.

“I understand.” His voice was deep and rueful.

This was not the worst of it. If Zhuang Zijin’s tested to be cancer-free, it may not be hereditary at all.

They could only wait for the test results to be out.

Zong Jinghao hung up and set the phone aside. He hooked his index finger under his daughter's chin, carefully studying her face. She had a pair of bright eyes, clear and gleaming like stars. Her skin was white like porcelain dolls.

He kissed his daughter's forehead and held her in his arms.

She's my angel. God won't be so cruel as to take away their health.

"Daddy..."