

The Kiss 431

Chapter 431

The doctor

reiterated, "Though the fetus is developing well, you, as the mother, are a bit run down. Make sure to rest, eat nutritious food, don't overwork, and keep a positive mood. The family should also cooperate and take good care of you!"

"Don't worry, doc. We've got this covered!" Chase reassured the doctor with a beaming smile.

Ellinor felt a bit dazed as she walked out of the clinic. The pregnancy had caught her off guard.

She and Theo had only spent one night together. That night, Theo was under the influence of a love potion made by Sheila, which would have severe side effects if not consummated. Therefore, she had no choice but to step in.

But who would have thought that just one night would result in a baby?

Ellinor was barely twenty and just out of her teens. She was far from thinking about marriage and children. The fact that she was pregnant was like a punch in the gut. Moreover, she wasn't fond of kids, she thought they were little monsters that disrupted everything like unpredictable ticking time bombs.

She had so many things to do and didn't want this ticking bomb to be her lifelong worry and weakness.

But oddly enough, the notion of having a baby brought a sweet sensation that slowly spread in her heart.

She couldn't help but reminisce about that night, how Theo held her tightly, how he was restless yet restrained, and how he tried his best not to hurt her while being driven by the potion.

That gentle and sexy man had made her blush and her heart flutter in bed.

She wondered if Theo would be thrilled to learn about her pregnancy. Would he be overjoyed and speechless at the thought of becoming a father?

She couldn't exactly predict his reaction. All she wanted was to see him right away. Theo had been away on a business trip for half a month; he should be back soon, right?

She would tell him when he returned.

Otherwise, if Theo got a call about her pregnancy, he would likely drop everything and rush back home! She didn't want to disrupt his work.

Chase teased 'Ellinor, you're going to be a mom soon. Excited much?'

Ellinor snapped back to reality and yawned, "I feel pretty good!"

Chase carefully held Ellinor's arm, "Ellinor, be careful! The floor's just been cleaned and it's a bit slippery. I've got you; don't stir up the baby!"

Ellinor rolled her eyes. I'm not that delicate!"

*Ida, holding Ellinor's medical records, followed closely. "Ellinor, you're pregnant; let Chase help you! The doctor already told you that you're weak; you need to take care of yourself!"**

Speaking of which, Ellinor was a bit hungry. She didn't want something heavy like meat or fish, just something light and refreshing.

Suddenly Chase spotted something, "Ellinor, look there! That man over by the pediatric department looks like your Mr. Blanchet!"

Ellinor paused, followed Chase's gaze, and there he was. The height, the perfect V-shaped physique, the elegant yet imposing posture, if not Theo, who else could it be?

Chase clicked his tongue, "Mr. Blanchet is back? Did he know about your pregnancy and come to the pediatric department to get a head start on how to be a dad?"

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Watching the tall and handsome man, Ellinor's heart was pounding

The moment, when the one she most wanted to see suddenly appeared right in front of her was truly bizarre

She cracked a smile and trotted towards the man, pondering how to break the news of her recent medical examination to him

Chase wanted to go with Ellinor but was pulled back by Ida. "Why would you want to be a third wheel at this time?"

Chase shrugged and grunted, "I was just worried that Ellinor might trip in her hurry!"

Ida adjusted her golden-rimmed glasses, "Relax, Ellinor isn't that clumsy"

Chase crossed his arms, waiting with interest to see how Mr. Blanchet would react after finding out Ellinor was pregnant.

As she got closer, Ellinor began to speak, "Theo..."

Before she could finish, a toddler who had just learned to walk stumbled out of the pediatric clinic, affectionately hugged Theo's leg, and mumbled. "Daddy..."

Ellinor froze, and her smile faded instantly.

Daddy? She didn't mishear, the child just called Theo Daddy?!

The man bent over, picked up the little boy, and asked softly. "Where's your mommy?"

Ellinor had just been questioning whether she had mistaken him for someone else, but the moment she heard his voice, she knew it was Theo without a doubt.

Theo had a son?

Just then, Patricia walked out of the pediatric clinic. She came over to the man and said softly, "Theo, the doctor said the baby's condition is not serious; he just caught a cold, which led to fever. Just keep him warm and give him some medicine, he will be fine. I'll go get the medicine now and you keep an eye on him here."

"Okay, go ahead," the man responded indifferently

Then, Patricia took the prescription and headed towards the pediatric pharmacy.

Ellinor stood there, silently watching everything. The man was skilled and natural in handling the child, and he was not like a new father at all!

This unforeseen situation caused Chase and Ida to exchange worried glances, and they both stepped forward to check on Ellinor.

Ellinor's expression was calm, revealing no obvious emotions; she remained quiet and composed.

Chase was somewhat indignant, "Ellinor! Theo actually has a child behind your back! Wasn't he single before you?"

Ida snorted sarcastically, "Being single doesn't stop you men from fooling around!"

Chase frowned in disagreement, "When you're criticizing men, don't include me, okay?"

Ida ignored Chase, looking worriedly at Ellinor, fearing that she, who just found out she was pregnant, couldn't handle this blow.

Ellinor's face remained expressionless, neither anxious nor irritated, she simply pulled out her phone and dialed Theo's number.

Sometimes, what the eyes see may not be what it seemed, she needed to get confirmation from Theo before making any decisions.

Ellinor's call connected

The man, holding the child in one hand and the phone in the other, answered the call in a deep, magnetic voice, "What's up?"

Ellinor watched the man's every move from a distance and said, "Theo."

"Hmm? Miss me?"

"Yes" She admitted

The man was slightly taken aback, surprised that she would admit to missing him so readily

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Before this, she had never directly answered whether she missed him or not, nor had she ever initiated a call to him.

Theo couldn't help but chuckle, "I will be back in a few days, I'm not done here, you just wait for me."

Ellinor's voice had lost its warmth, Oh"

Theo didn't say anything else. hung up the phone, and busied himself with soothing the little tyke in his arms who wanted his mommy

Listening to the short, busy tone from the other end of the line, Ellinor's eyes completely cooled, her lips curling in self-mockery

What a joke! She always thought she was rational, clear-headed, not a hopeless romantic, and certainly wouldn't blindly trust in love and a man

But the truth showed that she was no different from any ordinary person!

When Patricia showed her the scar on her abdomen that day, saying she and Theo once had a child, she didn't take it to heart and didn't doubt Theo's character for a second. She took it as a cheap lie Patricia made up to sow discord between her and Theo.

She was so certain that Theo wasn't the type of guy to mess around or shirk responsibility

But just now. Theo lied to her. He was clearly in the country but lied about not being back yet.

So, could she conclude from this that Theo might have never left the country in the past half month and was always with Patricia and their child?

Ha! Was this necessary? If he wanted to be with Patricia, he didn't need to deceive her and act behind her back! He could've just told her, she would never interfere

Her relationship with Theo started as a simple business partnership, and she had no right to interfere. If it weren't for Theo suddenly changing his tune and saying he wanted to start fresh with her and take their relationship seriously, she would've never had any illusions about him.

She knew that because of the unknown grudge between the Blanchet and Howard families, the Blanchet elders were worried that Theo and Patricia's entanglement would deepen, so Mr. Blanchet was pressuring Theo to marry another woman as soon as possible.

It was only when she saw their child today that Ellinor finally realized that Theo had never let go of Patricia. His cold, indifferent act towards her was probably just a ruse to deceive the Blanchet family elders, and she was the fool who fell for it.

From start to finish, she was a pawn Theo used to deal with the Blanchet family elders. To make her play the role of Mrs. Blanchet convincingly, Theo even lied about his feelings

Was he really that despicable?

Some passersby began whispering.

"That man holding a child over there is so handsome!

"He really is! I saw his wife just now, she's also very pretty, she must be getting medicine for the child now!"

"Their kid is so cute and adorable! The whole family is so pleasing to the eye!"

**With parents that good-looking, how could the child not inherit their good looks?"*

Listening to the murmuring around her, Ellinor lowered her eyes and took a deep breath

Chase gritted his teeth, unable to hold back, "Ellinor, don't be sad, I'll go beat that jerk Theo for you right now!"

Ellinor waved him off, speaking softly. "There's no need, let's go."

"But that scumbag, he Chase's fist clenched with a crunch and he was clearly frustrated!

Ida pulled him back, "Calm down, don't cause trouble for Ellinor!"

At this moment, Theo seemed to sense something and turned around with the child in his arms.

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When Theo turned around, Ellinor and her two buddies had already vanished from the hospital corridor. Was he hallucinating? He could have sworn he'd just heard Ellinor's

voice

Patricia returned with the medicines, "Theo, I've got the baby's medicines. We can head out now"

Theo gave a slight nod, carrying the little child who was already nodding off on his broad shoulder, and the three set off for the elevator

Basking in the envious stares from passersby, Patricia felt a surge of happiness and pride. She stole a glance at the handsome man by her side, cradling their child. Yes, this was her picture-perfect life. She, Theo, and their child living in bliss.

In the car

Ida was at the wheel, glancing at the rear-view mirror and she gingerly asked, "Ellinor, where to now?"

"Back to the Blanchet villa Ellinor replied evenly.

*Chase frowned and was confused, 'Ellinor, Theo has betrayed you. Why go back to the Blanchet villa?**

Ellinor squinted, calmly watching the streets roll by outside the window, "We're not off the clock yet. Theo and I had agreed on a three-month partnership from the start. Today is the last day of those three months. I need to stay in the Blanchet villa until midnight for our agreement to be fulfilled. A deal's a deal!"

Chase admired Ellinor's meticulousness but also felt helpless, "Ellinor, are you okay?"

Both Ida and Chase could tell that Ellinor had fallen hard for Theo. Especially her reaction when she found out she was pregnant, her eyes and brows softened with a feminine gentleness they'd hardly ever seen on her

Ellinor gave a small smile, replying lightly, "I'm fine. He's just a man and nothing more than a blip in life."

"And what about the baby in your belly?"

"Go with the flow. After all, Theo's got good genes, and it's free of charge. Might as well think of it as borrowing his seed; it saves me from picking and choosing in the sperm bank later on!"

With that, Ellinor closed her eyes, "Alright, I'll get some sleep. Wake me when we're there."

Ida and Chase shared a look, choosing not to say anything further.

Ellinor leaned back in her seat with her eyes closed, but sleep still eluded her.

To say she wasn't heartbroken would be a lie. Theo had been incredibly sweet and considerate to her recently, constantly bending over backward to make her happy. She'd never been treated so delicately in her life, which led her to mistakenly believe that Theo was different from all the other men, someone she could lean on once in a while. So

she let down her guard, letting him into her heart, and even seriously considered spending the rest of her life with him. Only to realize she was just head over heels for nothing

Women were often easily swept up in the whirlwind of romance, played like a fiddle by men's smooth moves.

She was no exception.

Whatever, chalk it up as another life lesson from the school of hard knocks.

Live and learn.

Ellinor admitted to being heartbroken, but it wasn't enough to shatter her. Now, she just felt a dull ache in her chest. She'd experienced far worse, this was nothing and it!!

pass

All wounds heal eventually.

The Blanchet villa

Devin greeted her respectfully, "You're back. Have you had lunch?"

Ellinor changed into her slippers and entered from the foyer, "Not yet. Devin, I feel like having something light for lunch."

Devin bowed, "Very well. I'll have something prepared and sent to your room shortly."

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Ellinor nodded, "Yeah, thanks"

She, as usual, slowly climbed up the stairs to her room. Halfway up, she paused on the stairs, turning around to ask, "Oh, by the way, Devin, did you receive the stuff I had sent over this morning?"

She had ordered the engagement gifts that she got from the Mendoza family to be sent back via local express delivery. They should have arrived at the Blanchet villa by

NOY

Devin said, "Got them, I've put them into the storage room for safe keeping. Want to take a look, Ellinor?!"

Ellinor waved her hand lightly. "No need, just remember to tell Mr. Blanchet when he comes back."

Devin replied, "Sure thing. Ellinor"

After giving her instructions, Ellinor continued to go upstairs.

The engagement gifts from the Blanchet family were quite valuable. She needed to return them to the Blanchet family, so she didn't owe them anything.

Devin watched Ellinor's retreating figure with a puzzled look. Something seemed off, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

Not being able to figure it out, Devin shrugged it off and went to instruct the kitchen staff to prepare a light lunch for Ellinor.

Before Mr. Blanchet left, he specifically instructed them about Ellinor's diet. Ellinor had allergies, so all allergens must be completely avoided. Devin had to personally check the ingredients every day.

After returning to her room, Ellinor took a bath, changed into her home clothes, ate the lunch brought in by the maid, and then went to bed.

Perhaps it was because she was pregnant that she always felt very tired. Lying in bed, she finally felt more relaxed. She had gotten used to sleeping on this big bed in Theo's room recently and now she felt somewhat reluctant to leave it.

Eventually, with her thoughts in a jumble, Ellinor drifted off to sleep.

Late at night, the weather turned cold and windy.

The wind woke up Devin, who immediately ordered the servants to check all the doors and windows to ensure they were all closed properly. They couldn't let dust or cold air blow in and disturb Ellinor's sleep.

Suddenly, a car's headlights shone into the yard, and the sound of the engine got closer and closer.

Looking outside, it was Mr. Blanchet's car! It was already past midnight. Why was Mr. Blanchet back at this time?

A few minutes later, the man came in, looking travel-worn.

Devin had been waiting at the door, "Mr. Blanchet, you're back!"

Theo took off his coat, which was chilly from the cold air outside, and handed it to a servant nearby. "Mm, where is she?"

Devin naturally knew who Mr. Blanchet was asking about, "At this time, Ellinor should be sound asleep."

Theo hummed lightly, bypassed the approaching servants, and headed straight upstairs.

After receiving Ellinor's call

during the day, he had been thinking about her. He couldn't help but want to rush back to see her.

Ellinor rarely admitted that she missed him. That simple "Yes" was like a hook in his heart, making him itch with impatience.

Theo quickly climbed up the stairs, approaching her room, thinking she was asleep, he intentionally lightened his steps.

He tested the doorknob, and to his surprise, the door wasn't locked.

She didn't lock the door when he was out?

Theo rubbed his forehead, finding it both amusing and exasperating. He opened the door and stepped in quietly. The room was dark, the sky outside was cloudy and windy, there was no moonlight, and everything was blurred.

"Ellinor, I'm back."

He sat on the edge of the bed, his gaze falling on her usual sleeping spot, his voice low and soft. However, there was no response.

Ellinor must have been in a deep sleep.

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Not wanting to interrupt Ellinor Mendoza's sweet dreams, Theo Blanchet prepared to leave the room to rest in his study as usual. Just as he was about to exit the room, he suddenly realized something was off. There was no sound of breathing in the room

His heart skipped a beat, and he quickly turned on the light. He looked around to find that the room was empty!

He strode forward and yanked the covers off the bed and it was bare!

Where the hell was Ellinor at this ungodly hour?

He immediately took out his phone to call her, but the phone on the bedside table rang

That was his phone, which he had given to her. How could she have left without her phone this late at night?

A sudden premonition hit Theo. He turned around and opened the wardrobe. There wasn't a single piece of women's clothing inside.

Theo's pupils constricted, and he barked, "Get someone in here!"

Upon hearing this, Devin hurried over, "Mr. Blanchet, what's wrong?"

Theo shot him a cold glare, "Where is she?"

Devin looked confused. He glanced around the room but saw no sign of Ellinor, then he looked at the wardrobe full of men's clothing and instantly felt a sense of unease.

"Mr. Blanchet, Ellinor went to her room to rest after dinner. I didn't see her go downstairs at all! Because she's been quite sleepy lately, she goes to bed very early. I even specifically told everyone not to disturb her"

Theo's jaw tightened, "Go find her! Don't bother coming back if you can't find her!"

Devin quickly agreed, "Yes, Mr. Blanchet, don't worry, we'll find Ellinor!"

But by dawn, they found no trace of Ellinor, and none of the Blanchet family's security cameras captured her leaving.

Theo sat defeated on the couch; he was silent and his eyes were bloodshot.

Ellinor had run away

She had cleverly avoided all camera angles and slipped out without being noticed.

How badly did she not want him to find her? Had she meticulously planned this escape?

The Blanchet family's butlers, servants, and maids stood anxiously to one side, waiting for Mr. Blanchet's order, as they had failed to find Ellinor.

The tension in the room was palpable; at the slightest sound from Theo, they were ready to beg for mercy.

Collin rushed in, reporting, "Mr. Blanchet, there's no sign of Ellinor at the airport, train station, or hotels. The Mendoza family hasn't seen her either. They said she did come home yesterday morning but left shortly after I delivered your gifts. They haven't seen her since."

Theo leaned back on the couch, one hand supporting his forehead, looking weary, aloof, and ruthless, as if the fate of the world rested on his shoulders.

After a moment, Devin summoned his courage to speak, "Mr. Blanchet! Ellinor had a lot of stuff delivered yesterday morning, probably the gifts Collin mentioned. I had them put in the storage room!"

Theo narrowed his eyes but said nothing.

"Mr. Blanchet, it seems that Ellinor didn't take anything with her except the paintings you gave her."

She left no trace and even returned the wedding gifts!

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What's this? Wanting to cut him off completely?

Dream on!

Theo finally barked out, "Find her! Keep on looking! Even if we have to turn the Earth upside down, I want her found!"

Collin, despite the chilling dread crawling up his spine, bowed his head in obedience, "Yes, sir!"

A month later.

Master Michell's world tour exhibition had arrived in Hiland City

The receptionist at the gallery entrance was dressed in an elegant uniform, with a light orange scarf tied around her neck and her face adorned with delicate makeup. She stood there with a professional smile, inviting each visitor to the exhibition.

This was the most high-end gallery in Hiland City. The visitors to the exhibition, whether in formal attire or in exquisite dresses, were clearly of high social standing and taste by the look of their clothes.

Until a twenty-something girl in casual clothes appeared at the entrance of the gallery

Seeing the girl approaching, the receptionist's smile immediately faded, and she scowled in disgust, blocking the girl's way. "Sorry, you can't go in."

Stopped in her tracks, Ellinor raised an eyebrow, "Hmm? Why?"

The receptionist replied bluntly, "Because you don't seem to be one of our invited guests, so you can't go in. Please leave immediately!"

Ellinor frowned slightly. "If I'm not mistaken, the sign in front of your gallery says that the exhibition is free, doesn't it?"

The receptionist replied haughtily. "Yes, our exhibition is indeed free, but only for customers who can afford to buy. If you can't afford it, don't come and make a fuss!"

"Really? How do you know I can't afford it?" Ellinor smiled slightly.

The receptionist looked Ellinor up and down with a haughty and contemptuous gaze

A light blue shirt, loose jeans, and a pair of clean sneakers.

Perhaps because she was so beautiful, even the simplest clothes looked refreshing and good on her. But it was obvious that they were cheap clothes, and the style was not at all suited to their high-end and elegant gallery

With this thought, the receptionist became somewhat impatient, "Are you alright? If there's nothing wrong, can you not impede our work?"

"I do have something to do; I came to see the exhibition."

The receptionist laughed as if she had heard a joke, "Didn't you see all the customers who just entered our gallery? They're all dress

ed up. Looking at the way you're dressed, even if you went in to see the exhibition, you wouldn't be able to afford the cheapest painting.

Moreover, if we let someone like you in, other customers will question the standard of our gallery, they may even suspect that the paintings we exhibit are fakes!

So, can you stop causing trouble? Please leave immediately!"

Ellinor narrowed her eyes, "Who says you have to be formally dressed to attend an exhibition? I've never heard of that."

The receptionist was completely out of patience, "What's wrong if our gallery requires formal attire? Are you leaving or not? If you don't leave, I'll have to call the security!"

Ellinor nodded casually, "Sure, go ahead, you might as well call your manager over too."

The receptionist gave her a disdainful glance, "Our manager is busy waiting for an important guest, he doesn't have time to see someone like you!"

Just then, the gallery manager happened to come out to greet someone.

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"What's with all the ruckus at the entrance? Don't you know that it will give our gallery a bad reputation if the customers see this?"

The gallery manager walked over, clearly displeased

Seeing the manager coming, the receptionist quickly changed her attitude and turned to him with an innocent look

"Boss, I'm sorry" It's this woman over here causing a fuss, dressed all tacky, and insisting on barging into our gallery"

Upon hearing the situation, the manager turned to look. His stern expression immediately changed, and he quickly bent down in a bow, 'Ms. Mendoza, you've arrived

The receptionist was stunned, her face a picture of confusion, "Wait, she..."

Ellinor cracked a small smile. "Yes, I'm here. But it seems you're not too thrilled about letting someone in my attire enter to view the art?"

The manager's smile was strained. He shot a stern glance at the receptionist and quickly apologized, "Of course not! Ms. Mendoza, I'm truly sorry for any discomfort caused. She's just a temp and isn't familiar with our gallery's rules. Please don't be upset, I'll fire her immediately!

"Whether you fire her or not isn't my concern. But art should never be about dividing people into classes, what one wears to view art is their own business. This mindset of judging people by their outfits has got to change"

The manager nodded quickly, agreeing. "Ms. Mendoza, you're absolutely right. We'll take this as a lesson and correct our staffs attitude!

"Can I go in now?"

"Of course! Please, Ms. Mendoza, come right in!*

With that, Ellinor leisurely walked into the gallery.

The receptionist watched Ellinor enter with a puzzled look, "Who is she?"

"That's Ms. Mendoza, the most esteemed guest of our gallery today! If you offend her, you're in big trouble, got it?" The manager scolded sternly.

What?!

The esteemed guest the manager was waiting for was that shabbily dressed girl?

The receptionist couldn't believe it, "But she doesn't look rich at all! Who is she, really?"

The manager glanced at the unrepentant receptionist with disgust.

"You don't need to know! I'm officially telling you. You're fired! Go get your pay from the finance department and leave immediately. Our gallery doesn't need shallow employees like you!"

The receptionist was stunned; she hadn't expected to actually get fired. She panicked, "Boss, please don't fire me! I didn't mean it, give me another chance."

The manager, eager to attend to the esteemed guest, didn't have the time to deal with her and shook off her pleading grip. Disgusted, he brushed off where she had touched him and walked away without looking back."

"Boss... The receptionist, angry and unwilling, had no choice but to go to the finance department.

Inside the gallery, soothing classical music played. The guests mostly focused on Master Michell's famous signature pieces.

Ellinor stood alone in a quiet corner, looking contemplatively at a still-life painting on the wall.

Actually, she wasn't very interested in commercial exhibitions like this. She was here today because she heard that Master Michell would be attending.

According to information from Arnold Mendoza, Master Michell was her mother's teacher. In the limited clues she had, he was the only one who knew her mother's identity.

She hoped to take this opportunity to meet Master Michell and ask him about her mother.

Who was her mother exactly? Who was after her? Is she still alive?

At that moment, the gallery manager walked over with an earnest attitude, "Ms. Mendoza, is there a piece you're interested in? Let me introduce it to you"

Ellinor snapped back to reality. "Not right now. If I find anything I like, I'll ask you. For now, tell me when Master Michell will be attending"

Upon hearing this, the manager sighed, "I'm afraid there's been a change of plans Master Michell was supposed to attend, but his wife suddenly fell ill just before they were due to leave. He needs to stay overseas to take care of her, so he won't be able to attend the exhibition in our country for now."

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Ellinor frowned slightly, a little vexed

Master Michell couldn't come to China, and she couldn't go abroad to find him now.

For the past month, the Blanchet family had been searching for her whereabouts. If she left the country now, there would be an exit record, exposing her tracks.

During this time, she hadn't used her own identity for any transactions. She'd been using Chase Larios and Ida Gipson's cards to carry out her daily activities to avoid being tracked by the Blanchet family through big data.

She didn't have time to continue playing house with Theo.

The most pressing matter was to discover her mother's identity and what had happened years ago that drove her mother into a corner, making her unable to stay by her side.

If her mother was still alive, she had to find her!

If her mother was no longer in this world, she had to find out the cause of her death and avenge her!

Seeing Ellinor's lack of interest in the artwork here, the gallery manager said, 'Ms. Mendoza, if these paintings don't tickle your fancy, we have works by other artists. Shall I take you there?'

Ellinor reigned in her thoughts and asked directly, "Do you have any paintings by Lady Lotus?"

The gallery manager was taken aback, "We do, actually. We have two of Lady Lotus's paintings in this exhibition!.

Lady Lotus was a favored student of Master Michell. Every time Master Michell had an exhibition, he always included a few of his beloved student's works. However, it was rare for anyone to ask about this relatively obscure artist. Because Lady Lotus's style was quite unique and she always kept a low profile, her international renown wasn't very high.

"I'm surprised you like Lady Lotus's work!"

Ellinor didn't want to explain too much, "Where are the paintings? Take me to see them"

"Sure, this way, please!"

"Here they are, these two. They're said to be works from Lady Lotus."

The gallery manager pointed to two paintings hanging side by side on the wall.

One painting was of a man's silhouette, which made Ellinor feel an inexplicable sense of familiarity.

The other was a landscape painting that was very realistic.

Ellinor didn't say much, "I'll take both of these; please wrap them up for me"

The gallery manager liked this kind of decisive buyer who didn't ask about the price. He smiled politely and bowed, "Alright, please wait here for a moment. I'll get someone to take them down and wrap them up for you."

As the manager left, Ellinor stared at the paintings on the wall, lost in thought.

Her mother's painting style back then was warm, reflecting a carefree and happy period in her life, right?

The man's silhouette in the painting... was it someone her mother had once loved?

Could it be her biological father?

Just as Ellinor was pondering.

"Ms. Mendoza, long time no see."

A familiar male voice suddenly echoed from behind.

Ellinor paused, coming back to her senses. She turned around to see the familiar, handsome face reflected in her eyes.

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The man was smiling, his eyes twinkling with a mischievous yet passionate glint

Seeing Bartlett Rex, whom she hadn't seen for ages, Ellinor frowned in suspicion, "What are you doing here?"

Bartlett, in his finely tailored deep brown suit, exuded an elegance that was subtly tainted with a devilish charm deep within.

"I heard there were two paintings by Lady Lotus here, so I thought I'd try my luck."

"Try your luck? Mr. Rex, you're not exactly known for being lucky! Unfortunately for you, I've already bought the two paintings by Lady Lotus. Ellinor raised an eyebrow

Bartlett took a step closer to her, his smile deepening his gaze like an alluring invisible thread, "No, I am lucky I came here hoping to bump into you, and here you are!"

Ellinor pulled a face, finding him as irritating and flirty as ever.

She had previously expressed interest in buying the three paintings of Lady Lotus in Bartlett's gallery, but he not only refused to sell them to her but also flirted with her. Eventually she got those paintings through Theo.

So, it wasn't surprising that Bartlett knew about her fondness for Lady Lotus's paintings.

Plus, Bartlett and Theo were long time buddies, making it hard not to think they were in cahoots.

With these thoughts, a hint of caution flickered in Ellinor's eyes. "You came here to see me? Mr. Rex, what do you want?"

Bartlett squinted at her, looking deep into her eyes, "Yes, I need something"

"What is it?"

Bartlett chuckled, "Why don't we finish the exhibition first and then go grab a bite? It's been a long time, we can talk more over dinner, how about that?"

Ellinor wasn't interested in his invitation, "Sorry, I don't have that much time. Mr. Rex, if you have something to say, say it now! If it's not convenient to talk here, then I guess it's not urgent, and it doesn't matter if you don't say it!"

Bartlett was a bit hurt by her cold and indifferent attitude, and he didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Ellinor, we're friends, right?"

Ellinor remembered that when she fell into the water at Jonah Wyton's villa, it was Bartlett who helped her borrow clothes. She had agreed to be his friend at that time.

"Yeah, we are."

"As friends, could you be a little less cold to me?"

Ellinor frowned, "Just spit it out, what do you want? I don't like beating around the bush!*

Bartlett gave a wry smile and sighed, looking quite troubled, "Ellinor, stop treating me like a wolf, I just want to help you."

"Help me? With what?"

Bartlett leaned in a bit closer, staring intently at her face.

"Ellinor, while I don't know the specific reasons yet, I can tell that you've been wanting to find Lady Lotus. Maybe I can help you with this!"

Ellinor's eyes were focused, clearly intrigued by what he had to say

"You know where Lady Lotus is?"

Bartlett gave a mysterious smile, whetting her appetite, then purposely stopped talking. "Now, are you willing to have dinner with me?"

Ellinor furrowed her brows, not liking the suspense.