

Too Much to Bear, My Love Chapter 596

Chapter 596 Avoid Direct Conflict

The condition of the Winters family's eldest son was more critical than they had initially expected. For some reason, his kidney and liver were rapidly hardening, and he seemed to have aged so much compared to his appearance more than half a month ago.

Seeing her son in this state, Melanie felt like her heart was torn to a million pieces. I have a hunch that this is all Amelia's fault for colluding with the doctor. My darling son is obviously on the brink of life and death, yet she insists on having the doctor say that this is normal! Oh, my son, do wake up and get well soon! I don't want to have to send my own son off!

Heartbroken, the woman covered her mouth and began to sob. She wished she could take her son's place and suffer in his stead!

Amelia and Tiffany stared at Spencer, who lay on the hospital bed, connected to an oxygen tank. Their expressions were grim, and their hearts were overflowing with mixed emotions.

As Tiffany reflexively glanced at Amelia, her lips were quivering as though she wanted to say something. However, Amelia shook her head at her.

"Dad, I'll go and ask the doctor," said Amelia.

Melanie raised her head and glared at Amelia with bloodshot eyes. Agitatedly, she hissed, "It was your husband who arranged for my son to be hospitalized here at the beginning, and the doctor promised that your brother would be fine. But look at what happened! It's only been slightly more than half a month, and he's already so sickly! How could you be so cruel so as to conspire with the doctor to take Spencer's life? You just hate to see our family prosper, don't you? I should've just committed suicide back then and refused the Huttons, and your brother wouldn't have ended up like this!"

Amelia kept quiet. A pang of pain flashed across her eyes.

I'm destined never to be able to be part of the Winters family.

"Mrs. Winters, how could you say that? Amelia did it out of her kindness! How did it end up as an act of cruelty in your eyes? Life and death are out of our control, and no one wished for this to befall Spencer! You're blaming Amelia for everything! Can't you be more reasonable?" said Tiffany.

Eyeing Amelia grudgingly, Melanie uttered through gritted teeth, "If she can return my son healthily to me, I promise to treat her with the utmost respect."

“You’re simply unbelievable!” exclaimed Tiffany before she dragged Amelia out of the ward.

Dominic looked at his wife and asked, “Why do you have to be this way?”

“Our son is already so severely ailed; can you really bring yourself to say that Amelia’s not involved in this? We have no enemies other than her. Plus, the doctor mentioned that someone had intentionally added something into Spencer’s medication.”

The man fell silent.

“You see her as your own daughter, but she might not necessarily view you as her father. Don’t forget how you’ve treated her all these years. She’s human, too; it’s impossible for her not to have the slightest bit of hatred toward us. That’s it. I’m going to find Mr. Wick for assistance. We can ask him to help transfer Spencer to a different hospital. Otherwise, death is the only option if he remains here.” Melanie frantically took out the card that June had left for her. She was going to dial the number written on it, but Dominic stopped her unexpectedly.

“Are you done being ridiculous?” her husband remarked in a hoarse voice.

Melanie tried to snatch the card that Dominic had taken from her, but he dodged her advances.

“That’s enough! Will you only be satisfied when this family comes apart?” reprimanded Dominic.

Like a hungry wolf, Melanie glared at him viciously. As her eyes welled up with tears, she cried, “If my son dies, then there’s no need for me to live on too! Only Mr. Hutton can save my son now!”

“Get a grip on yourself! You know very well that our son’s illness has nothing to do with Amelia. If cirrhosis turns into cancer, it’s not easy to cure it. Let’s just go with the flow, all right? Amelia really doesn’t owe us anything, so stop making things difficult for her,” said Dominic rationally.

Propping her head in her hands, Melanie muttered, “Now that Spencer has become like this, I’ll break down if I don’t target my hatred at something or someone. He’s only in his thirties—he’s still so young! Not to mention that he has a wife and children to take care of... Nothing must happen to him! Cirrhosis is no more severe than leukemia; if I was saved back then, then surely he can be too! If weren’t for Amelia’s hand in this, my son would not have ended up in his current state!”

Dominic exhaled a deep sigh. He seemed as if he had aged more than a decade in just one day.

Amelia and Tiffany walked into the doctor's office. Robert was present too.

Noticing the two ladies entering his office, the man pointed to the couch on one side of the room and said, "Amelia, take a seat first. I have something to tell you."

Amelia did as he instructed.

After sitting down on the couch on the other side, Robert folded his hands together and uttered with a grave expression, "Amelia, we found who intoxicated your brother, and we've handed the relevant security footage to the police station. However, the person infiltrated your brother's ward disguised as a doctor. He was extremely clever in avoiding the security cameras, so we could only get a shot of his back, not his face. We can only wait for the police to crack the case. As for your brother, it seems that he was injected with a new type of drug by that person. As it's only just been invented, we have no idea about its side effects. We'll treat him as best as we can and remove parts of his liver and kidney that have hardened. His recovery will then depend on his physical state."

Amelia frowned and inquired, "Mr. Lancaster, tell me the truth—what is the success rate of my brother's surgery?"

"Fifty percent. His illness is worsening faster than I had anticipated. We had a meeting yesterday and decided that we needed to operate on him earlier. But the risks of this surgery are rather high, so I need to discuss this with your parents," answered Robert in complete honesty.

"But didn't you doctors say that my brother's condition wasn't particularly severe?"

"Amelia, none of us imagined that someone would drug your brother in the hospital. This was our miscalculation; the hospital will compensate your family as deemed appropriate. We're guilty of dereliction of duty." Robert stood up and solemnly gave Amelia a ninety-degree bow.

The latter was shocked by Robert's action. She hurriedly got up from the couch and waved her hand, saying, "Mr. Lancaster, there's no need for that! You're my elder—you don't have to be so formal with me."

"No, I must. We did not fulfill our duties as we should have." Robert raised his head and continued, "Amelia, don't worry. I'll explain this clearly and personally to your parents, so they won't misunderstand you."

Amelia merely put on a bitter smile, unsure of what to say.

"Mr. Lancaster, I'll leave my brother in your hands. Please take extra care of him." Her face was pale as she spoke. She then turned to leave the office.

Tiffany followed right behind her, and the duo walked out of the hospital in complete silence.

When they reached the path covered by greenery outside the hospital, Tiffany comforted Amelia, "Babe, don't be like this. It's not the worst outcome yet, right? You were at death's door once too! Even the doctor had given you the notice of critical illness, yet you managed to survive. Your brother will surely be fine too! Medical technology is so advanced now that even leukemia can be cured, so cirrhosis shouldn't be that big of a deal! Don't you think so?"

Amelia merely remained silent.

Tiffany walked up to her and saw that her expression was rather sullen. Otherwise, she looked fine.

"Let's go there and sit for a while," suggested Tiffany as she pointed at a bench.

Amelia nodded.

The two women went over and took a seat on the bench. Amelia was in a daze as she stared at the passersby. Quite a lot of them were patients donning hospital gowns and taking a walk in the company of their family or friends.

"Babe, what's on your mind?" Tiffany's voice pierced through Amelia's deep contemplation.

The latter turned her head and eyed Tiffany. Curling her lips, she said gently, "Nothing much. I just didn't expect that I would end up in this situation again with the Winters family after a decade."

"Babe, take it easy. This isn't your fault at all! You've already done your best toward the Winterses. If they don't know how to be grateful, that's on their conscience. Your brother was sick, to begin with, and it's natural for illnesses to worsen. Only brainless people would blame you for everything! You're not a doctor anyway, so how can you decide whether he lives or dies?" Tiffany was enraged at the thought of what Melanie had done to Amelia just now. She instantly scrutinized Amelia's face and asked, "Babe, is your face all right?"

Amelia was stunned for a moment before realizing that Tiffany was referring to her being hit in the face.

She shook her head. "I'm fine."

Tiffany was upset.

“With how things are right now, do you still want to return to the hospital? I think Mrs. Winters definitely doesn’t want to see you.”

Amelia shook her head again. There was a glint of confusion in her eyes.

“Let me give Oscar a call to see if he can get James to come and take a look at Spencer. Maybe I can even get James to invite his mentor to come over.” With a sigh, Amelia went on slowly, “After all, he’s still my brother. I don’t want something terrible to happen to him.”

Tiffany understood how Amelia felt.

The latter was someone who prioritized relationships and could not bring herself to reject her own family. In the end, the one who would get hurt was still herself.

“Babe, you’re obviously not going to receive anything in return for your efforts. What’s the point?”

In spite of herself, Amelia wailed, “Then, what should I do? They’re my family! Even if the truth does sometimes hurt, I can’t just sit by and watch them suffer. For as long as I can remember, I’ve always imagined that one day I’d become so great that they would be proud of me, and they wouldn’t ignore my feelings any longer. But now that I’ve indeed gotten greater, they still don’t care about me. I have to hear from others that I was abandoned by my own birth father. Do you know what that feels like? My heart aches terribly!”

Tiffany reached out and embraced her.

“Babe, calm down. You still have us! Oscar and Tony are your most beloved, while I’m your best friend. We will be a strong pillar of support and shield for you; no one can possibly harm you,” said Tiffany soothingly.

Amelia buried her head in Tiffany’s shoulders and cried tears of repressed sorrow.

It was not that Amelia did not care. The truth was that she was so used to putting on a facade that no one could see the innumerable wounds within her heart.

After crying for a while, Amelia lifted her head and took out a clean handkerchief to wipe her tears away. Her voice was somewhat raspy as she mumbled, “Don’t tell Oscar about what happened in the hospital.”

Tiffany did not know what to do about Amelia’s behavior.

“I don’t even know what you’re trying to gain by constantly protecting the Winters family.”

Amelia simply cast her best friend a glance.

“Fine. Forget I said anything.”

“I’m not protecting them; I just think this matter started with me. If it weren’t for me, my brother would not have been drugged. I think I have an obligation to make sure he’s healed,” explained Amelia obstinately.

Tiffany let out a sigh and did not say anything.

In the end, Amelia gave Oscar a call and asked him to get James to come and take a look. Due to Melanie reprimanding her in the past, Oscar had already asked the experts he hired from overseas to retreat. Amelia was initially thinking of teaching the Winterses a lesson, so she silently approved of his action. Alas, no one expected something like this to happen within the blink of an eye.

The saying that life was unpredictable rang true. If she had not made things complicated before this, perhaps her brother would not have ended up in his current state.

In the end, she still had to rely on Oscar.

The man’s voice sounded through the phone. “James and I will be there in an hour. Find a place and wait for me; don’t go head to head with your parents. Wait till I come, then we’ll talk things out. All right?”

“Okay.”

After the call ended, Tiffany questioned, “What did Oscar say?”

“He’s afraid that I would butt heads directly with my parents and that mom would purposely put me on the spot, so he instructed me to find a place and wait for him.”

“Looks like he knows your parents’ temper like the back of his hand already.”

Hearing that, Amelia merely smiled.

Tiffany shrugged and fell silent too.

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Chapter 597 His Life Is In Danger

Oscar arrived with James. James was invited by a hospital in Koandria to participate in a discussion about a new drug. As such, for the past half a month, he had not been around.

“James, I’ll leave my brother to you then,” Amelia said earnestly, as if she had just met her savior.

James nodded and replied, “Amelia, don’t worry. I’ll treat your family just like my own. I’ve only returned to Chanaea yesterday and I’m still suffering from jet lag. I rushed here at once after receiving Oscar’s call. Let me take a look at your brother first before discussing with the doctors here.”

Amelia nodded.

After everything had been discussed and arranged, they were met with an obstacle.

“Who are you?” Even though Melanie was asking James that question, she was eyeing Amelia suspiciously.

“Mom, he is a world-renowned surgeon who has had experience performing different kinds of surgeries including heart transplants and cancer surgeries. He has only agreed to treat Spencer because of his friendship with Oscar,” Amelia explained.

After Melanie heard her daughter’s words, she could not help but recall what June had told her previously, thinking that it was a conspiracy.

She said as her eyes widened, “Get lost! Scram! Don’t even think about hurting my son.” With a dangerous glint appearing in her eyes, she continued while pointing at Amelia, “I’m going to transfer my son to another hospital right now. I won’t let you kill him, you vicious woman!”

Everyone’s expression changed when they heard that.

Even though Oscar’s expression had darkened, he said patiently, “Mom, I know you’re in a bad mood, but I would suggest that we let James examine Spencer first and not let his condition worsen.”

In response to that, Melanie opened her arms wide, blocking the entrance to the ward.

Oscar massaged his temples and looked toward Dominic. “Dad, do you want to save Spencer?”

Dominic nodded his head.

“Then, please help to move Mom away.”

After a moment of contemplation, Dominic proceeded to drag Melanie away.

“Let me go, let me go!” Melanie yelled, struggling with all her might.

Ignoring the woman's protests, Oscar turned his attention toward James and said, "James, we will leave him to you then."

James nodded.

When James came out of the ward after examining Spencer, he said, "I would suggest that you transfer him to my private hospital. I will make a call to my mentor and ask him to make a trip to Chanaea."

"Is it OK to transfer him in his current condition?" Oscar asked.

"His condition still allows him to be transferred. As long as his family members consent to it, we can transfer him right away," James replied.

Oscar nodded and said to Dominic, "Dad, we are thinking of transferring Spencer to another hospital. What do you think about it? Of course, we would let you and Mom make the final decision. I will respect any decision you make. I think Amelia and I have already done enough. If we do too much, it will just upset Mom further. Besides, it is unlikely that she would agree with anything we do."

The man had expressed his stance clearly.

Dominic agreed without any hesitation.

"Let's do that. I will give my consent. As long as my son can be saved, I will agree to anything. Oscar, I trust you and Amelia. I know both of you won't harm Spencer," Dominic said sincerely, looking at Oscar.

Oscar nodded and made a call to Robert at once, giving him a brief explanation of Spencer's situation and informing him that the patient would be transferred to another hospital.

A while later, Robert, who had a serious expression on his face, appeared with a group of other doctors.

"Oscar, why did you suddenly decide to transfer my patient to another hospital? You need to give me a good reason for that," Robert said.

Hearing that, James stepped forward and extended his hand. "Mr. Lancaster, it has been a while," he greeted with a smile.

After the two men shook hands, Robert nodded and said, "James, it's been a long time indeed."

"Mr. Lancaster, I just did an examination for Spencer and found a new drug in his body. It was a drug that Anglandur had recently developed, so I need to transfer him to my

hospital to do some further analysis. By right, this drug shouldn't be available in Chanaea yet. I want to know the reason why it's here," James said.

"You already know about it?" Robert asked seriously.

James nodded, and after a moment of contemplation, he suggested, "Mr. Lancaster, I need to have a meeting with you and the doctors in your hospital to discuss this matter. Is that OK with you?"

"Sure."

Besides agreeing to having the discussion, Robert had also consented to Spencer's transfer to James' private hospital, which was set up with the help of Oscar.

After Melanie struggled out of Dominic's grip, she launched herself toward James. Pounding on the doctor's chest with all her might, she said resentfully, "I'm going to kill you! I won't allow you to harm my son. Whoever wants to move my son needs to step over my dead body first!"

Since James would never hit an elder, he could only try to dodge Melanie's fists. However, it was still painful for him as Melanie was throwing all her force into her punches.

In the end, James got angry and grabbed Melanie's hands.

Seeing that, Dominic quickly pulled his wife toward him and reprimanded, "Stop it! Do you really want to watch our son die?"

Melanie looked at Dominic, not quite understanding what he meant.

"Melanie, that's enough. All of the doctors here are the best in the world. If we offend them, there will be no one left to save our son," Dominic said weakly.

Melanie was stunned when she heard that.

Taking a pause, Dominic carried on, "Melanie, stop being so obstinate. You know that our son has the same illness as you, and this illness is life-threatening. If not for Amelia, we wouldn't even be able to afford his medical bills, and Spencer would just be waiting for his death. We really should be grateful," Dominic said, his face pale.

That was when realization finally struck Melanie.

In the end, Spencer was transferred to James' private hospital.

Melanie and Dominic were dumbfounded for a second when they entered the high-end hospital, feeling fascinated by the hospital that resembled a luxury hotel. They were rather overwhelmed and started looking around at once.

“Dominic, are the hospital fees here very expensive?” Melanie asked softly.

“I’m glad that you know. So you should stop making things difficult for Amelia. If we provoke Oscar, our son would really have no choice but to await his doom,” Dominic warned in a hushed tone.

Dominic was an experienced man and knew the ways of the world. Sometimes, those who seem kind to others might harm them behind their backs. On the other hand, those who appear distant might be the ones who could be relied on for help during difficult times.

Melanie merely kept quiet.

“I’ve already thrown away Mr. Wick’s name card. You need to stop having any inappropriate thoughts, understand?” Dominic warned once more.

“Yup, I know.”

After settling Spencer in, James said, “Amelia, I will examine your brother personally in the afternoon. After we get the results of the examination, when my mentor arrives, I will discuss with him how we should proceed with the surgery. Don’t worry, I won’t let anything happen to your brother.”

“Thank you so much, James.” Amelia thanked the doctor sincerely.

“Your problem is now mine,” James buttered the woman up in a joking manner.

Amelia smiled.

When Oscar, Amelia and the rest walked out of the ward, they were approached by Dominic and Melanie, who both had awkward expressions on their faces.

“Melanie, didn’t you have something to say to this gentleman here just now?” Dominic reminded, referring to James.

Looking at James, Melanie said slowly in a respectful tone, “Sir, I’m so sorry about my behavior just now. I panicked when I heard that my son was going to be transferred to another hospital without my permission. I thought you wanted to harm him, that’s why I hit you. I really hope you won’t take it to heart.”

James replied politely, “Mrs. Winters, you can just call me James. Oscar and I have known each other for a long time, and Amelia is just like family to me. Since you and Mr.

Winters are her parents, I treat you like my family too. As such, there's no need for you to be so formal with me."

Melanie smiled awkwardly and looked rather unnatural.

"Mr. and Mrs. Winters, both of you may go inside and see your son now but please try to keep quiet. The patient's condition is not looking good and too much noise would affect his rest," James said.

Melanie perked up immediately at the mention of her son.

Grabbing James' hand, she said, "Dr. James, please be honest with me. Is my son all right? Please save him! I am willing to do anything you ask me to."

"Mrs. Winters, please don't say that. I will definitely do my best for my patient. However, I will need the patient's family's cooperation as well. We can only save the patient with the trust of their family members," James said meaningfully.

Both Melanie and Dominic understood what the doctor meant and agreed.

After reassuring the two elderly, Oscar and Amelia followed James into his office.

"James, just tell me honestly. What are the chances of recovery for my brother?" Amelia asked directly once they reached the doctor's office.

"I've performed quite a few surgeries for cirrhosis. Ninety percent of my patients managed to recover completely. However, your brother's condition is different. He had been injected with a drug that was newly developed by Anglandur which speeds up cirrhosis at an alarming speed. In fact, the rate at which it develops is so fast that the other organs would fail within a short period of time. As such, your brother's situation is quite tricky. I will give my mentor a call later to discuss. We need to find the person who has managed to obtain the rare drug. Since it is such a new drug, it is impossible for it to enter Chanaea so soon. Moreover, it was used to deal with an ordinary man." James frowned and had a serious expression on his face.

Amelia clenched her fists tightly and looked solemn as well.

"Will his life be in danger?" the woman asked after a moment of silence.

"Yes," James answered flatly.

Amelia downcast her eyes when she heard the doctor's answer.

Oscar wrapped his hand around her shoulders and pulled her into his arms at once, saying, "Don't think too much for now. James will do his best to save him."

After taking a pause, Oscar continued to comfort his wife. "I have already instructed Hugo to take some men with him and guard your brother's ward. No one would be able to get near him, other than the doctors and nurses whom we are familiar with. Sorry, I was angry previously and did not consider your feelings. Since you don't want anything to happen to Spencer, we won't let that happen."

Amelia rested her head on the man's shoulders.

After a long silence, the woman said, "James, please save him. He's my brother, and I can't let anything happen to him. My parents won't be able to take it if something bad happens to him." Even though the Winters family refused to acknowledge her, Amelia could not bring herself to be ruthless to them.

"I will definitely try my best," James promised before continuing, "Amelia, please don't worry. I have already promised Oscar that I won't let anything happen to your family. Just relax for now and don't think too much."

Amelia nodded.

Too Much to Bear, My Love Chapter 598

Chapter 598 Do You Not Like Me

James threw himself fully into the matter of rescuing Spencer. At the same time, Oscar had also arranged for an investigation to look into who was behind poisoning Spencer. Kurt and his men followed the leads and found out that it was done by a foreigner who had entered Chanaea using a fake ID card and had left the country immediately after completing his mission. His departure had effectively cut off all leads that might reveal what his true identity was.

"Carry on with the investigation," Oscar commanded.

"But Boss, he was traveling on a fake ID card and has already left Chanaea. There are so many countries in the world that he can choose to go to. Even if we expend a huge amount of financial and human resources, there's no guarantee we'll be able to track him down," one of the guards said boldly.

Oscar seemed to be in deep thought.

"Keep an eye on that man named June. I want his every move to be reported to me," he instructed.

The same guard spoke up. "Boss, unfortunately, that man named June has flown back to his home country yesterday. We have no idea why he left."

Oscar narrowed his eyes. June seemed to be acting fast. He probably had a hand in this matter, but it would be hard to pin him down now that he was out of the country. He had returned to his own territory where the Adertons were an old and powerful family with connections in every stratum of the society. Even the government was deferential toward them. If the Clintons were the local tyrants of this city, the Adertons could be considered the local tyrants over there.

There was no way he could just send his men over to capture June and bring him back.

Even if June were to return to Chanaea, he would have been fully prepared. It would not be easy to catch him. "You may go now."

"Yes, Boss."

As soon as everyone else had left, Amelia entered the room holding a cup of hot milk.

As Oscar looked at her, his previously hardened expression instantly started to appear softer and more tender.

"Have some milk," Amelia said gently while offering the cup to him.

Oscar took the cup and drank a big gulp. It was not too cloyingly sweet, which was just the way he liked it.

He put down the cup and pulled Amelia into his arms, rubbing his chin on the top of her head.

Feeling tickled, Amelia tried to struggle free but gave in after a few seconds and settled into his embrace like a little kitten. "What's the matter? Is something bothering you?"

"I'm sorry I didn't manage to capture the person who harmed Spencer," Oscar said in a low voice while licking her earlobe.

Amelia patted his chest lightly. "You're feeling vexed because of this? This doesn't sound like you at all."

"It pains my heart to see you toss and turn in bed and lose sleep over this every night. I want to capture the mastermind so that your mind can be set at ease."

"You noticed?" Amelia lifted her head and saw the dark rings below his eyes. Her heart ached as she thought about how much her problem was bothering him.

"You are my woman. If I'm not on top of your every move, am I fit to be your man?" Oscar lowered his head and looked straight into Amelia's eyes. When their eyes met, he could not resist kissing her on the lips. Then, he released her and said tenderly, "Try not

to think too much. I'll take care of everything. If you want to find out who's responsible for the state that Spencer is in today, I'll get to the bottom of it."

"There's no need to," Amelia said without hesitation. "James has asked for help from his trainer. If the two of them were able to pull me back from the brink of death, I'm sure they'll be able to save my brother too. This will be considered as my repayment to the Winters family for taking me in and providing for me all these years. When it's all over, I'll sever all ties with them. Our paths in life are different. There's no happiness in forcing ourselves to be a family."

"Do you really think so?"

Amelia nodded.

"No regrets?"

Amelia laughed in resignation.

"What's there to regret? My ties with the Winters family should have ended a decade ago. It's just that I still had a tiny glimmer of hope that they'd treat me like their real daughter. But now I've seen through them. After Spencer recovers, I don't think we'll ever meet each other again," Amelia said with a sense of acceptance.

Oscar kissed her on her lips again, his heart aching for her silent suffering. "Do you want to take Tony to visit them?"

"Why would I want to do that?"

"They're your family after all. I suppose they have the right to see their grandchild?"

"They don't even want to recognize me as their daughter. Do you really think they'll want to meet Tony?"

Oscar was silent.

Amelia put one arm around his waist and patted him on his chest contentedly with the other hand. "I know you want what's best for me, but please trust me on this. Tony is a sensitive child, and he's very sharp at sensing whether a person has kind or malicious intentions. Mom doesn't like me, so I doubt she'll like Tony either. There's no need to force them to like each other."

"All right," Oscar said as they walked out of the study with their arms still around each other. "It's getting late, you'd better go to bed."

Amelia nodded.

She soon settled into a rare good night's sleep.

The next morning, she woke up when Oscar was still sleeping and joined Molly in the kitchen after washing up.

As they were preparing breakfast together, Tony ran into the kitchen and greeted them politely. "Good morning, Molly," he said before putting his arms around Amelia's leg from behind her and clinging to her like a koala clinging to a tree. "Mummy, I've missed you so much. It's been a long time since we've played together. I don't want to go to Grandma's house today. I just want to stay home with you."

Amelia washed her hands, turned around, and scooped Tony into her arms. "Molly, I'm taking Tony out to play for a while."

"Go ahead, I can manage on my own."

Amelia carried Tony out of the kitchen and set him down on the sofa. She looked at Tony and said with a tender smile, "Did you really miss me?"

Tony nodded. "Mommy, it's the weekend today. I want to go to the playground with you. I want to ride on the Ferris wheel."

Amelia touched his face and said apologetically, "Remember I told you that I need to go to the hospital today? Uncle Spencer is unwell. I need to take care of him because Granddad and Granny are getting on in years, and they don't have the energy to tend to him. So I need you to be a good boy and go play with Grandma first. As soon as I'm done with my chores, I'll pick you up, all right? We can even go on a holiday with Daddy when all this is over."

Tony cocked his head to the side as he listened. Unlike other children his age, he was sensible and not prone to throwing tantrums to get his way.

He only had one question. "Mommy, I know from watching television that Granddad and Granny are your parents, but how come I've never met them? Do they dislike me?"

Amelia felt a stab in her heart when she heard that.

She stroked Tony's cheeks lovingly and said with a chuckle, "You're such an adorable boy. Which grown-up wouldn't like you once they've met you?"

"Then why won't Granddad and Granny meet me?"

"That's because Uncle Spencer is unwell, and that's keeping them too busy to come meet you."

“Mommy, you’re lying. They obviously don’t like me,” Tony said with a pout. He had seen through her lie.

Amelia was stunned. She had almost forgotten that Tony was more mature and perceptive than other children his age. She had to approach the matter from another angle. “Tony, don’t you believe your own Mommy anymore?”

“No, I’ll always believe you, Mommy. However I’ve decided to follow you to the hospital today to visit Uncle Spencer, Granddad, and Granny,” Tony said with a solemn expression.

After a moment’s consideration, Amelia decided it was better to just go along with Tony’s wish. “Do you really want to meet Granddad and Granny?”

“Aren’t they the most important people in your life?” Tony asked directly. Because they’re so important to you, I’ll do whatever I can to please them.

Amelia naturally understood what Tony meant.

She pulled him into her arms and said, “All right, I’ll take you to meet them. But you must be on your best behaviour because Uncle Spencer is not well, and that’s making everyone sad and worried. So if they’re not as warm to you as you expect, you must try to understand that it’s not because they don’t like you. It’s just like whenever you’re sick, I find it very hard to cheer myself up too. Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

Tony nodded his head solemnly.

When Oscar woke up and went downstairs, he was informed immediately by Amelia about her plans to take Tony to the hospital.

He paused for a moment before asking, “You’ve made up your mind?”

“Tony really wants to meet them. I shouldn’t stand in the way of him fulfilling his desire to get to know his grandparents,” Amelia said with a wry smile. She was not against Tony getting to know the Winters family. In fact, she felt closer to them compared to the Hutton family whom she had not contacted for more than twenty years. Perhaps the years of cold treatment she had received had filled her heart with an inexplicable sense of hope and longing.

Perhaps this was a case of wanting what one could not get the most.

“All right,” Oscar agreed without further hesitation.

After breakfast, the three of them proceeded to the hospital together.

When Dominic and Melanie saw Tony, whose face was as exquisite as a porcelain doll, they did not break down in tears of joy. Instead, they appeared awkward and restrained. Compared to the good-looking and well-groomed Tony, the two elderly folks looked ordinary and old, like two peasants from the countryside. Amelia had bought them nice clothes before, but they were all vehemently rejected by Melanie.

“Amelia, is this your son?” Dominic asked in a tight voice.

Amelia could not help feeling a tinge of disappointment.

Her family did not seem enthusiastic about meeting her son at all.

However, she kept her emotions in check very quickly.

“Dad, his name is Anthony. We nicknamed him Tony, which means priceless. We want him to know how much we cherish him,” Amelia said.

Dominic only smiled upon hearing her introduction and made no move to step forward and give Tony a hug.

Tony cocked his head to the side and said, “Granddad, you can call me Tony too.”

Dominic and Melanie looked at each other, not knowing how to react. They did, however, seem to finally detect a sense of awkwardness in each other’s eyes.

“Granddad, Granny, do you not like me?” Tony asked in confusion. Their reaction was completely different from the way his Grandpa and Grandma reacted when they first met him. He could even sense that they seemed to be trying to keep a distance from him. But why is that so? Am I not likable?

“Of course we do, Tony. You’re so handsome and cute,” Dominic explained with a wave of his hand.

Too Much to Bear, My Love Chapter 599

Chapter 599 Investment

Amelia squatted down. “Do you remember what I’ve told you, Tony?”

Tony said: “You told me that Granny and Granddad would be too worried for Uncle Spencer to be in a good mood, and for me to behave myself. I was! All I wanted was to just say hello to them.”

At his words, Amelia felt a trace of resentment in her heart.

“The hospital’s no place for a young child, Amelia,” Dominic added. “It smells strongly of medicine. Your mother and I have to take care of your brother. Take Tony home. When Spencer feels better, all three of us will go to see Tony.”

Amelia’s fist loosened.

“Tony is your grandson, Dad,” Oscar said. “Don’t you miss him at all?”

A trace of embarrassment flashed across Dominic’s face.

“Oscar, don’t get me wrong,” he replied with a sheepish grin. “I think Tony is too delicate like a doll. Having come from a small place, we haven’t seen much of the world. I’m afraid that our blunt ways will scare him.”

Melanie gave Tony a complicated look. “I’m going in to check on our son, Dominic. Forgive me for not being good enough for such an exquisite grandson.” Without another word, she strode off into the ward.

Dominic was even more embarrassed.

“I’d better go in and check on your mother, Amelia.” Dominic also made an excuse to enter the ward.

“Grandpa and Granny don’t really like me, do they?” Tony asked quietly, looking hurt.

“It’s not like that, Tony,” Amelia said patiently. “They’re just worried about Uncle Spencer. I promise to bring you to see them once he gets better, all right?”

Tony looked at his mother with bright eyes and made the lie much more difficult for her to tell.

“I’m sorry, Tony,” Amelia said guiltily. I shouldn’t have brought Tony to the hospital. I didn’t know that they are cruel enough to ignore a child’s feelings to this extent.

Tony placed his little hand on Amelia’s face. The warmth of his hand spread through her skin into her bloodstream.

“If you will just say the word, Mommy, I will make Grandpa and Granny love me,” Tony assured.

Amelia felt warmth in her heart.

“You don’t need to,” she replied with a smile. “I know you are a good boy. There is no need to aggrieve yourself for me.”

Tony wrinkled his sharp little nose. "But Mommy, I don't like it when someone makes you feel bad."

Oscar picked him up with such suddenness that Tony gave an exclamation of shock before staring at Oscar. "What are you doing, Big Meanie? Let me down."

Oscar looked down at him from full height. "Watch your tongue, little man. I'm taking you and your mother out for a big dinner at this delicious restaurant I found. You're going to love the food there. After that, we can go to an amusement park. Haven't you always wanted to ride the Ferris wheel?"

Like a charm, Tony's attention was indeed diverted.

Oscar took his wife and son for a drink before proceeding with the plan of the restaurant and then to the amusement park.

Accompanied by Oscar, Tony went twice on the Ferris wheel. Even after the rides, he was still very excited. Half an hour later, however, he approached Amelia with his hand on his stomach. "My tummy hurts, Mommy," he groaned. "I want to go to the toilet."

Oscar picked him up immediately and the family of three hurriedly looked for the bathroom.

It was nearly an hour later when Tony emerged. His little face was pale, and his legs were shaky.

Amelia opened a bottle of mineral water for him as she fussed, "Are you all right, Tony?"

"I'm hungry, Mommy," Tony said morosely as he clutched his deflated stomach.

Her worries dissipated in an instant, Amelia could not help laughing.

She wiped Tony's brow with a clean handkerchief. "Come, let's have something delicious to eat."

Oscar drove them to another restaurant. Unexpectedly, Tony went to the toilet again right after their meal.

Thoroughly alarmed by that point, Amelia and Oscar took him to the hospital as soon as Tony finished using the toilet.

After examining him, the doctor turned to his parents with a stern gaze. "The child ate too much, too quickly. As his parents, it is your responsibility to manage your child's portions. Children have weaker immune systems. It's very easy to overwhelm their capacity for digestion if you aren't careful."

Amelia was beside herself with worry. "Is it serious, Doctor?"

"Thankfully, it isn't," the doctor said. "I'll give him a jab, then prescribe some medicine to aid in digestion for when he goes home. However, prevention is better than cure. You have to pay attention to Tony's diet lest this happens again."

Amelia nodded vigorously.

After Tony had gotten his jab, Amelia followed Oscar to collect Tony's medicine. She was very distressed for Tony who was leaning on Oscar a little sadly.

She was so distressed that she almost burst into tears. "Oh, you poor boy. You must be feeling awful! It's all my fault for not paying closer attention to what you were eating. If I had stopped you from having ice cream earlier, you wouldn't have had a stomachache. It was my carelessness that had caused you such pain."

Tony's eyelids fluttered as he gazed up at her. "I'm fine, Mommy," he said weakly. "I just want some ribs, but the doctor said to only let me have soup instead. I feel sad at the thought of not being able to have meat." Amelia could not help laughing as she was completely mollified by the way he batted his eyelashes in defeat.

Tony chuckled too. "You're most pretty when you smile, Mommy. Cheer up, I'm fine. In fact, I will be completely okay after eating some chicken nuggets."

Amelia's worries disappeared. Her heart melted into a puddle at such a lovely comment by her son.

After Oscar drove his wife and son back to the apartment and tucked Tony in, Julian called.

Oscar picked up at once. "Hey, Julian."

"Oscar, didn't you arrange for Tiffany to meet with me to talk about the adaptation of her fantasy novel?" Julian said on the other end of the phone. "I have already selected the location. Can you come over now?"

"Tony has had a bad stomach," Oscar replied succinctly. "Come to my house instead. We'll have the meeting here."

"Tony has had a bad stomach?" Julian asked concernedly. "Is he okay?"

"He's fine now. We'll talk about it when you get here."

"All right, then. I'm on my way."

After Oscar hung up, the doorbell rang.

Amelia went to open the door and found Tiffany standing outside.

“How did Tony’s stomach flu happen, Babe? How is he? Is it serious?” Tiffany anxiously grabbed Amelia’s hand and blurted out one question after another without giving her time to respond.

“He’s fine now,” Amelia replied. “After eating the wrong thing, he went to the toilet several times. We just got back from the hospital. He’s sound asleep.”

Tiffany ran into the bedroom and gave a soft cry of pity after a glance at Tony’s motionless figure on the bed.

“How can something like this happen out of the blue?” Tiffany said, stroking his cheek.

“I took him to see my parents,” Amelia explained guiltily, “and they didn’t treat him very well. I was afraid that he would not tell me that he was upset, so we treated him to some delicious food. It was our fault for not restricting him. He had two whole ice creams and three ham sausages that he is usually not allowed to touch. After riding the Ferris wheel, he became like this.”

Tiffany stood up and looked at Amelia like she was a monster.

“Are you kidding me, Babe?” she cried angrily. “He’s only two years old! Why would you stuff him and put him on a Ferris wheel? Are you out of your mind? Where is your common sense? Children are delicate!”

Amelia lowered her head in shame, not daring to refute the reprimand.

At the sorry sight of her friend’s guilt, Tiffany could not bring herself to continue.

“What’s gotten into you, Babe?” she continued in a gentler voice with a helpless shrug. “How could you be so absent-minded? It isn’t worth risking Tony’s well-being for grandparents who don’t care about him. It’ll be too late for regrets when something happens to Tony, wouldn’t it?”

Amelia sighed.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, she gazed at her son whose features were contorted in pain even in the depths of sleep and felt a pang of mixed feelings in her heart.

“It was Tony who begged me to bring him to his grandparents,” Amelia explained. “He was a good boy for greeting them when he saw them. I just didn’t think that my parents would detest me to such an extent that they wouldn’t even give look at him. Instead of letting him wallow in disappointment in himself, we decided to take Tony for something delicious to cheer him up. Getting him hospitalized was the last thing we wanted.”

Tiffany sat down next to her friend. "I'm sorry, Amelia," she said guiltily. "I didn't mean to be harsh. I just can't stand watching you and Tony tear yourselves apart for the Winters. They aren't worth it."

"I know."

If she did not know by now where she stood in her parents' eyes from how they treated Tony, Amelia really is the densest girl on the planet. It's one thing to love your family but another to put your child's interests beneath theirs.

Furthermore, there was no place for Amelia in the Winters household anymore. Her incessant attempts to reconcile with her parents in spite of such resistance on their part would only make her appear shameless.

"It's better not to let children get involved in the grievances amongst adults. Children are intuitive, you know. He knows when he's not wanted, he just can't express it in words."

"I know. You're right"

The two women chatted a little longer in the room. Upon Julian's arrival, they came out into the lounge.

"Hello, Mr. Hayes. It's been a while." Tiffany extended her hand toward Julian.

Julian smiled broadly. "Just call me Julian. A friend of Amelia's is a friend of mine too. My friends don't call me Mr. Hayes."

Tiffany nodded politely. "I will, Julian."

Julian then turned to Amelia. "I'd heard from Oscar that Tony's had an episode of stomach upset, Amelia. How is he now? Is it serious?"

Amelia smiled at his concern for her son. "He got his jab at the hospital. After coming home and taking his medicine, he'd been asleep until now. I'll make him some chicken broth later. He'll be fine."

"That's good to hear," Julian said as he handed Amelia an exquisite-looking bag. "I'd bought some supplements on the way over. My mother sends her love, along with a promise to whip up something nutritious for him."

Amelia took it with a smile. "How thoughtful of you, Julian. Why don't you and Tiff talk about her script? I guarantee that her adaptation will be a bestseller should you choose to invest."

Julian grinned good-naturedly. "Since you spoke so highly of this project, I will still invest even if it makes a loss. The money is nothing to me. I have read the novel, though, and

I think that the plot and characters are written beautifully. In order to properly do such an outstanding piece of work justice, it is my wish for it to be shot with little to no deviation from the book. I sincerely think that it'll appeal to both fans of the original novel and moviegoers alike."

"You three get started. I'll get you something to eat."

Oscar, Julian, and Tiffany sat on the sofa in the living room to talk about the script while Amelia went into the kitchen to prepare some food.

The talk lasted several hours. Occasionally, on her trips into the bedroom to check on Tony, Amelia would drop by to express her opinion. At the end of the cordial discussion when it came to the trio arriving at a consensus, Julian pledged to invest close to a hundred million while Oscar rounded up his investment to an even hundred million. Aside from that, he also promised to secure the participation of other investors to make the adaptation as large of a scale as they possibly can and to market it heavily before its official release to make it the most anticipated movie of the year.

Tiffany did not expect the two men to be that supportive, though she knew that it was mostly due to Amelia's credit. If Amelia hadn't put in a good word for me, I'm afraid Oscar wouldn't even deign to consider my project.

"Thanks for your faith in me, guys," Tiffany said gratefully. "If this thing ever takes off, Derrick and I will have you over to dinner for your help."

"That suits me," Julian said as he brushed her formality aside. "I want a word with Derrick, the first-time producer. After all, I intend to recoup huge profits from this investment. Oscar and I are no philanthropists, so you don't need to thank us."

"I guarantee that you'll reap fantastic profits for this adaptation, Julian," Amelia chimed in. "You have mentioned your appreciation for Tiff's writing, have you not? The development of the plot and the design of the characters will make for a very attractive movie plot, I'm sure. On top of that, she's a best-selling author and already has a loyal fanbase. Mark my words, the filming of this novel will definitely be a hit before its premiere. All you have to do is wait for the profits to roll in."

Julian grinned. "My newly founded entertainment company will hit the ground running thanks to this adaptation. If my company can become a titan in the entertainment industry in the future, I will have Tiffany to thank for that."

"You are very kind, Julian," Tiffany said at once. "Everybody knows that you do not lack the funds to make great movies if you wanted to. All you have to do is reach out and there'll be many screenwriters better than me begging to curry your favor. It is only due to Amelia for you to even consider investing in my work."

After exchanging several more polite remarks like that, Tony suddenly came downstairs. “Mommy,” he muttered groggily as he rubbed his eyes, “I’m hungry.”

Amelia immediately picked him up and kissed him several times on the face.

“Does your stomach still hurt, Tony?”

Tony kissed her twice on the face and wrapped her hands around her neck affectionately. “I’m hungry and I want some meat, Mommy.”

“I’ve made you some chicken broth, Tony,” Amelia coaxed. “Be a good boy and have that today. You can have meat tomorrow when you’re feeling better, all right? You can’t handle too much greasy food after everything your tummy has been through today.”

“I want some nuggets, Mommy,” Tony whined pitifully. “Can I please have some? Please?”

Amelia fell silent.

“Come give Tiffy a hug, Tony,” Tiffany said as she knelt before him with her arms spread. “I came to see you as soon as I’d heard that you had an upset stomach. Are you happy to see me?”

Tony nestled in her arms. “I want some meat, Tiffy,” he mumbled coquettishly. “I’ve been on the toilet all day. Look how flat my tummy is.”

“Be a good boy and have your chicken broth today. I promise to cook you some chicken nuggets tomorrow. You love the nuggets I make, don’t you?”

“Will you really, Tiffy?”

Tiffany nodded.

“Okay, Tiffy, I believe you. You wouldn’t go back on your word, right?”

Tiffany shook her head. “Here, pinky swear.”

Tony clutched her pinky in his. “You’ve made a promise now,” he said solemnly. “May lightning strike you and turn you into a dog if you go back on your word.”

“Of course.”

The adults could not help but burst into laughter.

Too Much to Bear, My Love Chapter 600

Chapter 600 Explain Yourself

Emboldened by Oscar and Julian's involvement, Derrick's investors who had been tentatively on the fence began to express their confidence in the project. With the collective backing of the major players involved, the word about the adaptation of Tiffany's novel attracted another close to half a billion in investment. With a production of such magnitude, the success of the adaptation seemed inevitable as long as the significant elements of drama, marketing, and casting were met. With Oscar's invisible but omnipotent influence behind the scenes, the Hissons would not dare attempt a blatant interference.

Kate and Terrence had different reactions to the news of Tiffany's success in securing Oscar and Julian's support.

Despite Kate's anger, Terrence became thoughtful upon hearing the news as if comparing the value that Tiffany and Crystal could bring to help the cause of the Hissons.

Tiffany's ability to win over Oscar and Julian is conclusive proof of their relationship as god-siblings. Aside from that, the fact that she and Amelia are best friends is enough to overshadow the fact of the girl's humble origins. With the backing of the Clintons behind her, the Hissons will benefit hugely if Derrick marries her. Though the Halliwell family is also quite prestigious, they are based in Beshya. The distance from Tayhaven makes an alliance with them more improbable and volatile.

"The girl has some tricks up her sleeve, it seems," Terrence said meaningfully.

Kate felt a stab of fear in her heart as she turned to look at Terrence. "What do you mean, Dad?"

Terrence met her gaze. "I am perfectly aware of your feelings toward the girl, Kate. However, you have seen with your own eyes how she reacted to the problem Derrick's company was facing. Instead of crying at the door for you to let her see him, she had instead made use of her contacts to help Derrick break into another field. If this project of theirs is successful, he will already have one foot securely in the entertainment industry. Need I remind you that his success also reflects the Hissons' share in the entertainment industry. Anyway, it is good for us to have Tiffany marry into our family. The girl knows Oscar and Amelia, for God's sake, and she's a famous best-selling author! Even if I didn't choose her for my grandson, the point is that Derrick chose her too. You should at least respect his choice, if not mine."

Kate was becoming more alarmed by the minute.

"Dad, that wasn't what you said at the beginning. She has no prominent family members to speak of, she only has a bachelor's degree, and her appearance is plain at best. She is not worthy of my son. Besides, Crystal is head over heels for Derrick and has been

waiting for him all these years. What will happen to Crystal if you give Derrick and Tiffany your blessing?”

As Crystal was chosen by Kate, the former knew exactly what to say to gain the favor of the latter. Tiffany, on the other hand, was not good-looking, nor was she skilled in pleasing her elders. Terrence’s approval of the girl seemed to exacerbate Kate’s dislike for her.

“There are things you can’t consider superficially, Kate,” Terrence said sagely. “I think that Crystal isn’t as pure as you make her out to be. Being away in Beshya all year round, how could you be sure that she is suitable for Derrick?”

Kate’s eyes widened with shock as she looked at the old man in disbelief.

“Weren’t you full of praise for Crystal before, Dad? The Halliwell family is influential in Beshya. If we toy with their daughter like this, I’m afraid it might offend them.”

Terrence motioned for his bodyguard behind him to retrieve something from the study who reemerged seconds later and presented the old man with a leather pouch.

“Take a good look at the true nature of the daughter-in-law of your choice, Kate.” Terrence pointed to the leather bag.

With a sense of foreboding that an unbearable truth lay within its folds, she did not dare touch it.

“What is this, Dad?”

“Why don’t you take a look and find out?”

After some hesitation, Kate picked up the leather bag and opened it gingerly. As she perused the photos and the large stack of documents, her expression grew increasingly sour.

“What’s going on, Dad? How did you get these photos?” Kate could not believe that the daughter-in-law of her choosing had been with so many men.

“After listening to your songs of praise for Crystal, I had someone follow her to see if she was as good as you said,” Terrence said casually as he picked up the crutches in his hand. “It just so happened that these photographs reached my hands yesterday. Given how interesting I thought they were, I’d thought that you might find them to be as useful as they were to me.”

Kate’s cheeks were scalding as if she had been slapped several times across the face.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, she was still resolute in her disbelief. “These photos could have been faked, Dad. Crystal has always behaved very well in front of us and has been nothing but filial to you. I still think that she is the rightful wife of my son and the mother of his heir. She’s the most suitable candidate, after all. There must be someone who wants to sabotage her chances of marrying Derrick.”

“Feel free to have the photographs authenticated if you don’t believe them.”

Kate clenched the photo in her hand tightly as her rage bubbled close to the surface.

“I still think that there has been a misunderstanding, Dad,” Kate attested stubbornly. “I’ll ask Crystal in person, but two single people are free to explore their options in the absence of an engagement in this day and age. It’s no big deal for Crystal to spend her time with other men.”

“I did not expect you to be so generous, Kate,” Terrence responded drily. “You’re insisting on Derrick marrying this girl at the risk of him getting cheated on in the future. How kind of you to give the girl the benefit of the doubt.”

“Dad, that’s not what I meant, I’m just trying to-”

“Anyway,” the old man interrupted, “do what you will. The evidence speaks more loudly than I ever could. I don’t really care what people do before marriage, as long as they don’t get caught by the media. As for what you decide to do as a mother, I’ll leave it up to you. It depends on how much you love your son.” After speaking, Terrence got to his feet slowly. With one last look at Kate, he continued, “I’m tired. Good night, Kate. You should get some rest.”

After Terrence disappeared upstairs, Kate remained on the chair as she stared blankly into space.

Even she did not know how long she had remained motionless before the decision to call Crystal spurred her into action.

“Crystal,” Kate said as soon as the former picked up, “are you free tomorrow? I have something that may be of interest to you.”

“I am, Mrs. Hisson,” Crystal replied. “What time would you like to meet? I’m having a party with my friends in Tayhaven and will not be returning to Beshya tonight. Pick a place, and I’ll meet you there tomorrow. How about that?”

Kate’s heart sank. “All right, then. I’ll send you the time and address soon.”

I can’t wait, Mrs. Hisson. Good night and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Good night.”

Kate was visibly distraught after hanging up the phone. As she stared at the girl in the incriminating photographs, she felt sick to her stomach at the sight of the girl with whom she placed so much faith in being amorous with so many different men.

She had only four conditions for a daughter-in-law. She insisted that they remained unadulterated, come from a good family, be of a pleasant temperament, and be blessed with beauty.

Having thought that Crystal was the perfect daughter-in-law, Kate did not expect the truth to slap her across the face as hard as it did.

Even worse, Kate felt as if Crystal had humiliated her in front of Terrence. That was the biggest slap in the face of all.

Due to the shame that kept her up all night, Kate's fondness for Crystal decreased as the suspicion of Crystal's filial piety to her being an insincere act was beginning to set in.

Kate and Crystal arrived at their appointed place on the following day.

Crystal set down her bag and smiled at Kate. "I heard that the cuisine in this restaurant is as authentic as it gets, Mrs. Hisson. Have you decided what to order yet?"

Kate slid the menu over. "You go first. We'll chat when the food arrives."

With Kate's coldness made amply clear, a trace of doubt flashed in Crystal's eyes. Though she did not understand what had caused the change in the former, she decided to wait and see.

After placing the order for several dishes, all of which were Kate's favorites, she slid the menu back to the older woman.

What else would you like to try, Mrs. Hisson? Here, feel free to order anything you like."

"No need," Kate said blandly, "We've ordered enough for the both of us. I don't have much of an appetite today."

Crystal handed the menu to the waiter before studying Kate carefully.

"Did I do something wrong, Mrs. Hisson?" Crystal said, addressing the elephant in the room.

Kate pretended to be confused. "Why would you say that?"

“I don’t know, Mrs. Hisson. You just seem a little cold today. I would like to know if I’ve done something wrong so I can change. I think of you like my own mother, you know. It hurts living with the knowledge that I’d disappointed you somehow.”

Kate looked at her for a moment before sighing faintly. She took out the leather bag from her purse and pushed it in front of the younger woman.

“Have a look, Crystal,” Kate said. “I hope you can explain yourself.”