

## The Mbahsb 121

### The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride - Chapter 121

Finally, Ethan slowly stood up from the sofa.

As he did, he drew the attention of the people around him. Nobody knew who he was. All they could see was a superior-looking, tall man with cold, black eyes, as alienating yet dazzling as the sun. Everyone subconsciously felt drawn towards him.

He walked towards Fiona, shrouding her in his shadow. He looked down at her and the daughter next to her with frighteningly cold eyes and said in a low voice, "Was your kindness enough to give you the right to force your adopted daughter to get married as a substitute bride?"

Being stared at by him like this, Fiona shrank back. Any trace of arrogance she held earlier now disappeared. "Wh-what do you mean?" she stammered.

Ethan sneered coldly. "When my mother's family was rich and powerful, you clung to her like a parasite. Thinking you could profit from us in the future, you arranged for your daughter to marry her son when they grew up. Later, when my mother's financial situation declined, you regretted your decision. Not wanting your biological daughter to marry me, you had your adopted daughter do it instead. Was that the real reason why you adopted a daughter?"

Memories brought about by Ethan's words resurfaced in Fiona's mind.

Sylvia Larson...

Fiona hadn't heard that name in a long time.

Sylvia Larson was Ethan's biological mother. At the time, the Larson family was one of the richest and most powerful in the city. And Sylvia was beautiful—she was even considered the most beautiful girl in the city.

Ethan had gotten his good looks from his mother.

And even though Sylvia was born into a rich family, she had a pleasant personality and never put on airs. Fiona, on the other hand, came from an ordinary family. When the two girls were in college, Fiona deliberately tried to get close to Sylvia, gunning to become the rich girl's best friend.

Back then, Fiona had benefitted a lot from Sylvia's riches. Later, she suggested to Sylvia that their children get married, if one of them had a boy and the other, a girl.

That was how Fiona successfully tied herself to a rich and powerful family like the Larson's.

However, it wasn't part of her plan for the Larson family to decline so suddenly. As soon as Sylvia could no longer be considered rich, Fiona immediately cut off contact with her. The two of them never spoke afterwards.

It wasn't until about ten years later that Fiona heard that Sylvia had died. She had practically forgotten about Sylvia by then, and even when she heard the news of her death, Fiona didn't give a damn.

"How dare you accuse me of such nonsense!" Fiona said, albeit her voice faltered.

But she couldn't say anything to defend herself, because Ethan was right.

Wide-eyed, Janet turned to look at Ethan.

Ethan had never told her before about how the engagement came about.

In the distance, Garrett's heart leapt to his throat. He was worried that something big was about to happen.

The subject of Ethan's mother was very touchy to him, and he seldom mentioned her. It had been almost ten years since Garrett first met Ethan in high school. But he still didn't know his friend's family too well.

Something big had happened back then, which led to the collapse of the Larson family and the rise of the Lester family.

But all rich and powerful families were complicated behind the curtain. Although the Lester family was powerful on the surface, they were rotten on the inside. Their dirty secrets were just concealed well.

The onlookers began to talk even more harshly about Fiona.

"Get this old woman out of our sight! She spread rumors about her adopted daughter!"

"How shameless! She's a liar and a hypocrite!"

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The more people that pointed their fingers at Fiona, the more overwhelmed she got. She was so enraged that she needed to take a few deep breaths to regulate her blood pressure. How she wished in that moment she could strangle Janet to death!

Thankfully, she managed to hold herself back. She racked her brains for a way to redeem her reputation, but found that she couldn't refute Ethan's statement at all.

There was no way she could admit to the dirty things she had done. Her only choice was to retreat.

Seeing that her mother was nearing defeat, Jocelyn was furious. She opened her mouth to give Janet an earful, but was interrupted by Fiona.

"Calm down, Jocelyn." Fiona shook her head. Then, she whispered into her daughter's ear, "We've lost. It'll be worse if we try to defend ourselves."

Jocelyn wrinkled her nose with disdain. "Mom, I can't stand her arrogance! When she still lived with us, she never fought back when we beat her or scolded her. That bitch deserves to be punished. Who does she think she is, anyway? She's just a bitch who was abandoned by her biological parents!"

Fiona's eyes went wide and her hand flew to cover Jocelyn's mouth. They weren't in the confines of their own home. If Jocelyn kept talking like this, things would just get worse.

"We're leaving."

They couldn't stay here a second longer. Fiona shot Janet one last murderous glare before turning around to leave with Jocelyn and the timid Bernie.

As they stormed off, Fiona gritted her teeth angrily.

She was never going to let Janet go. She needed to take revenge.

After the Lind family of three left, the commotion died down and the guest went back to drinking and talking.

Just as Janet was about to approach Ethan, several colleagues stopped her.

“Lind, you look amazing today. If I didn’t see you quarreling with those women, I wouldn’t have recognized you.”

Gerda grinned from ear to ear, with a slice of cake in one hand.

“Yes. It was a good chance to make things clear.” Janet smiled back helplessly.

As she spoke, she craned her neck to look for Ethan, only to find that his broad back was to her. Shortly after, he disappeared in the crowd that surrounded her.

“I knew you weren’t the kind of person they made you out to be!” Gerda said enthusiastically, pumping her fist in the air.

Many employees from the Larson Group were at this party. After the altercation just now, they all knew the truth. They all came over and toasted to Janet’s victory.

“We’re sorry, Lind. We used to think you just lived off of your foster parents’ money.”

“Little did we know that your foster family is the worst! They’re rich, yet they pretended to be poor and miserable here!”

“Yeah. We didn’t know the truth and gossiped about you behind your back. We’re really sorry.”

Janet smiled faintly and her eyes softened. She wasn’t good at this kind of stuff. What with the crowd that surrounded her, she could only smile and politely clink glasses with everyone. “It’s okay, you guys. It doesn’t matter now. Just forget it.”

After the crowd dispersed after a while, she let out a long sigh.

Now that she had cleared up the truth in front of so many people, no one would dare accuse her of being ungrateful again.

It was already past midnight when the party ended.

A cold full moon hung in the sky, surrounded by twinkling stars.

The Larson Group arranged for luxury cars to send the guests home from the party, which drove off one by one.

Janet and Ethan were also led to a car that would take them home.

On the way, Ethan sat in the backseat silently. His eyelids drooped slightly, but the corners of his jaw were tight. Janet felt he looked a little melancholy and depressed.

After taking a careful look at him, she quietly looked away. But she couldn't help but peer at him from the corner of her eye.

"What's the matter?" Ethan saw right through her. He looked up at her and rested his elbow on the car window.

Janet watched his movements. His fingers were so elegant and beautiful, as if they were carefully carved by an artist.

But the rest of him looked quite rough. After getting along with him for a long time, Janet slowly uncovered a lot of strange things about him.

He turned out to be quite meticulous in whatever he did. He always took a shower before sleeping and when he woke up, and he always folded his clothes neatly. He liked to watch live football games without subtitles despite them being from different countries. It seemed that he could understand without difficulty. This made Janet suspect that he knew several foreign languages.

Clenching the hemline of her dress tightly, Janet looked at him earnestly and asked in a soft voice, "Can you tell me something about your mother?"

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A silence fell over the car. Even the driver didn't dare to make a sound.

Outside the car window, the trees swayed as the wind whistled through their branches, like a ghost singing in the night.

At Janet's question, Ethan's expression darkened.

"Well, if you don't want to talk about it, just forget it. I'm sorry I brought it up," Janet apologized immediately, sensing that she had said something wrong. "I was just curious. I didn't mean to offend you."

She turned around and focused on the scenery outside, watching the trees and scattered lights. Truth be told, she was a little disappointed.

She didn't know what was with her tonight. Maybe all the booze from the party gave her the courage to ask Ethan something personal.

To her disappointment, she failed at the first try.

The wind blew in through the window. Suddenly, Janet felt a warm hand holding hers.

She turned around to meet Ethan's deep eyes. "Didn't you want to know about my mother? You're sitting so far from me. How could I tell you without shouting?"

Janet looked around and found that it was true. Her whole body was pressed against the window, as though she wanted to put as much distance between her and Ethan as possible.

Just as she was about to scoot over, the car came to a halt. They had arrived at their apartment.

"Already?" Janet muttered unhappily. Ethan hadn't spilled any beans yet.

Seeing the disappointment in her eyes, Ethan got out of the car then helped her out. He immediately shrugged off his coat and wrapped it around her shoulders. "Let's take a walk."

The man's coat was oversized on her. Being enveloped by it, only Janet's bright, clear eyes could be seen. She nodded eagerly, her shining eyes bobbing up and down. "Okay!"

Together, they walked to the benches in the small park near their apartment. Purple vines crept up the columns, looking especially enchanting.

"Come on, then. Tell me already!" Janet tugged at Ethan's sleeve, her eyes full of curiosity. She looked like a little child asking for candy.

Ethan pursed his lips into a straight line, and his expression darkened again. But with a heavy sigh, he started to talk.

"My mother was born into a rich family, but her family's financial situation plummeted fast later. She was never a mistress, like the rumors claimed. My father had forced her, which led to her pregnancy. At the time, she couldn't fight against him, and he was the one who claimed she was just a mistress. Because her health was in bad shape, she couldn't have an abortion. So she gave birth to me."

Janet tilted her head to look at him. His tone was calm, but there was a frighteningly cold undertone.

Plus, Ethan omitted how his mother died. There must've been more to the story.

But she didn't ask. She could tell that his mother held a special spot in his heart.

Yet in order to protect Janet earlier, Ethan had brought up the subject of his mother in front of all those people.

"I have to thank your mother, because you turned out to be a great man." Janet smiled and wrapped her arms around his waist.

Her cheek was pressed against his chest. There was always a faint smell of mint on his body. She couldn't help but bury her nose into his clothes, taking in his scent.

Ethan chuckled and rested his chin on her head. In a low, hoarse voice, he asked, "What's gotten into you? Aren't you afraid that I will eat you up?"

Janet's heart skipped a beat. With a cunning look in her eyes, she raised her head and pressed her lips against his.

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The quiet night seemed to spark up the romance between the couple. Janet somehow felt fearless.

She and Ethan hugged each other in the quiet park.

Ethan gently lifted her up and hoisted her on his lap. His touch made Janet quiver as she began panting. Ethan clasped her neck with one hand and nipped her bottom lip.

Perhaps because they were outdoors that Janet felt more nervous. The furtive night made it all the more thrilling. Janet was afraid, but she wanted more.

Ethan wrapped his hand around her slender waist and pulled her closer to him. Their chests brushed against each other. Janet was wearing a long silk dress that made his body temperature spike up in an instant.

Janet grew breathless as Ethan deepened the kiss. He slowly loosened his grip after a while, and the two stared at each other, gasping for breath.

“Who taught you to bite people like this?”

Ethan asked, peppering soft kisses all over her cheeks and eyes.

Leaning against Ethan’s strong chest, Janet looked up and saw his Adam’s apple bob up and down.

“Well, I learned it from you. Did I do it wrong?” she asked, touching her flaming cheek.

Ethan chuckled and looked at her. Once her breathing returned to normal, he leaned forward and pressed his lips against hers. This time, the kiss was soft and chaste, unlike his usual hungry, aggressive kisses.

Ethan bit her lower lip and gently sucked it. Then, he opened his eyes and saw the passion on her face and how much she enjoyed his kisses.

Janet let out a soft moan and stuck out her tongue to lick Ethan’s lips. However, she then realized Ethan was watching her, so she shyly shrank in his arms.

Ethan seldom kissed her this gently, without lust but just pure affection. He wrapped his arms around Janet and rested his head on her shoulder. “Now, I have you.”

Hearing his muffled voice, an inexplicable feeling welled up in Janet’s heart. She stroked his hair and realized they only had each other. “Yes. We have each other.”

Ethan hummed softly as he gently bit her slender neck and earlobes.

His hot breath blowing against her skin made Janet shiver with pleasure. “Stop kissing me. I’m still on my period,” she mumbled as a blush flamed her cheeks.

Her body felt sticky, and her raging hormones made her uncomfortable.

“I know. I’m only kissing you. I won’t do anything else.” Ethan could barely breathe. The need to make love to her grew intense with every passing minute.

Ethan stood up and lifted Janet in his arms in one swift motion. “You’re light as a feather.” He frowned, trailing his fingers against her hip. “You don’t have flesh in your body.”

“I’m already heavy.” Janet blushed. Her heart skipped a beat. Fortunately, no one was around. She felt conscious about making out with Ethan outdoors.

Moreover, she didn’t expect him to lift her with one hand. She quickly wrapped her arms around his shoulders. His towering frame made her feel tiny.

Ethan immediately took her home, and the two fell on the sofa and continued to kiss.

“Wait, wait, I have something important to do.” Janet quickly turned her head and stopped him from deepening the kiss.

Ethan groaned and buried his face on her bosom, groaning irritably. His body was burning with passion. However, he stopped kissing her and gently bit her neck.

Having no other choice, he stood up and ran a hand through his hair.

Janet nodded. Once Ethan went to the bathroom, she took out her phone from the sofa and sent a message to Brandon.

“Mr. Larson, thank you for organizing the party tonight. Everything went well.”

She thought about it and added, “Things went on just like you said. Many colleagues have apologized to me. I’m sorry for all the trouble, and thank you very much for helping me.”

It was Brandon, who had invited the Lind family members to the party and asked Janet to clarify herself in public.

As soon Janet sent the messages, Ethan’s phone on the table lit up.

Since the room was still dark and the lights were still off, the messages caught Janet’s attention.

His phone lit up twice, right after Janet sent messages to Brandon.

She frowned and looked up at Ethan’s phone.

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The scorching sunshine filtered through the curtains. The faint smell of disinfectant wafted in the air.

It had been a few weeks since Janet came to see Hannah. She felt a little guilty about not being able to see her often. Ever since Janet started working, she had been dealing with unfortunate incidents that seemed to take all her time.

Hannah’s liver transplant surgery was scheduled for 10 o’clock today. Janet still had half an hour to talk with her.

“Don’t be nervous. You won’t feel any pain after they administer anesthesia.”

Janet smiled and combed Hannah’s gray hair.

Hannah gently patted Janet’s hand and smiled at her. “I have no fear, my little girl. I know you’re busy with work. You don’t have to wait here for me. The nurses in the hospital are very considerate. You need to stop worrying about me.”

Tears welled up in Janet’s eyes. She knew Hannah was in so much pain, yet the old woman was smiling to make sure Janet didn’t worry about her.

“Don’t worry about me. I’m not a child.” Janet couldn’t help but smile at her.

Hannah suddenly pouted and flicked her gaze to the door. “That young man has been waiting outside for a long time. Why don’t you let him in?”

Janet turned around and saw Ethan leaning against the railing in the corridor. His gaze occasionally flitted toward them to see if they were okay.

Janet hadn't figured out how to introduce him yet.

"Nice to meet you." Ethan walked into the ward with a polite smile. He had changed into a brown windbreaker today. The man looked handsome as if he had come straight out of a magazine photoshoot.

Janet had never seen Ethan in such clothes before. She was taken aback for a moment.

After a moment's hesitation, she said, "This is Ethan. Well... You know about the marriage the Lind family had arranged for me."

Hannah wasn't aware of Janet's secret. She only knew the Lind family had arranged a man for Janet and that she was already married.

Hannah's face broke into an ecstatic smile as she examined Ethan's face. "Wow, what a handsome young man!" She patted Janet's hand. "He looks like a good, decent man. Janet, you are a lucky girl!"

Ethan smiled and glanced at the clock on the wall. "It's about time."

Janet's heart leaped to her throat when she saw the nurses wheeling Hannah into the operation theater. "She will be okay, right?" she asked in a tremulous voice.

"Yes, everything will be fine." Ethan patted her back comfortingly.

It was a long procedure that lasted all afternoon.

Hannah had to stay in the hospital for at least three weeks for observation to see if her body had adapted to the new liver.

After the operation, Hannah had to rest on the bed as the doctors administered an IV drip. She needed someone to take care of her.

"I want to take a few days off and take care of Hannah. But I'm not sure if the company will agree." Janet let out a weary sigh as she walked out of the doctor's office.

"You should call them and explain your situation. I'm sure they'll understand. After all, it's a reasonable request," Ethan suggested.

"But I have already taken many days off this month." Janet's shoulders slumped with dejection.

"How do you know if you don't give it a try?" Ethan asked

Janet sighed and called Tiffany.

"You want to ask for leave? No problem at all. How many days do you need? How about two weeks?" Tiffany asked in a serious tone. Janet was taken aback. She thought Tiffany was mocking her.

"No, no, no! Thank you so much." Janet frantically shook her head. "Forget I called."



“No, I’m serious. How many days do you need?” Tiffany asked. Brandon had called Tiffany earlier and spoken to her. Therefore, she didn’t dare to frighten Janet in any way. Tiffany didn’t know much about Janet, but she was shocked the CEO of the company had personally called her, instructing her to approve Janet’s leave.

“Well, two days. Is that okay?” Janet asked cautiously.

“Okay, okay. Sure. Your leave is approved.” Tiffany laughed.

Hannah recovered well after the operation. The doctors said she would be discharged real soon.

Janet had already taken several days off, so she had to return to work. However, she didn’t work overtime and came to the hospital as soon as she got off work to check on Hannah. During the day, she hired a nurse to take care of Hannah. Initially she was against the idea of a full-time nurse, because she couldn’t afford it. Ethan ended up paying part of the fee to make it happen.

Three weeks later, Janet packed the bags and helped Hannah out of the hospital.

“Hannah, would you like to live with me?”

“Oh, no. I’m old, and I’m used to living in the countryside. Take me back home. I won’t be comfortable living in big apartments here.” Hannah smiled happily. She was pleased to see that Janet led a better life here.

Janet had no choice but to grant Hannah’s wish. She called a taxi at the gate of the hospital and decided to drop Hannah back at her home in the countryside.

Janet looked out the window and saw them traverse a desolate path. At that moment, it dawned on her that the car was driving in the wrong direction.

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“Excuse me, you are driving in the wrong direction.”

When Janet looked out of the window, she found that they were already in the wild. The place was uninhabited and was surrounded by an endless stretch of trees.

The car was winding across an unknown path.

Hannah knew her way home better than anyone else. She also realized they were traversing an unknown terrain.

“Ah, this is not the way to our home! Are you deliberately going in the wrong direction?” Hannah anxiously shouted.

Sensing something was wrong, Janet quickly grabbed the driver’s seat. “Stop the car! We need to get out!”

The driver glanced at them through the rearview mirror. He was wearing a mask, leaving only his eyes visible. Before they knew it, he hit on the gas.

Janet and Hannah jerked backwards. Hannah had just undergone the surgery, so she weakly collapsed on the seat. Her lips turned pale in an instant.

The taxi moved in an unknown direction, circling along the winding mountain road.

“I told you to stop the car. If you don’t, I’ll call the police!” Janet took out her phone from her bag and quickly called the police. “Help! A taxi driver has abducted me. I don’t know where I am. There is a maple forest in front of me.”

“Ma’am, calm down, please. Do you remember the license plate’s number? Could you be more specific about where you are and what’s around you? Any clue would be helpful to us.”

Janet couldn’t tell where she was. She couldn’t see the license plate number now and didn’t pay attention to it when she got into the car.

“No. I don’t know. I don’t remember. I’m terrified! Please help me.” Janet’s voice trembled with fright.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. Any landmark or any distinct thing you can spot?”

“No, nothing. It’s a desolate place surrounded by mountains and trees.”

The driver sneered and turned a deaf ear to Janet’s words. Then, he suddenly turned the steering wheel and made a sharp turn.

Sitting in the back seat, Janet jumped with every bump. As the driver took a sharp turn, Janet’s phone flew from her hand and fell down. Janet fumbled around and finally picked up the phone. Unfortunately, by then, the call got disconnected.

Janet propped herself up and looked out of the window. The wind was like a sharp knife, slashing her face.

Just as Janet tried to jump out of the car, her gaze fell on Hannah, who had passed out in her seat.

Janet could easily jump out of the car and escape. But Hannah was old and was just discharged from the hospital. Therefore, Janet couldn’t leave Hannah alone in the car.

Janet took out her wallet, gathered all the money, and angrily threw it at the driver. “I’ll give you all my money. Let us go!”

The driver narrowed his eyes and chuckled. “You bitch! What’s the use of your small bills?”

He ignored Janet’s pleas and drove into a grove.

Not knowing what else to do, Janet called Ethan right away.

When the phone got connected, she shouted, “Ethan, Ethan... the taxi driver has abducted me and Hannah. It looks like we are in a maple forest. But I don’t know the specific location. No one is here. It’s about an hour’s drive from the city...”

Janet controlled her emotions and tried to calmly describe her situation to Ethan.

“Do you have anything to protect yourself? Try escaping or negotiating with the driver. I will be there in 20 minutes.”

Janet felt a sense of invisible security. Ethan's calmness somehow made her believe she was fine, and that he was coming for her. She trusted him.

However, she was too frightened to notice that Ethan's voice had never been this cold and serious before.

Hearing that Janet was on the phone, the driver hit the brakes.

Janet's forehead rammed against the seat, and she cried out in pain. She hurriedly fumbled in her bag. As soon as she touched a pen, she heard the door open.

"You \*\*\* bitch! Who are you calling?" The driver grabbed fistfuls of Janet's hair and dragged her out of the car. Then, he snatched her phone.

"Ah! Let go of me!" Janet shouted in horror, kicking her legs and struggling to escape.

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Janet thrashed around, struggling to escape. She tried biting his hand and kicked her legs. But she was no match to the driver. He was a strong man who effortlessly dragged her out of the car.

Hannah wanted to help Janet, but the driver kicked her. "You old bitch, get away from me!"

Then, he slammed the door shut and locked Hannah in the car.

"Hannah!" Janet screamed as a lone tear trickled down from the corner of her eye. When the driver closed the door, Janet quickly took the pen and stabbed it into his palm.

"Ouch! Damn it!" The driver groaned in pain. The man's face turned scarlet red and the blue veins on his forehead popped out. He quickly grabbed his wrist, and the blood trickled down from the tip of the pen.

Without looking back, Janet seized the opportunity to escape and ran into the forest.

The driver grew furious. He quickly took off his mask and pulled the pen from his palm. He sucked on his wound and spat out the blood. "Damn you, bitch!" he bellowed.

He grabbed the knife on his belt and chased after Janet.

Janet ran as fast as she could.

After running past the maple forest, she arrived at a green cornfield. The cornstalks towered above her, swaying with the wind. They were taller than an average man's weight.

Janet couldn't run anymore. She bent down and began gasping for breath.

All the running had exhausted her.

She turned around and found that the driver was still chasing after her.

Knowing that she was no match for the driver, Janet decided to hide in the cornfield behind the lofty cornstalks.

The wind blew the corn leaves, and the sound of footsteps became louder and resonant.

Huddling in the cornfield, Janet held her breath and carefully listened to the sound of the footsteps.

“Bitch, I know you’re in here!” Janet’s heart leaped to her throat when she heard that.

As the footsteps grew louder, the corn leaf above her suddenly parted. The driver grinned down at her, looking like the devil.

“I found you, bitch!”

Janet let out a piercing scream. She tried running away but the driver grabbed her hair and dragged her out. Janet fell to the ground with a loud thud.

“You bitch! You shouldn’t have made the phone call. And how dare you attack me?!” The driver angrily dragged Janet out of the cornfield with a ferocious look on his face. He squatted before Janet and slapped her face twice.

“Let me go! I will give you more money!” The sharp pain made Janet dizzy; her vision grew blurry.

She could taste the rancid taste of blood as they slid down from the corner of her mouth.

The driver grabbed her chin and eyed her with lust. Then, he pulled out his knife and tore Janet’s shirt open. His jaw dropped when as he looked at her milky white skin. “Oh!” He moaned. “Gosh, you’re beautiful! We can have some fun before I kill you.”

Janet struggled and scratched the man’s face. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and her chest heaved violently. “Don’t even think of touching me. I will \*\*\* kill you!”

The driver frowned and touched the wound on his face. Anger blazed in his eyes. He slapped Janet and ripped off her shirt. “Fuck you, bitch! I will give you a moment to enjoy it!”

### **The Mysterious Billionaire and His Substitute Bride - Chapter 129**

Twenty minutes ago.

The Larson Group executives were in a conference with another high-profile company.

Ethan’s phone had been vibrating for quite a while, but he chose to ignore it the first couple of times. When the phone buzzed again and he finally glanced at the caller ID, his frown relaxed.

He raised a hand to signal a halt to the meeting. “I’m sorry, but I need to take this call,” he said, proceeding to answer his phone without waiting for the other men’s response.

As Ethan listened to Janet’s words, his face slowly darkened. His body grew tense, and a heavy pressure was palpable in the air.

Garrett turned to Ethan and noted how tight his grip was on his phone, as well as the slight tremor of his hand.

“What happened?” Garrett asked as soon as Ethan hung up.

But the latter barely acknowledged him. “Sorry, this meeting will have to be postponed,” Ethan announced. He stood up and walked out of the room.

The men looked at each other, dumbfounded, but none of them dared to raise a question.

Garrett hurried after Ethan and asked him again, "What's wrong?"

Ethan closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Send out all our helicopters to look for a maple forest in the periphery of the city."

Garrett needed no further explanation. He nodded and rushed to do as he had been ordered.

He knew that something had happened to Ethan's wife.

Moments later, five helicopters hovered over the city, scouring for a particular patch of woods.

Ethan was on one of the machines, sitting with back ramrod straight and his eyes straight ahead. He was barely keeping his anger in check.

Just then, the radio crackled, and Garrett's voice came through the noise of the propellers in full action. "We've found it. There's a maple forest just outside the main highway into the city. I'm sending the exact location to your phone."

Ethan cursed under his breath and instructed his pilot to turn around. The helicopter took several seconds to make a turn, and then it was speeding toward the southeast part of the city.

Meanwhile...

After being slapped and then running for a long time, Janet now had no strength at all, but she was still struggling.

She stared up at the sky in despair, and thought she heard the distant rumble of a helicopter approaching.

"You bitch, I'm gonna fuck your brains out," the driver said with an evil grin on his face. He undid his belt, took it off, and used it to tie Janet's hands together.

Before he could tighten the binding, however, someone pulled him by the shoulder and sent him falling on his back.

Dazed and disoriented, the man had to blink a few times and collect his bearings. When his vision finally cleared, he found himself surrounded by a group of people wearing all black.

He knew that something had happened to Ethan's wife.

"Cut his balls off," Ethan commanded, his voice cold as steel.

He stood against the light streaming through the trees, so the driver only caught his tall, suited silhouette.

"Who are you people?" the driver demanded as he cowered and tried to crawl away.

No one answered him, but one of the men in black stepped forward, brandishing a knife.

Shortly after, a howl of agony rang out in the woods.

Ethan strode over to a barely conscious Janet. He crouched beside her and untied her hands before carefully wrapping her in his suit jacket.

He gathered her close in his arms and whispered, "Don't be scared, baby."

Janet's eyes were still glazed, and she instinctively panicked at his sudden proximity. She flailed in his embrace. "Let go of me! Somebody, help! You bastard! If you dare to touch me, I will kill you!"

The sheer desperation in her voice made his heart ache.

Ethan grabbed both of her hands and tried to soothe her. Although his voice was calm and comforting, his face was the complete opposite. His brows were knitted, his lips tight, and a deadly storm was brewing in his eyes.

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Ethan carefully carried Janet into the car. As he laid her down on the backseat gently, the cool breeze of early autumn blew on her ruddy cheeks.

"Do you know who I am?" he whispered. Seeing Janet in such a state made Ethan feel terrible.

He ran his fingers through Janet's messy hair. There were two obvious palm marks on Janet's face, and there was a streak of blood at the corner of her mouth.

His heart ached so much that he didn't dare to touch Janet's face. Holding Janet's shivering body in his arms, he gently tried to comfort her. "It's okay now. I'm here. You're safe. Don't cry."

Janet clenched the waistcoat of Ethan's striped suit and looked up at him, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Only then did she return to her senses. She threw herself into Ethan's arms and sobbed, "Oh, Ethan, it's really you..."

"Yes, Janet. It's me." Ethan was very patient. He gently fixed the suit jacket he put on her and put his arm around her shoulders. With his head slightly lowered, he was able to press his forehead against hers.

He kissed her earlobe gently. "Does it still hurt?"

Janet couldn't answer him. She could only sob uncontrollably and bury her face into Ethan's chest.

It was as though a boat that had sailed alone for so long had finally found a harbor amidst a violent storm.

Ethan rubbed her back reassuringly and gestured at his men to bring some tissue.

His men, on the other hand, were in a state of shock.

Their boss had always been an icy cold, serious man. Yet here he was now, wiping the tears of a woman as though he was patiently coaxing an aggrieved child.

"Your eyes are all red and puffy from the crying. They won't look pretty for a while," he whispered in a low voice. Only Janet could hear him.

At that, the woman stopped crying abruptly. Her teary eyes turned angry.

“Calm down, babe. You look good no matter what—even if your eyes are red and puffy. So stop crying. It hurts me to see you cry.” Seeing that she still had the energy to glare at him, Ethan finally heaved a sigh of relief.

But when his eyes landed on the stark slap marks on her face, his expression darkened once more.

Damn it.

Castration was too good a punishment for the driver.

It took a few more minutes for Janet to calm down. She was really scared.

As Ethan’s men castrated that damned driver, piercing shrieks echoed across the forest. After screaming in pain for a while, the driver finally ran out of breath and fell silent, whimpering quietly.

Ethan covered Janet’s ears before turning to his men and ordering coldly, “Keep him alive. No matter what, get him to tell you who’s behind this.”

Ethan rubbed her back reassuringly and gestured at his men to bring some tissue.

A few minutes later, Ethan’s men dragged the driver away.

With a tissue in her hand, Janet blew her nose and wiped her tear-stained eyes. The tip of her nose and cheeks were red, and her eyelashes were wet with tears.

“Ethan, were you able to find Hannah? How is she?” Janet asked in a broken voice.

Ethan cupped Janet’s face and wiped her remaining tears with his thumb. “Don’t worry. I’ve asked someone to look after her.”

When Janet finally calmed down, Ethan took her to see Hannah.

Ethan had rescued Hannah from the car. She was fine, but since the driver had kicked her just now, her arm showed a little bruising.

“Oh, my God! Are you okay? I’m glad you’re safe. I was so worried about you.” Hannah stroked Janet’s hair. When she saw the red marks on Janet’s face, she couldn’t help but burst into tears. “How on earth did this happen?”

Janet averted her gaze. Biting her lower lip, she couldn’t answer.

Then, her eyes wandered over to Ethan. She quietly glanced at the dozen men in black suits that surrounded them. Confused, she tugged Ethan’s sleeve questioningly.

“Why are you dressed like that? And where did all these people come from? They look so scary.”