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"I know it now."

In a few short minutes, Sebastian's composed himself back to his old, cold and calculating self. He stood up and left with purposeful strides.

Frederick watched him, fingers clenched tightly around his cane.

Soon after, Tim Holt, Frederick's butler, entered. Upon observing the strange look on his master's face, he inquired with concern. "Is everything all right? How is Mr. Sebastian? How did the girl know what was going on? Even we didn't." He fired off one question after another.

The most pertinent question, however, he saved for last.

Frederick's expression turned icy. "I do not know. Perhaps, Sebastian's killing of the dog was not the first murder she had witnessed."

"What do you mean by that?" Tim pressed, intrigued.

"When Rufus Wand brought his wife over, Sebastian was just ten years old. It was at that age when he killed that dog. After that, Rufus seldom let his daughter visit us."

"So, when Mr. Sebastian accidentally murdered at age eleven, the girl shouldn't have seen it. How could this be?" the butler reasoned, intent on solving this mystery.

Rufus Wand was Sasha's father. During that unfortunate incident when Sasha caught a glimpse of Sebastian's illness taking over, it had scarred her, which was why they do not visit as they used to. Rufus did not explicitly state his reasons for the reduced frequency of visits, but it was not subtle to the average observer.

Sebastian was eleven when he started his treatments.

But how on earth did the girl know about what happened there? The timeline doesn't add up.

The only people who knew about this were Tim, Mr. Hayes Sr., and the doctor. To tie up loose ends, Frederick had the doctor taken care of.

So how did she know?

How was it possible that the sweet, obedient boy turned into one with deceit and rebellion in his heart? Had he neglected his son?

Frederick cast an eye towards the door through which Sebastian had departed with uncharacteristic ferocity.

In a ward at the People's Hospital in town, the three children stood staring at their mother with a heavily bandaged head. Tears ran freely down their cheeks.

"This is all Daddy's fault. Why couldn't he rescue Mommy earlier? I told him she was in danger," Matteo cried.

Ian stood silently. But underneath his grievous appearance, for the first time, he felt disappointment towards their father who couldn't even protect one woman.

"Guys, I think we should get another daddy," Vivian sobbed. "He can't even protect Mommy. Let's go to Uncle Solomon, okay?" Her brothers stared at her in disbelief.

At this moment, Luke entered with Sasha's medication. His knees buckled when he heard Vivian's proposal.

"Children, let us all calm down. This incident happened so quickly; it caught your father completely unaware. If he had known, he would have done everything in his power to prevent that from happening and keep your mother safe."

"Would he really ?" Matteo asked.

"Of course, Mr. Matteo. Do you remember who rescued you when you were kidnapped?"

Luke liked Matteo because he was the smartest child, and also because he was the easiest to lead into conforming among the three.

Sure enough, at those words, Matteo began to doubt his earlier assertion.

"And you, Mr. Ian," Luke continued, taking advantage of the moment. "You've seen it with your own eyes how your father treats your mother. When your mother took you away to Yartran, who appeared when she was being bullied?"

Ian was embarrassed as well. He said nothing.

Luke turned to Vivian.

Of course, she did not mean what she said about changing her father. Solomon was no relation of hers; she spoke figuratively. But it was the intensity of her speech that struck Luke the most; it was a huge contrast to her simple mind. When he approached her, Vivian ran to her mother and clung on to her.

"Don't try to change my mind. I don't like him! It was because of him that Mommy keeps getting hurt over and over again. Uncle Solomon would never allow that. I want him!"

She spoke so loudly that Luke covered the space between them in two strides and clasped her mouth shut.

"Alright, young lady. Say no more, we will go to Uncle Solomon right now, okay?" He was mortified that Sebastian, who was at the doctor's office, would come back and hear her.

With Vivian in his arms, Luke marched out of the ward. Her brothers followed suit.

When Sebastian returned to the ward, having obtained the latest updates from the doctor, there was no one in there except the unconscious Sasha.

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Did Luke take them?

He pulled a chair and sat in it, turning his attention to the report clutched in his hand.

Sebastian spent the past two days in the hospital without returning to his office. He attributed the uneasy feeling that was haunting him to fear of Sasha's death.

He squinted at the report.

As a doctor, Sasha had struck her head with such precision using the hairpiece without killing herself. However, there were damages to the nerves in her brain. She might not be the same when she wakes up.

May not be the same, in what sense?

Will she lose her mind? Her sight?

He balled up the report in his fist. His mind was cast back to the day at the hotel.

Sasha was intense and passionate. It was something Sebastian had experienced on several occasions. First, she faked her death and left the country with her two newborns. On the yacht, she had stabbed herself just to expose Xandra. And that time when Matteo was in trouble, she went on a solo mission to rescue her son.

She wasn't afraid to die for her children.

He did not expect the day to come when she would use her life to defend his secret for him.

Is she really that courageous in the face of death?

His fingers ached from the tension. Back at the hotel when she was about to expose his secret, a murderous intent leaped to his heart before he could stop it.

At that very second, he thought he was going to kill her.

However, she would rather sacrifice herself than expose his secret.

The irony was painful.

Sebastian ripped up the report in anger and threw it into the bin. He looked up with bloodshot eyes and cursed. "Serves you right for being stabbed. You saved a man who has been constantly a thorn by your side. Are you stupid ?"

Insults and sarcasm were the only way he knew how to communicate with her.

Nevertheless, he couldn't bring himself to keep up the tirade. The lump in his throat was getting bigger, impeding his speech.

The buzzing of his phone spared Sebastian. "Hello?" he cleared his throat, looking out the window as he picked up.

"Mr. Hayes, we're on to something," his guard said. "The doctor who hypnotized Ms. Wand was not an acquaintance of Dr. Kaye. But we did a facial reconstruction on him. Turns out he's a student of psychology from Moranta."

"What else?" Sebastian demanded.

"We know Philip Emmanuel opened his bank account."

Upon piecing the information together, Sebastian was on his feet, with a terrible aura of cold fury about him that seemed to lower the temperature of the room.

His guard sensed it over the phone. "And what's more, Mr. Hayes," he concluded hastily. "the journalist has been interrogated. Someone wanted to find out about us. It's the Emmanuels."

This time, there was no mistaking the deafening roar of silent rage on the other side.

"Never mention the Eternal Group to me ever again," said Sebastian quietly.

"Yes, Mr. Hayes."

"Confiscate every asset belonging to the Emmanuels; send the evidence to the cops, and tell them that without my permission, no Emmanuel is allowed out. Especially. Mathilda. Emmanuel."

At the last sentence, Sebastian spat out each word with vehemence.

This is madness! They're over the line!

I will root out every single one of them and force their family name into extinction!

His uncontrollable rage might have something to do with his genetic deformity.

On the same day that afternoon, the Emmanuel family within the walls of their home in Imperial Garden was not expecting a calamity to befall their family.

Sasha woke up at night. She stared at the inviting warmth of the yellow bulb above her. The room was spinning as she worked hard to recall the events that had landed her in her present predicament.

She had used up all her leave for the month. If she didn't return to Clear Hospital soon, she wouldn't be entitled to her incentive.

With that notion, she attempted to get out of bed.

Before she could prop herself upright, a searing pain at the side of her head forced her eyes shut. It was so intense and sudden, she could not help but let out a cry before falling back down.

What is going on? Why did my head hurt so much?

Clenching her teeth to steady herself, she gingerly touched her head. A series of hurried footsteps and a familiar voice greeted her ears.

"You're awake? Don't move too much, you're still hurt." The voice was low and pleasant, tinged with panicked concern.

Sasha froze in surprise, not believing what she heard. Gazing upwards slowly, she saw the familiar broad frame and handsome features, like the magnum opus of a master artist, striding towards her.

It felt like a century ago that she had this déjà vu of him approaching her. She lay for a long time motionless, staring at him.

The blank, confused look in her beautiful eyes caused Sebastian's heart to sink

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She doesn't recognize me?

Can she remember me? Am I losing my mind?

Sebastian steadied himself and approached her cautiously. "Sasha?"

Sasha gazed back at him unblinkingly, through wide and tear-streaked eyes.

However, he saw the recognition in her gaze. It almost seemed as if she was waiting for something.

Sebastian was unable to restrain himself any longer. He took another step towards her. Sasha shrank away from him immediately.

"What are you doing? You are still hurt! Don't move!" He grabbed hold of her.

His touch seemed to agitate Sasha. Distrust became horror as she screamed and twisted herself free from him.

"Let go! Let go of me!"

Distraught and afraid of hurting her, Sebastian let her go.

He watched as Sasha cower on her bed like a cornered deer. She buried her head under the blanket and began chastising herself.

Has she really lost her mind?

Sebastian stood by the bed. His limbs and face felt unnaturally cold. He did not know what or how to feel.

Thump.

Under the cover of her quilt, Sasha's thin wrist appeared stealthily.

She was like a thief, feeling her way around the cabinet by her bed, and knocked over a glass bottle.

What is she doing?

Sebastian went towards it, intending on cleaning up the shattered glass.

Sasha watched him through a crack in her quilt and waited for her chance. He was kneeling over the broken glass and caught sight of her staring at him through the bottom of the bed.

"Argh! Why won't you leave me alone? Are you an evil spirit or something? Why am I always dreaming about a scum like you?" Sasha yelled in frustration.

She remained huddled under her quilt, exposing only her angry eyes to glare at Sebastian.

He froze, still on the floor.

In her dreams? Scum?

"Am I missing my son so much that I'm dreaming of the scum?" Sasha furrowed her brows in confusion as she continued to mumble to herself out loud.

It was true that she did not think of Sebastian much or dreamed of him for the past five years.

During her time in Moranta, she had worked incessantly to set up a new life. Besides, she had to sever all ties with her past connections when she faked her death.

Now he stood before Sasha, as clear as day. Just like the same old domineering and stubborn Sebastian that she remembered.

I must be dreaming. Sasha concluded.

She decided to go back to sleep, but before she could, her bare arm outside of the blanket was met with a sudden warmth. It surprised her to see a muscular hand closing over hers. "Is it true?"

"What ?"

"Can you feel me touching you?" The man kneeling before her sounded hoarse. He could wrap her thin wrists in one palm.

All she could feel was her hand being caressed with a gentleness that was shocking to her. Sasha's eyes widened.

How could this be?

Am I still dreaming? He feels so real.

It scared her. Sasha felt overwhelmed by emotions and her throbbing temple. She moaned quietly.

"What's wrong? Are you in pain?" Sebastian asked, panicking slightly.

Several memories surfaced in Sasha's mind. She pictured the man holding her and struggled to form the words from her quivering lips.

"Matteo is missing. Please... find him."

With that, she passed out.

At this moment, the doctors burst in upon the immediate cessation of noise.

After order had been restored, Sebastian heard the doctor's verdict.

"There's nothing wrong with her," he said. "You mentioned she was confused. That may just be a lingering side effect of trauma. Thankfully, Mr. Hayes, she did not lose her sight, or her mind. She is a superb doctor."

The doctor could not help but marvel at Sasha's medical skills.

Sebastian was beyond relieved. His twenty-eight years of life had not been as torturous as the ten minutes it took to wait for the doctor's examination. The suffering was akin to a visit to hell.

He was unwilling to admit it, but it had been the darkest point in his life.

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"That memory disorder of hers, will she recover from it?"

"She will. Didn't you say that while she passed out, her consciousness was in another time period? That tells us that that part of the brain was affected. With some rest, she'll be back to normal in no time."

The doctor gave Sebastian some final reassurance.

Truth be told, Sasha's situation was exactly like what the doctor said. When she woke up the next day, Sebastian noticed that she had remembered everything, including the things that happened before she fainted.

Having said that, Sasha would occasionally be slow to react to things around her.

"Sasha?"

"Huh?" It took some time before she responded as she sat on the bed. Her tiny face turned, looking at Sebastian with a blank stare.

Seeing that she responded, Sebastian picked up the glass of warm water he poured in advance; and the medicine that was left on the side. "Take your medicine. The water's going cold."

She looked tired and took a while to react. "Okay... "

Sasha proceeded to pick up the pills from Sebastian's hand with her cold fingers and stuffed them in her mouth, swallowing them just like that.

Sebastian did not say anything.

He kept his temper at bay and held up the water, directly to her lips this time.

His action astonished Sasha.

Even though her reaction time was a bit slow, she still remembered the things that happened between them. Especially what happened before she blacked out.

Did this man's personality change? Why is he treating me like this? Is it because I'm injured?

As a matter of fact, that was certainly not the case. Even if Sasha was injured, she was injured because she did not want to expose his secrets. Sebastian was oblivious as he thought that Sasha only saw him violently snap a dog's neck when he was five. He did not know that she also saw him do something even more terrifying and violent when he was eleven.

The thought sent shivers down Sasha's back, and she immediately shut her mouth tight.

Her action caused Sebastian to knit his eyebrows.

What's this woman doing? The doctor did tell me she'd be a little slow, but there was nothing about her not listening to me. Truth be told, to him, it looked like Sasha was afraid of him.

Sebastian felt uncomfortable with how she swallowed the pills, worried that she might choke herself. So, he raised an eyebrow before squeezing her chin in his hand.

"Open up!"

Sasha stayed quiet as her eyes widened, staring at him.

Is he... Forcing me to drink? What's he trying to do? Murder?

Her face instantly paled. Looking at him, a layer of moisture formed within her eyes, expressing the fear and shock she was feeling at the moment.

Sebastian was rendered speechless by her reaction.

What's she crying about? I'm just feeding her some water because she might choke herself! But she's crying?

Sebastian's temper was rising as he scolded, "What are you crying for? Do you think I'm going to poison you? Just drink the water, you dumb fool. What's gotten into your head?"

Sasha was stunned. He just wants me to drink? Nothing else?

She was stumped as she looked at him for quite a while before confirming that the man in front of her had no other intentions. Thus, she lowered her gaze and opened her mouth to take a few sips of water. To her surprise, it was actually just water, and it made Sasha feel a bit awkward.

"Alright, you get some rest. I'll be back after work."

Sebastian, on the other hand, did not notice her unusual behavior. To him, those were all normal because Sasha injured her head.

He picked up his coat and headed towards the door, about to go back to the company.

Sasha remained silent.

However, when Sebastian reached the door, it was like Sasha just heard what he said. So, she immediately stopped him. "You don't have to come. I can take care of myself."

"What did you just say ?" Sebastian stopped in place. He was most likely still getting used to how slow Sasha was, so he did not hear her properly.

"I don't think my injury is that serious. I should be discharged soon. Can you send Matteo and Vivian to my apartment? I'll be back in the afternoon," she told him.

Does she actually want to leave ? More than that, she's asking me to send her children to her apartment ?

Once Sebastian caught on, his expression immediately darkened. "Are you disobeying me again? Maybe I should lock you up."

"Huh?" Sasha was dumbfounded and her expression bleached.

Lock me up?

Sebastian was quiet as he calmed himself down.

Eventually, he softened his tone, "You've not fully recovered yet, so you need to stay here for a few more days. I'll let you go back once you're healed. Can you please listen to me?"

The last part of his sentence was spoken very mannerly, as though he was coaxing a child.

That being said, Sasha was still pretty much afraid of what Sebastian said in his previous statement.

Indeed, she had not fully recovered. That was why her reactions were all very slow. And all she could think about now was what Sebastian said prior because of the shock it gave her.

Does he actually want to lock me up? He's afraid that I would run away. Now that he knows I saw what happened that year, he's trying to keep me by his side at all times; so I don't spill his secret.

For Sasha, locking her up seemed to make sense.

What then? Imprison me forever? Or... He might just execute me!

That idea sent chills down her spine. It felt like she got stabbed as a sharp pain came pulsing from her heart, making it hard for her to breathe.

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But why? If I wanted to do that, I wouldn't have put my life on the line at yesterday's banquet.

Sasha was still sitting on the bed. The colors on her eyes faded like a blossom that suddenly lost all its life force as she idled there. For an extended period of time, she did not move a single inch.

She stayed like that until noon when she heard cheery footsteps scampering outside.

"Mommy! We're here to see you, Mommy! Do you miss us ?" A child's voice echoed through the hallway.

Hearing that, Sasha looked towards the door. Soon after, a little girl appeared in a pink dress, dashing towards her as soon as she got there.

It was Vivian.

Seeing her finally put a smile on Sasha's face, and she immediately pulled off the blanket and got out of bed. "Vivi, come give me a hug! I missed you guys so much!"

The cute little kid happily ran towards her mother and hugged her with a smile on her face.

Ian and Matteo came in shortly after. One of them carried a fruit basket, and the other had a thermos as they came in with Wendy.

"Mommy, are you getting better? You were still asleep when we came here yesterday." Matteo was concerned about his mother's health.

He approached Sasha as soon as he saw that she was finally awake and checked on the bandage on her head.

Sasha felt extremely touched, so she lowered her head and positioned it in front of the child. "Touch it. See if I'm fine now."

Matteo and Ian went quiet.

However, Vivian raised her chubby hand and placed it on top of the bandage on Sasha's head.

"You dumb boys, if Mommy let us touch her head, it has to mean that she's all better now. She's a doctor, remember? Would she not understand her own situation? Right, Mommy?"

"That's right. Vivi's the smartest after all," Sasha said as she gave Vivian a peck on the cheek.

After hearing that from their mother, Ian and Matteo were able to relax. Both of them opened up their arms and proceeded to dive into Sasha's embrace.

Wendy, who was on the side, placed the things that they brought on the table with a smile on her face as she watched them. When she was done, she approached the family that was still reluctant to let go of each other.

"Alright now, you kids. Let your mommy have some food first, okay?"

"Okay," the triplets spoke as one.

After that, Sasha went to eat at a small table while the three children were very thoughtful. They just played on the sofa on their own, not wanting to disturb their mother's meal.

"How are you, Ms. Wand?" Wendy poured some water for Sasha. "Is everything okay?"

"... Yes, thank you, Wendy." Sasha nodded and started drinking the soup.

Seeing Sasha like this, Wendy was finally able to lift the weight on her chest. At that moment, she sat down beside her.

"That's wonderful. Ms. Wand, you really are too kind for your own good. If you listened to your kids and didn't go out, this wouldn't have happened. Look at what happened to you." Wendy was genuinely concerned about Sasha.

Wendy had looked after Sebastian for many years and watched him become who he was every step of the way. Naturally, she would want his spouse to treat him faithfully.

To her, Sasha was the best candidate as she treated Sebastian better than anyone else.

However, when Wendy finished her sentence, it felt as though Sasha was ignoring her, drinking the soup. She showed no reactions whatsoever.

Maybe she's just hungry.

Wendy did not give it too much thought and got up to do some chores.

After about two minutes, Sasha finally responded with a spoon in her hand as she looked towards Wendy. "It's okay. It was just an accident. I didn't know something like that could happen when I got out that day."

"Huh?" Wendy was caught off guard. "What accident? You mean the incident at the Emmanuels?"

"Yea." Sasha nodded.

Wendy immediately got riled up. "Bull*hit! How can you call that an accident? They were clearly waiting for you to step into their trap! You don't know this, but the Emmanuels made an elaborate scheme just to set you up. Even Brandon Emmanuel personally came to the house to look for you."

The housemaid even followed that with a few more curses.

Sasha was stumped by her comment.

What does she mean? What elaborate scheme? They were waiting for me? And what has Brandon got to do with any of this?

Sasha could quickly comprehend what Wendy said this time and flooded her mind with thoughts regarding that.

"What's actually going on here? Why is Brandon involved in this?"

"Why are you still mentioning him?"

"But, I went to help him that day because his family had arranged for an engagement he did not like. What happened to me is totally unrelated," Sasha explained to the housemaid as she tried her best to defend Brandon.

She actually did not believe that Brandon was involved in what happened as she understood what kind of person Brandon was.

Back in the day, even though he always visited the Hayes family to make fun of her, Brandon had never done anything harmful to her.

However, Wendy was not buying it and got even angrier. "How can you confirm that this had nothing to do with him? Now that Mr. Hayes destroyed that entire family, do you still think Brandon wasn't involved?

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"What did you just say? Sebastian destroyed the Emmanuel family?"

"Didn't he tell you that? What happened to you was caused by that family. They bribed some reporters and found someone to set you up. Mr. Hayes got infuriated when he found out about this. Not only did he reclaimed all the Emmanuels' properties, but he also handed in all the evidence he had to the authorities. In the end, the police apprehended the leaders of the family. Even... Even Ms. Matilda was no exception.

Clang!

The spoon in Sasha's hand dropped right into the bowl. She was gobsmacked as she looked at the housemaid in disbelief.

It was really the Emmanuels who did that ? But why did they do it ? What benefits would that get them ? I know they have a grudge to settle with me, and it's serious enough for them to want me dead. But what does this have to do with Sebastian ? What would they get if Sebastian goes down ?

Truth be told, the Emmanuel family had been supported by the Hayes family from the very beginning. If something were to happen to Sebastian, the giant Hayes Corporation would be in a situation where it would have no suitable candidates to inherit his position. After all, Frederick was getting too old, and the children were still too young. All the shareholders would definitely be vying for that position of power.

What do they get if that happens? Sasha continues her long string of thoughts. Are they trying to dig their own grave?

Sasha was both terrified and enraged at the same time, unable to accept the truth behind Wendy's word.

"Ms. Wand?"

Sasha was quiet.

She forced herself to stay calm and was finally able to look at the housemaid. "Wendy, can you help me contact Brandon? Ask him to come and see me."

"Huh? You still want to see him?"

"Why? Is he jailed as well?" Sasha expression finally changed.

Nevertheless, Wendy told her that Brandon did not get caught up in what happened.

"It was Mr. Hayes Sr.'s decision. He was vouching for Mr. Brandon. Besides, he is one of the shareholders of the Hayes Corporation. No matter how chaotic the Emmanuel family is, he would be fine."

"Alright then, please help me call him. I want to see him." Sasha let out a sigh of relief and asked Wendy to make the arrangements.

She needed to meet a member of the Emmanuel family to understand what went on. The incident was clearly not that simple. No matter what intentions they may have, the Emmanuels would never have targeted Sebastian like that.

Other than that, she remembered that the psychologist talked about schizophrenia when they met. The illness was something that she did not tell anyone, including Dr. Kaye. So, how did he know about it? Sasha desperately needed an answer.

Seeing that Sasha was persistent and defended him, Wendy finally promised her that she would ask Brandon to visit her at the hospital.

Thus, Sasha waited in the ward after Wendy left.

However, as Sasha waited into the afternoon, it was Frederick who showed up instead of Brandon.

"Sasha, how are you doing ? I heard you woke up, so I came to see you. Is everything okay now ?"

Frederick was as polite as ever when he approached Sasha with his cane in hand to inspect her head.

Sasha was quiet.

There was an instance where all her emotions were welling up, and she almost cried right in front of the old man.

All those years, she had always treated him as her own father. She held him near and dear to her heart. Sasha would act tough and show her determination in front of anyone, but Frederick was an exception.

In front of him, she did not have to act.

Sasha's eyes turned red as she wanted to call out to him.

"Sasha," Frederick spoke before she could say anything. "I'm so sorry for what happened to you. I didn't know that people were trying to dig out secrets of the Hayes family from you. Thank goodness you were aware of the situation and prevented a catastrophe. Now, You don't have to worry anymore. I'll protect you from now on, so you just stay by my side and don't go anywhere, okay ?"

Frederick stood there and looked at Sasha as he made the important decision.

Sasha was stunned.

Stay by his side from now on? At the Hayes residence? Does that mean... I can only stay by his side for the rest of my life? Just for the family secret? Is he trying to protect me, or is he actually just trying to imprison me?

It dawned on Sasha. Initially, she was slow to react, but at that instance, she could feel goosebumps all over her body from Frederick's terrifying gaze under the guise of a considerate smile.

Sasha immediately swallowed the words that reached her mouth.

She had never seen this look from Frederick before. Back then, those eyes were always kind, considerate, and affectionate.

However, it felt like he was extremely distant and indifferent at that moment. So much so that it was even enough to make Sasha's nerves tingle.

"Mr. Hayes, what I did that year was unintentional..."

"I know. If you intended to do it, you wouldn't have seen it."

Frederick was surprisingly calm.

With that, Sasha could no longer hold it in, her eyes bloodshot. "If that's the case, why do you need me to go with you? You know that I've been keeping it a secret all these years. I never told anyone about it."

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"Yes, I believe you. But keeping that secret with you is ultimately too dangerous."

"What... are you trying to say ?" Sasha took some time before she could squeeze past her sobbing to ask.

Frederick smiled. "What I meant is that you'll be safer with me around. After all, Sebastian's life cannot be at risk. This time, you were alert and prevented a crisis. What about the next time? Sasha, none of us wants to take this risk."

The old man was finally making his intentions clear.

Sasha was stunned.

What does he mean by this? He doesn't want to risk his son's life, so he's going to imprison his best friend's daughter instead? For how long? One year? Ten years? Or is it going to be forever?

At this point in time, Sasha felt even more disappointed.

She felt lost as she looked at the man that once told her he would treat her as his own. In the end, she let the tears she held in for so long fall. "Actually, you don't have to be so tedious about it. Just kill me. That would be the safest option." "What are you talking about? How could I kill you? I've watched you grow ever since you were young! Moreover, you are the mother to my two grandchildren. Why would I ever do that?" Frederick was furious.

Sasha showed no signs of reacting after hearing what he said.

He won't kill me ? What's the difference between imprisoning me forever and killing me ? Maybe he doesn't want to bear the guilt.

Sasha grinned and said nothing.

Seeing that she was not going to say anything, Frederick felt a little awkward.

"Alright. I'll send someone to pick you up tomorrow. You enjoy your time with the kids tonight and don't worry. I'm not going to mistreat you. Everything will be like it was back then when you're with me."

Silence ensued.

After another long pause, Sasha finally responded, "Like how it was when I was your daughter-in-law?"

In an instant, Frederick's expression turned even more rigid.

"Since you don't want to be with Sebastian, you won't be my daughter-in-law. You're my daughter. I'll recognize you as my goddaughter."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I've already agreed upon the marriage between Xandra and Sebastian. She will be my daughter-in-law from now on, but you don't have to worry. You will always have more authority than her in the Hayes family!"

Frederick gave Sasha a promise as if he was trying to assure her, giving her some special treatment.

When Frederick left, Sasha stared into his back. She felt the blood in her veins run cold, remembering a lot about what happened in the past and felt nothing from them anymore.

So, blood will always be thicker than water.

•••

After Sebastian got out of work, he came to the hospital just as expected.

However, this time around, he noticed that Sasha was even slower. When he came in, she carried a chair over and sat at the window, enjoying the cold breeze. There was no response from her even after Sebastian called out to her multiple times.

Has it gotten even worse?

Sebastian immediately became tensed and hurried over to her while tossing his laptop to the sofa. "Sasha Wand, are you deaf? Did you not hear me calling you?"

"Huh"

Sasha finally raised her head after having the cold breeze in her face for a long while.

The cold made her face slightly translucent, and Sebastian did not need to touch it to know that she was freezing herself, just based on the greenish color on her lips. This woman really has gone mad.

Sebastian face turned dark and stern. He immediately bent down to carry Sasha out of the chair.

"Ah..." Sasha was startled, letting out a scream.

What's this man doing?

Before she knew it, her heart was racing. Her veins expanded as blood came flowing up to the top of her head, making her head ring.

"What... what are you doing ?"

"What am I doing? Are you out of your mind? Why would you sit here? Do you want to stay in the hospital even longer?"

Sebastian was never a patient person. So, when he heard Sasha's question, he immediately got irritated.

Sasha stayed quiet until Sebastian put her down on the bed. He even pulled the blanket up to cover her up. After that, she was able to slowly calm herself down as the ringing in her head subsided.

Is he worried about me? Is he afraid that I might catch a cold?

Sebastian's actions reminded Sasha of him force-feeding her the glass of water. It was just a normal glass of water, but she thought he tried to poison, imprison, and murder her, so she refused the drink.

It was just water in the end.

On the other hand, the old man, who she was so happy to see and suspected nothing of, was the one who wanted to imprison her and put her away.

How ironic! Sasha thought as she slowly closed her eyes.

"Did you take your medicine?"

"I did."

"Have you eaten anything yet?"

"Yes."

"What about the injection?"

"It's done."

Their questions and the answers had no delay in it and flowed smoothly, and it surprised Sebastian, who was pouring some water for himself.

He turned around to look at the woman who he tossed onto the bed, the woman that stayed there in the same position without even moving an inch.

Has she recovered?

Sebastian walked over to her and pulled a chair from the side to him.

"Your rate of recovery is quite impressive," he said.

"What are you talking about ?" Sasha did not understand what he was saying.

However, she still opened her eyes and looked towards him, who was at her bedside. Sebastian was sitting up straight with his legs crossed. He had a beautiful nose and a flawless face, reading Sasha's medical record with one hand on the armrest. The whole scene looked casual, yet, there was a mysterious elegance to it that made others unable to shift their eyes away.

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"Are you done staring at me?"

"Huh? What?" Sasha snapped out of it, her pale face flushed in a matter of seconds before she turned around and hid under the blanket.

That was so embarrassing!

However, the man behind her was snickering. Sebastian grinned after seeing what Sasha was doing. "Since you're performing exceptionally well, I'll allow you to get discharged tomorrow.

"Really?"

Sasha was like an excited little girl, instantly turning back towards him.

"Yes." Sebastian raised an eyebrow. "I'll come and handle the paperwork tomorrow morning. The day after happens to be Christmas Eve, so you should do some preparations when you get home. I'm too busy to do anything."

Within a few sentences, Sebastian was able to push all the work onto Sasha.

If it was in the past, Sasha would have been delighted.

They hardly ever got along, so it was out of the question for him to give her any work to do. Back then, even being delegated some house chores would make Sasha feel happy.

Having said that, she just looked at him and sat up.

"I'm hungry."

"Didn't you just eat?"

Sebastian raised his head after hearing her and looked at her with his beautiful onyx eyes. He was amazed.

Right then, Sasha shifted her gaze away awkwardly. "What I ate... was lunch."

Her voice was as soft as a little kitten. She sounded like any patient would, weak and winded.

It made Sebastian's heartbeat speed up as he seldom saw here in this current state.

Thus, he said nothing more and made a call to order some food.

After half an hour, a deliveryman appeared at the door with two huge boxes of food.

What's this? I'm the only one eating right? That's too much!

Sasha looked at the man on the sofa with a puzzled expression. "Why did you order so much food? How do you expect me to finish them?"

"Who told you that you're the only one eating? I have to eat too, you know," Sebastian replied while he sat on the sofa with his legs crossed, his fingers gliding across the keyboard on his laptop.

Sasha was instantly taken aback by what he just said.

He hasn't eaten too? Wait... this isn't about whether he ate or not. Why is he eating here in the first place? And with me?

With that in mind, her eyes gaped, thinking that she misheard him.

On the other hand, Sebastian went on with his work for quite some time before finally shifting his eyes from the screen to Sasha. "What's wrong ?"

She stayed quiet and took some time before she turned awkwardly to get the food. "It's fine. You should eat with me. Don't let it get cold."

"Okay. Let me get this email done first."

Sebastian lowered his and returned to his work.

As soon as Sasha saw the food, she gulped and finally accepted the situation that she was in. It was something Sasha would have never thought about.

When Sasha said she was hungry, she was only trying to make Sebastian stay there a bit longer. Never in her wildest dream would she thought that Sebastian would be dining with her.

Sasha proceeded to take out the boxes of food. She realized that Sebastian was really going all out. Only two people were eating, but he ordered a ludicrous amount of food. There were two main courses, two side dishes as well as a whole bunch of other stuff. What's this? Sasha looked towards him once again. "I think you ordered too much. We won't be able to finish it with just the two of us."

"We can throw it out if we can't finish it. Why would you think about whether you can finish it when you're eating? Aren't you tired of living like this, Sasha Wand?" Sebastian commented in his usual domineering tone.

The only response Sasha could give was a sigh before she sat down.

After a while, Sebastian was finally done with his work. So, he got up from the sofa and sat right across the small table facing Sasha.

"What would you like? The broccoli soup, garlic bread... "

"Those are for you. You're still recovering, so you need to eat light." Sebastian told her while picking up some pasta.

Did I hear this right? Sasha instantly froze with the noodle she had hanging from her mouth.

These are all for me? Why? Since when did he become so considerate?

Back then, Sebastian would always ridicule and belittle Sasha, taking shots at her all the time. He had never actually cared about her.

The more she thought about it, the more she felt a lingering fear creeping up on her.

Nevertheless, Sasha was without a doubt happy when she heard what he said.

And so, she quietly confirmed that Sebastian was only eating the rice and nothing else before grabbing the soup that she had been eyeing on. Sebastian kept quiet. You're such an idiot!

It took some time for the two of them to get over the awkward atmosphere before finally talking like how they used to.

"How are the kids at home?"

"They're fine. They listen to me since you're not there," he answered as he ate.

Even though they were worried about their mother, the kids were rather obedient the past two days since Sebastian promised them that he would bring Sasha back.

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Hearing that, Sasha stopped eating for a brief moment. "Even Vivi? Did she cause any problems?"

"That little girl?" He knitted his brows as he was chowing down the food before him.

Seeing that made Sasha's heart sank.

"What happened? What did she do? Please don't be angry at her. She's been pampered ever since she was still a baby, so please be patient with her. She's actually a good girl."

Part of Sasha wanted to tell him that he should treat Vivian well. After all, she was his child too.

With that being said, Sasha kept quiet. Sebastian would definitely be suspicious if she said that at a time like this.

Besides, the possibility of him believing her if she told him Vivian was his daughter was slim. Sebastian would most probably think Sasha was up to something.

It pained her just thinking about it.

Luckily, Sebastian noticed she was flustered. "What are you panicking about? I didn't even do anything to her. She's fine, so don't worry."

With that, Sasha let out a sigh of relief.

That's great.

At that moment, she lowered her gaze. She did not know whether she should feel happy or sad.

The kids listening to Sebastian was great news, so Sasha figure she should be glad. She wanted to be happy.

Truth be told, the moment she heard him speak, she could barely even lift the fork she had in her hand. It felt like there was a heavy load on top of it. The sadness she felt made breathing feel like a grind.

"What happened? Why did you stop eating?"

"Huh? Eating... I'm eating." Sasha snapped out of it and hid her feelings away.

Sebastian watched her for a bit and noticed that something was off. However, he did not put too much thought into it. He figured that it was just the side effect of her injury, like how she sat at the window like an idiot when he came.

Eventually, the two finished their meals after about an hour.

Frankly speaking, Sasha was the one eating everything while Sebastian just sat there.

He was really picky about the food he ate and the environment he dined in. That was the reason why Sasha was so astonished when Sebastian stayed and ate with her.

"Are you going back now ?"

"Yes. Wendy can't handle them all at once. I'll have to go back early to put them to bed."

After he cleared the table, Sebastian went on to wash his hands in the bathroom before picking up his coat.

Sasha quietly watched while he was getting ready to leave.

She could see the tiredness in his eyes. It was most likely due to the rush between going back and forth between the company and the hospital that exhausted Sebastian.

Even so, he was certainly a qualified father since he did not even have the time to eat; but, he was still thinking of the children at home at a moment like this.

Sasha felt like she was able to relax with Sebastian on the job.

"Alright, take care then," she urged softly.

She looked at him affectionately. At that instance, she was trying her best to remember everything about the man in front of her, doing her best to burn it into her mind.

Sebastian stopped as if he felt Sasha's intense gaze and turned around.

Nevertheless, the moment he turned, Sasha shifted her gaze and pretended to pour some water for herself. She showed nothing peculiar as she was very calm.

On the other side of the room, Sebastian narrowed his gaze, thinking that he might have mistaken what he saw.

Before Sebastian left the hospital, he gave Luke a call and asked him to settle the discharge procedures for Sasha in the morning.

She's been out of sorts. Maybe she really misses home. If that's the case, I'll have to get her home earlier.

Nonetheless, Sebastian did not know that after a few hours, when the hospital became quiet, while the doctors and nurses were resting, someone sneaked into Sasha's ward.

After that night, Sasha was gone from the hospital.

• • •

When the news got to the Hayes residence, Frederick was waiting for Sasha in the living room.

Beside him were a few house deeds as well as some expensive-looking jewelry. The moment he heard Sasha was gone, he shot up from his seat and smashed everything there onto the floor. "Sasha Wand. I'm extremely disappointed with you!"

His infuriated roar echoed from the living area and resonated within the walls of the manor.

Everyone in the house was horrified of what just happened and no one dared come out to check.

Only the butler, Tim, came in and hurried the messenger away. "What are you people still standing there for? Go search for her. I want to see her here, dead or alive! If you come back without her, you'll be leaving without your head."

"Yes, sir!"

After he gave out the order, Tim approached Frederick, whose eyes were bright red, and tried to calm him down.

"Mr. Hayes, please calm down. It has only been one night. I doubt she could go very far. Even if she left Avenport, we only have to investigate the portals that she might have used. Then, we'll know where she went."

Frederick did not respond. He was still very much agitated that his chest heaved rapidly before calming down.

However, the killing intent that he emitted did not die even after he calmed down. In fact, it grew even more intense the calmer Frederick became.

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"It seems like I've underestimated her, and now she's fooling around with me."

"Like I said, sir. She's still someone else's daughter. She has faked her death once. What else can't she do?"

Crack!

A crisp crackling sound came as Frederick snapped the can in his hand in two.

Even the butler was dumbfounded by his action.

"Let everyone know to grab her on sight!"

"Understood."

The butler was overjoyed at his order as he immediately went and made the arrangements. While he was issuing the order, he specifically told the men to be wary of the Hayes Corporation. They could not let the company know about this.

It was obvious that Tim was referring to Sebastian when he mentioned the company.

At this moment in time, Sebastian had not received the news yet. Luke kept calling him, but he never picked up because he was busy comforting the little girl on the second floor.

"Mommy! I want my mommy!" Vivian cried.

It was as if she sensed that her mother was in danger, so the first thing she did when she woke up was crying.

In the end, Sebastian had to come in himself. "Stop it. Stop crying!"

When Sebastian came in, Vivian was in her pink pajamas without wearing shoes, just hugging her bunny doll while she cried a river.

He was very irritated by the crying? What's gotten into her? Who made her cry?

He approached her, wanting to put a jacket on Vivian in case she caught a cold.

With that being said, the little girl's cry grew even louder when she saw him. "Mommy! I want Mommy! I don't want you! Get out! Get out!" Her chubby hand swung frantically, not letting Sebastian get near her.

Sebastian was barely holding it in.

Right when he was about to give Vivian a spanking, the other two kids sneaked in. Seeing that their father was already very agitated, one of them went to their sister while the other blocked their father.

"Daddy, what are you doing ?" Ian asked.

For Vivian, Ian had come in without even wearing his shoes.

Sebastian noticed it and got even more annoyed. "What can I do to her? I want her to stop crying. Didn't you hear it? It's early in the morning, and her obnoxious cry has filled the whole house."

Ian and Matteo both stayed quiet.

Is Daddy okay? He actually called Vivi's cry obnoxious.

Soon after, Vivian's crying intensified. "Mommy! I want my Mommy!"

It looked like she was losing her mind, pushing her brother to the side as if she had a massive injury, and ran out of the room with her bare feet.

There was nothing Sebastian could do but chase after her.

Within a few minutes, Sebastian was able to catch the little girl who was crying like her mother just died. He pulled her into his embrace." Alright now, it's my fault. I shouldn't have shouted at you. I shouldn't have said your cry was obnoxious. I'm sorry, okay? Please don't cry."

It was the first time this tyrant in the business sector got on his knees and spoke in such a soft voice to coax a little girl. He even placed all the blame on himself.

With that, even though Vivian was still crying, it was less terrifying now as she was in her father's arms.

"I... I want Mommy."

"I know. I'm going to fetch her home later, okay?" Sebastian stayed calm.

Finally, Vivian stopped crying after hearing what he just said, but she still looked sad.

"Can you promise me? I just had a very bad dream. I dreamed that Mommy's gone. Uncle Sebastian, I can't live without Mommy. If Mommy's gone, I'll become an orphan."

Sebastian was quiet.

What's going on in this girl's head? Is this something a five-year-old should say?

He frowned, wanting to reprimand her for saying those things, but stopped when he saw the maturity in her sad eyes that superseded her age.

Indeed, this girl lost her father a long time ago. It's normal for her to feel insecure.

"That's not going to happen. If your mommy's gone, you'll still have me. I'll take care of you," Sebastian was considerate out of the blue.

But of course, he was just joking around. He figured there was no way Sasha would disappear.

To him, she was like the weed. Strong and unbending no matter where she was. She was simply invincible, just like how she had survived all those years after faking her death.

Just thinking about it was able to fan the rage within Sebastian.

Luckily, the little girl had stopped crying after hearing what he just said. After that, he brought her to his two sons and ordered them to take care of her while he went up the stairs.

When he got to the third floor, his phone rang once again.

"Hello?"

"My Lord! Mr. Hayes, where have you been? I've been calling you for ages now. Something happened at the hospital!"