

The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late

#Left Behind 101 - Read The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late Left Behind 101

Chapter 101 So Stupid

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No matter how bad the arguments got, Trina had never actually stopped Phoebe from doing what she wanted.

This time, Phoebe finally told her the truth. "I'm not doing this because it's worth it or because of Tracy. I'm doing it for myself.

"I can never forget the way she looked at me when she had no one else—like I was the only lifeline she had left.

"I know how talented she is. And I know her character. She would never steal someone's work. I believe she was framed."

Maybe she had gotten a little obsessed with the investigation. She hadn't found any proof yet, but her gut told her more and more that Tracy was innocent.

So when Phoebe finally found evidence, she was overjoyed. And when she learned Kellen had destroyed it, she was so furious she collapsed and ended up in the hospital.

Phoebe took a slow breath. "I knew she was innocent. She even came to me for help. But I looked the other way. If I kept doing that, I'd have to live the rest of my life with that guilt."

She wasn't doing this for Tracy. She was doing it so she could live with herself.

Trina opened her mouth but couldn't think of anything to say.

Phoebe went on, "Trina, I know the smartest choice would be to ignore her.

"But if she came to you, and you knew she was innocent, could you turn away and sleep at night?"

Trina had no answer.

She didn't know what she'd do. But she knew she couldn't live with that kind of guilt.

She bit her lip, looked away, and stayed quiet. The evidence was gone, and the matter was settled—at least on the surface. She didn't want to argue about it anymore.

Meanwhile, Tracy finally let out a sigh of relief when she heard about the school's official

statement.

In her current position, going head-to-head with Kellen would've been a disaster. But she had no intention of letting Winona off the hook.

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Hunting down Winona took up all of her attention. She was barely at her rented apartment anymore. She didn't even know Liam had gone to see Ronald.

When Ronald opened the door and saw Liam, he was a little surprised—but not shocked.

They didn't know each other well, but Ronald could tell Liam wasn't particularly bright and had a habit of clinging to things.

The first time they'd met, Ronald had guessed that Liam would come looking for him when Tracy wasn't around. He just didn't expect it to take this long.

If Liam cared about Tracy, he wouldn't have waited until now.

The funniest part was Liam's opening line. "There's five million dollars in here. Take the money, get as far away as you can, and don't ever see CeeCee again!"

He practically threw the bank card at Ronald, his tone dripping with arrogance.

Ronald didn't move. The card slid to the floor. His polite smile didn't change one bit.

Sure, people had insulted him before. But being paid off? That was new. And only for a measly five million.

Ronald's mouth curved slightly as he looked down at the card. "You've got the wrong guy. I don't know any Ms. Tracy.

"You've always said you only had one sister—Erin. And the only sister I acknowledge is Tracy."

Liam had bragged about his preference for Erin plenty of times. Anyone who listened could have figured that out.

"Don't play dumb with me!" Liam snapped, his face flushing with anger. "I know exactly why you went after her. You saw she was fighting with our family and thought you could take advantage of it. You figured you could get something out of us by winning her over.

"Well, forget it!"

Ronald stayed calm, the faint smile on his lips making it look like he was watching a clown perform.

He waited until Liam was finished before speaking. "Are you done? If you are, you can leave, I've got to make CeeCee dinner."

He didn't bother hiding the smugness in his voice. "She loves my cooking. Says it makes her

feel like she's home."

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If he had a tail, Ronald might have wagged it right in Liam's face.

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That last line hit Liam harder than he expected. For some reason, he felt like something had been stolen from him.

He grabbed Ronald by the collar. "Who do you think you are? If CeeCee wasn't just trying to one—up Erin, do you think you'd have a shot at her?"

"You're just a tool she's using to get back at us!"

He sounded so certain, so self-satisfied, as if it were an unshakable truth.

Ronald just chuckled. "In your mind, everything CeeCee does is about competing with Erin. You do think too highly of yourself.

"You're so stupid. What the hell do you even have in that head of yours?"

The insult was blunt and mean, but it felt damn good to say.

Chapter 102 Hide in It

Of course, Liam didn't see it that way.

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No one had ever insulted him like that before. He froze for a moment, his face twisting with

anger.

"You..."

The rest of his words caught in his throat. He was so furious that he just swung at Ronald.

But Ronald caught his fist effortlessly.

His face looked younger than Liam's, and there was even a lazy, easy smile on it. Yet the strength in his grip made Liam feel like he couldn't breathe.

Shocked, Liam stared at him, a knot tightening in his chest.

Ronald let go, then asked casually, "You act like everything you do is for CeeCee's good. But how much do you know about her?"

The question didn't land at first. Liam just stared, confused.

Ronald smirked and tilted his head toward the back of the apartment. "Come on."

He led Liam into the only bedroom—Tracy's room.

What do you see?"

"This is where CeeCee stays. What do

The room was small. Aside from a bed and a short nightstand, there wasn't even a closet. A single rack in the corner held a few clothes. The space felt bare, almost empty.

Something about it made Liam's chest feel hollow, too. But he still didn't understand Ronald's point. He kept his face cold. "What are you getting at?"

Ronald's smile faded, replaced by a sharp, mocking look. "This room's so small you can see everything the second you walk in. There's not even space under the bed to hide a person. What do you think I'm saying?"

Liam's gut tightened.

He didn't know exactly where Ronald was going with this, but he could feel it was something

he didn't want to hear.

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Ronald didn't care what he wanted to hear.

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"This place isn't the Jackman Villa, but I'd never let CeeCee go without. She deserves the best. But no matter what furniture I buy—nice or cheap—she refuses it. She says if there's *too* much in the room, someone might hide in it."

Might hide in it.

The words were like a slap.

Normal people don't sit in their own homes worrying about strangers hiding inside.

Something stabbed at Liam's chest.

He'd grown up surrounded by luxury, spoiled by the Jackmans his whole life. He couldn't even imagine what it felt like to be afraid of your own home.

And the Tracy he thought he knew would never be afraid of something like that.

Ronald saw the dazed look on his face and gave a faint smirk. Maybe Liam wasn't completely hopeless.

Leaning against the doorway, arms crossed, Ronald asked suddenly, "Do you know how CeeCee and I met?"

Liam's heart skipped. He didn't dare look back at him and didn't dare ask.

Ronald went on anyway. "We were kidnapped by the same gang. They weren't bluffing. They were killers. If it hadn't been for CeeCee, my body would've been rotting in some ditch, and no one would even know."

Liam stumbled back against the doorframe.

He remembered the time Tracy had been kidnapped. He remembered telling someone to make sure the body was dumped far away, because he didn't want the bad luck.

"I ... I didn't know... I swear I didn't know..."

His face went pale. He grabbed Ronald's hand, shaking all over.

"I thought it was fake. That's why I said what I said. I didn't know..."

It sounded like he was desperate to convince both Ronald and himself that he wasn't a monster.

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Ronald smiled, but his eyes were ice. "Of course you didn't know. Because you never believed her. All you had for her was suspicion, dislike, and hate.

"You say you misunderstood CeeCee. Then tell me, when Erin was kidnapped, why didn't you doubt her? Why didn't you ask why she sent her bodyguard away? Why was she in the old district? Why did the kidnappers just happen to let her overhear the mastermind's voice? Did you ever think about that?"

His voice was calm, but every word dripped with scorn. "Next time you leave your house, try using your brain."

If anyone else had ever talked to Liam like that before, he would've exploded.

But now, all he felt was guilt.

Yeah. Same *kidnapping*. *Why had I never once suspected Erin?*

A dull ringing filled his head. By the time Ronald shoved him out, he was in a daze.

He couldn't believe that his feelings for Tracy had been reduced to nothing but suspicion and

resentment.

She was the one he had trusted most. As kids, no matter what happened, Tracy was always the first to stand in front of him.

Chapter 103 Lies

+5 Free Coins

Liam had once sworn that he would treat Tracy well for the rest of his life. If anyone ever dared hurt her, he would risk his own life to protect her.

There had to be some misunderstanding. Maybe Ronald was just saying what Tracy told him to say.

Yeah, that had to be it. Ronald was an outsider—how could he

know Tracy better than I, who'd known her for over 20 years?

Liam decided he was going to find Tracy and get answers.

*But still,
if she wanted his attention, why go through Ronald? And why let him call her "CeeCee"?*

The more Liam thought about it, the angrier he got. He didn't even notice that once again, he was blaming Tracy for everything.

He didn't know how fast he drove back to the Jackman Villa, but he stormed straight into Tracy's room the second he got there.

She wasn't inside. But when he opened the door, he froze.

Compared to his and Erin's room, this one was small. Aside from a bed and a vanity, the only other piece of furniture was a single chair. The rest of the room was empty.

The sight reminded him of the bare little room in that rental apartment earlier.

This room *had been arranged for Tracy by Walter—how could it possibly look like this?*

Walter was out on business, so Liam went to find one of the house staff.

“What’s going on with Tracy’s room? You people aren’t secretly mistreating her again, are you?”

A while back, when Walter found out Tracy had been put in a maid’s quarters, he ripped into everyone who worked here. Two maids had been made scapegoats, accused of bullying Tracy, and fired.

But everyone knew the real story, and Liam—who had been the first to find out she’d been living in the servants’ wing—knew it best.

A lie repeated enough times could almost sound true.

Now Liam had convinced himself the bare room was the staff’s fault, not because of what Ronald had told him.

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But the maid shook her head quickly. “It’s not us, Mr. Liam. Ms. Tracy cleared the room herself. She said she doesn’t like too much stuff in here. She only kept the vanity. Everything else she moved to other rooms. Walter knows.”

Liam knew the staff wouldn’t dare lie to him.

And that made his face turn pale.

The maid didn’t know what was wrong with him, so she just stood there, uneasy.

That was the moment Erin walked in. She looked puzzled. “What’s going on?”

The maid’s expression lit up with relief. She rushed to explain that Liam had somehow gotten the wrong idea and thought they were bullying Tracy again.

Everyone who worked at the Jackman Villa knew how much the family adored Erin. It was only natural for the maid to turn to her for help.

She didn't notice that Liam—who used to greet Erin warmly—was now just standing still, watching her with a searching, uncertain look.

Erin noticed, though. Something in her chest tightened, though she kept her smile.

She waited for the maid to finish, then sent her away with a kind word. Turning back to Liam, she

gave

him a warm, understanding smile. “If Tracy asked for it that way, we should respect her decision.”

Her tone was gentle and comforting. But Liam didn't hear a word of it.

“Erin,” he asked suddenly, “before you were kidnapped, why did you send your bodyguard away? And why were you in the old district?”

Erin's smile froze.

She never expected Liam to ask her something like that,

When did he start getting smart? And worse, when did he start suspecting me?

Her lips parted, but when she saw his sharp eyes fixed on her, she forced herself to stay calm.

Her mind raced. She quickly put on a nervous, evasive expression. “I ... I was just bored. I wanted to take a walk by myself.”

It was a weak excuse, and her face made it obvious she was lying.

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Chapter 103 Lies

Liam's expression darkened. A wave of anger surged through him.

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He grabbed her arm—harder than he meant to. “Erin, you've never lied to me before. Tell me the truth—why were you there?”

Erin was startled by his sudden outburst.

This time, her fear wasn't an act.

In all the years since she'd come back to the Jackman Villa, Liam had never spoken to her like this. He'd never even raised his voice at her, let alone grabbed her like now.

Maybe it was the heat of the moment, but Liam didn't even realize his tone was harsh. He gripped her shoulders and shook her. "Were you were you ... "

The words caught in his throat.

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But if he didn't say them, Ronald's accusations would just keep echoing in his head like a curse.

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Liam hesitated for a long time before he finally asked, "Did you let yourself get kidnapped on purpose?"

Erin stared at him, stunned. After a long pause, her eyes turned red. "Liam ... are you accusing me?"

His grip on her shoulders loosened. He couldn't quite meet her eyes.

"I ... I ... "

He fumbled for words, but nothing came out.

Erin's eyes grew wetter. "Yes. I told the bodyguard to leave on purpose. I went to the old district on purpose. But it was for ... for Tracy!"

Her tears started to fall. “Tracy’s relationship with the family has always been tense. If everyone found out she was living with some man, it could’ve caused an even bigger fight.

“I only went to talk to her. But she didn’t appreciate it. And then ... I ended up getting kidnapped.

“Normally, I’m never without a bodyguard. But this one time—right after seeing Tracy—it just happened...”

She didn’t finish the sentence, but it was clear she was pointing the blame toward Tracy.

Liam’s angry expression froze. His thoughts started following her words without him realizing it.

“You only saw Tracy before you were kidnapped?” he asked.

Of course, Erin had seen more people than just Tracy, but that didn’t stop her from answering, “Yes.”

Liam’s mind became a mess, like two voices fighting in his head.

He didn’t want to doubt Erin, but Ronald’s words kept echoing.

He didn’t want to doubt Tracy, but he couldn’t stop remembering all the cruel things she’d supposedly done out of jealousy.

Erin looked hurt, but her eyes stayed locked on Liam’s face, reading him. She could feel his

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Chapter 104 Simple–Minded

uncertainty.

She hadn’t expected this.

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Among the Jackmans, Liam was the most impulsive and the easiest to sway. She had imagined almost anyone else could waver—but not him.

Now she was curious. *What had happened that nearly pulled him*

out of my grasp?

Erin's voice trembled as she spoke. "Liam, you're the one I trust most in this family. I never thought you'd doubt me.

"You've disappointed me. Maybe... maybe I never should've come back."

She pushed his hands off her. Her broken expression stirred an ache of pity.

In that moment, all the battling voices in Liam's head went silent. All that was left was panic and regret.

"It's

my

fault. Erin, please don't be mad. I was misled—I never really meant to doubt you."

He reached for her arm again, gripping it tightly, his face full of guilt.

"It's all Walter and Ronald's fault. If they hadn't been saying those things to me, I never would've started imagining the worst."

Andrew used to say Liam was stubborn and simple-minded. Back then, Liam didn't believe it. But now he could see *it*—he was too naive, letting a few words turn him against Erin. It was shameful.

He

gave himself a light slap across the face. It wasn't hard, but it was loud.

"It's all on me. If you're mad, hit me. But don't ever say you're disappointed in me or that you shouldn't have come back.

"I promise—I'll never let anyone turn me against you again. Please, don't be upset."

Erin still looked pouty, but her hands curled slightly. Franklin and Walter, those useless old men, were already a headache—and now there was stubborn Ronald too.

She needed to get rid of one of them.

But she didn't pull away from Liam's hand. Instead, she gave him a small, uncertain voice, tinged with hurt. "You mean that?"

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Liam nodded over and over, looking painfully sincere.

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Finally, Erin's angry expression softened, and she gave him a haughty little warning. "Then I'll trust you this once. But if you ever doubt me again, I'll never forgive you."

"Don't worry—there won't be a next time," Liam promised quickly.

By now, he'd completely forgotten why he had started questioning her in the first place. All he cared about was keeping Erin happy, doing whatever she wanted.

She let out a small laugh through her tears, as if she believed him.

But of course, Erin didn't believe their promise.

After all, the Jackmans had once adored Tracy and sworn to treat them both equally. She'd seen how that turned out.

Their promises meant nothing.

Still, she didn't say that aloud. Instead, she gave a touched smile. "I knew you were the one who cared about me most. I know you didn't mean it.

"In the end, this is my fault," she said, sounding self-blaming. "If I hadn't told my bodyguard to leave and gone to the old district by myself, no one would've had a chance to twist things and make you doubt me."

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Chapter 105 We Might Have Misunderstood Tracy

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"I only wanted to talk to Tracy and get her to tell our family the truth herself. She had already hurt Mom and Dad before when she pretended to be kidnapped just to get money, so she should be the one to back down first this time.

"Mom and Dad are both reasonable people. If she insists on being with that man, I believe they would understand."

She had only said those things to show herself as reasonable and mature while making Tracy look ungrateful.

But Liam's reply was completely beyond what she had expected.

"Erin, you really were in the wrong this time." Liam frowned. "How could you go and say those things to Tracy?"

Erin froze, unsure whether she was more stunned that he had said she was wrong or more lost about what exactly she had done wrong.

Liam let out a sigh. "That man is not good enough for Tracy. If she hadn't been having issues with our family lately, he wouldn't have had the chance to step in.

"I will never allow Tracy to be with him, and going to her with those words was overstepping."

He had tried to keep his tone under control, but it was still easy to hear the blame in his voice.

Even if Tracy had been in conflict with the Jackmans, she was still one of them. There was no way Ronald, a man of dubious background with nothing but a handsome face, could ever be worthy of her.

Erin was caught off guard, not just because Liam had said she was in the wrong, but because of what he had said afterward.

He was the one who disliked and looked down on Tracy, and he was also the one who kept talking about driving her out of the Jackman family. What right did he have to think he could decide who Tracy could be with?

The Jackmans' arrogance and self-importance were exactly as she had imagined.

A fleeting, mocking smile tugged at the corner of her mouth.

She lowered her head, looking pitiful and remorseful. "I didn't think that far... I'm sorry, won't do it again."

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Knowing his words had hurt Erin, Liam couldn't bring himself to stay angry. "We'll let it time. But if something like this happens again, you must tell us first. Don't go making decisions on your own."

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Even though he had decided not to be angry with Erin anymore, the matter was far from over.

"In the end, this all started because of Tracy's kidnapping. Once we get to the bottom of it, all the misunderstandings will be cleared up."

If not for that kidnapping, none of the chaos that followed would have happened, and Ronald wouldn't have suddenly shown up.

Hearing him bring up something from so long ago, Erin's heart tightened, and she asked carefully, "What are you going to do?"

Liam had never hidden things from her, so he answered seriously, "We might have misunderstood Tracy back then. Her kidnapping could have been real, so I have to get someone to investigate it."

He added a special reminder. "Erin, keep this to yourself for now. Don't tell Mom, Dad, or Andrew."

With how strained things had been lately between them and Tracy, it would be better to wait until the truth was clear. Who knows, the truth might even help mend their relationship.

Erin never imagined that he would still want to investigate Tracy's kidnapping.

She thought this incident would eventually be left hanging with no resolution, just like everything else that had happened in recent years.

A mocking smile tugged slightly at her lips. She really wanted to talk him out of it.

But she had just cleared herself of Liam's suspicions, and saying too much now might stir up more trouble.

In the end, Erin could only smile and agree with his decision.

But as soon as Liam left, her expression turned dark.

She had truly underestimated Tracy. Even after being cast aside by the Jackmans, she still managed to charm Liam.

Erin clenched her teeth, her gaze cold.

Because of the kidnapping, the Jackmans were keeping a close watch on her, and there were

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some things she couldn't do herself. But that didn't mean she couldn't get someone else to do

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She had worked so hard for everything she owned; she couldn't let Tracy take it back from her!

Since she had decided to confront Winona, Tracy had to make sure she was fully prepared.

They had been enemies since childhood, and she knew plenty of Winona's secrets. But there was only one she could use to make Winona back off from Phoebe.

They had never gotten along, so even though Winona agreed to meet, her tone was sharp when she arrived. "Never thought you'd be the one to invite me out. Have you finally realized how low you are and come begging for my favor?"

Her words were anything but polite. After all, the main reason she had shown up today was to humiliate Tracy.

But Tracy remained calm, showing no reaction to her taunts. "Do you still remember the girl who jumped off the building the day before the SAT?"

Winona's proud, smug look froze instantly, replaced by visible fear and panic.

Sunderpeak High School was the best school in Cloudville. Back then, Tracy and Winona had both attended it, though they were in different classes.

Back then, Tracy had been proud and aloof. Even if she disliked Winona, she had never gone out of her way to seek her out.

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Chapter 106 I Won't Bother You Again

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That was why Winona had always believed there were certain things Tracy couldn't possibly know. After all, they had very little interaction at the time. But now, hearing Tracy ask the question made her heart skip a beat.

Winona's expression flickered. She picked up the water glass on the table and took a sip. "Why are you suddenly asking about this?"

Tracy glanced at her hand, which trembled slightly as she held the glass, and spoke in a low voice. "When she jumped, I happened to be on the rooftop."

Clang!

The glass slipped from Winona's hand and slammed onto the floor, shattering into pieces. Cold water splashed onto her legs, making her shudder uncontrollably.

Tracy's expression didn't change at all, as if Winona's intense reaction had nothing to do with her.

The commotion drew every pair of eyes in the café toward them, and a waiter quickly came over to clean up the mess.

Winona waved the waiter away, her face deathly pale. Bracing her hands on the table, she leaned forward slightly without realizing it. "What do you mean by that? Do you know something?"

Tracy stayed calm, her gaze fixed steadily on Winona. She didn't rush to answer.

She wasn't lying—before that girl jumped, she had indeed been on the rooftop and had even spoken to her.

Unfortunately, she hadn't been able to persuade her to step back.

After what felt like an eternity, Winona was nearly driven to the edge by Tracy's calm demeanor, and Tracy finally spoke. "Before she jumped, she told me something. Do you want to know what it was?"

Winona's face turned even paler, and she sank heavily back into her seat.

"What ...

what did she say to you?" Her voice trembled as much as her hands.

Tracy finally set down the glass she had been holding, her tone cool. "Does it matter what she said?"

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Chapter 106 I Won't Bother You Again

Winona froze, not understanding what she meant.

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Tracy decided to be blunt. "We never had any deep grudges to begin with, and our places in life will always be worlds apart. You really don't need to put so much effort into targeting me.

"If you stop going after me and the people around me, I can forget what that girl told me, and I can make sure there will never be any evidence left.

"Sounds like a fair deal to you, doesn't it?"

Her meaning couldn't have been clearer, and of course Winona understood.

She hadn't expected that Tracy could have evidence about something she thought had been buried for years.

No one liked being threatened. Moreover, Winona had come to see Tracy today with malicious intent after receiving Kellen's call.

But if that incident from back then were to be exposed, her life would be ruined beyond repair.

She couldn't afford to take that risk!

"I can let Phoebe go, and I won't bother you again." Winona gritted her teeth as she agreed.

Yet once malice took root, suppressing it for the moment would only invite a stronger backlash.

After leaving the café and making sure Winona could no longer see her, Tracy finally let out the breath she had been holding.

She hadn't lied to Winona. When that girl jumped off the building, she really had been on the rooftop, and she really had spoken to her.

But all she had done was urge her to come down. The girl had only left her with one sentence: "My life has already been driven to the edge by Winona, and she's already destroyed me!"

Leaving those words behind, she hadn't even given Tracy the chance to speak before leaping from the rooftop.

The shock of watching a life vanish before her eyes had knocked Tracy unconscious.

When she woke up, the first thing she did was tell Andrew what the girl had said.

But the look of despair and pain in that girl's eyes became a nightmare that haunted Tracy for

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a long time. She had fallen seriously ill because of it, and it was only after she recovered that she heard from Andrew about what had happened afterward.

The school's investigation concluded that the girl had taken her own life because she was under heavy academic pressure and had developed depression.

But Tracy had heard whispers saying that the girl had been enduring Winona's bullying since 10th grade.

Tracy was certain the Millers had interfered, forcing the school to keep Winona's name out of it. But she had nothing solid to prove it.

At the time, Andrew had advised her that since the Millers worked closely with the Gills, any scandal involving Winona would drag the Gills and Norris into it as well.

Back then, Tracy had been completely devoted to Norris. Since she had no proof that the girl's death was connected to Winona, she had agreed to Andrew's suggestion and decided to bury the matter deep inside her.

So she had deliberately avoided the subject ever since. To this day, she still didn't know the name of the girl who had jumped to her death in front of her. Yet now she was using her as leverage against Winona.

By all accounts, she owed that girl.

Drawing a long breath, Tracy decided that when she had the means, she would look into the girl's family to see if there was a way to support them.

And while she was at it, she also needed to investigate a girl named Patricia Vesper, who had once attended Sunderpeak High School with them but had transferred out in her 12th grade

year.

Finding her was a promise she had made to someone—one that she fully intended to keep.

Chapter 107 Did You Find Something?

That person had also entrusted her with a message for Patricia.

After taking care of Winona's matter, Tracy went to the hospital to visit Franklin.

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+5 Free Coins

Perhaps because his birthday was coming up, Franklin had been in good spirits lately. He had even ordered two custom-made suits.

Even sitting in a wheelchair, Franklin looked full of life in his new outfit.

There was another suit in a box next to him, prepared according to Walter's measurements.

Walter's birthday came just two weeks after Franklin's, so whenever Franklin prepared something for his own celebration, he would always prepare a separate gift for Walter.

"That old geezer Walter, he said he was just going to visit the sponsored children and would be back soon, yet he's been gone all this time without a word!" Franklin glared at the suit in the box.

Tracy knew he was worried about Walter, so she tried to comfort him, “Grandpa, don’t worry. Walter said he’d be back before your birthday, and he’ll keep his word. Has he ever broken a promise?”

“Who says I’m worried about him?” Franklin snorted stubbornly. “If I had the time to worry about him, I’d rather check if this suit needs any adjustments.”

He carefully adjusted the suit in front of the mirror. “This is the first time Tracy is hosting my birthday party. I have to show up looking sharp and make her proud!”

Tracy knew he was just being stubborn. Deep down, he was a soft-hearted old man who cared a great deal about appearances, so she didn’t call him out.

Still, Walter had been away for quite a while and rarely called home, so Tracy was a little worried too.

When she got back to the Jackman Villa that night, she gave Walter a call.

The call was quickly answered, and Walter’s slightly tired voice came through. But the first thing he said when asked to check on her was, “Ms. Tracy, how come you are calling me at this hour? Did something happen at Jackman Villa? Did the Jackmans bully you again?”

“Walter, don’t worry, I’m fine,” Tracy reassured him.

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Chapter 107 Did You Find Something?

“That’s good to hear.”

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Walter let out a breath of relief but still reminded her patiently, “If you’re bullied, don’t put up with it. Those Jackmans can’t be trusted. If anything happens, go to Mr. Franklin. He’ll definitely stand up for you.”

“You’re alone at home, so don’t confront the Jackmans head-on. Especially when it comes to Erin, you must stay alert.”

Tracy thought that last remark sounded a little strange.

Even if Walter hadn't accepted Erin in his heart, he would still address her respectfully as "Ms. Erin" in the past.

It was the first time he had ever called her by name like this.

Tracy's heart tightened for no reason. "Walter, did you really go to see those kids you sponsor?"

Walter had never once been late for anything concerning Franklin, especially knowing how important this birthday party was to him. He had promised to be back early.

Yet here he was, overdue and suddenly speaking of Erin in such a way. Without meaning to, Tracy thought of his earlier words about something unusual between Erin and a man named Tom.

She unconsciously tightened her grip on the phone. "Walter, did you go to investigate Tom?"

Although it was phrased as a question, Tracy already knew the answer in her heart.

Back then, Walter had said he would look into Erin and Tom's relationship, and only a couple of days later, he claimed he was going to visit the kids he sponsored. There was no way she wouldn't realize the real reason behind his departure.

Walter was getting on in years, and his health was no better than Franklin's. After traveling for so long, it was no wonder his voice had been so weary over the phone.

A wave of guilt rose in Tracy, but Walter comforted her over the phone. "Ms. Tracy, you are truly sharp and bright. You're not as easy to fool as you were when you were a kid."

A mix of helplessness and ache filled her. "You could have left this to someone else, Walter. There's no need for you to make this trip yourself."

Sensing her concern, Walter gave a light chuckle over the phone.

Then, as if recalling something important, his tone turned serious. "It's a good thing I went

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myself. Otherwise, some things might never have been discovered."

Tracy's heart skipped a beat. "Walter, did you find something?"

Walter was silent for a moment, as if still deciding how to put it into words.

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After a long pause, he said, "This matter is a bit complicated and strange. I haven't gotten to the bottom of it yet, but there is definitely something wrong with Erin. I found someone and heard a few things about her."

He paused, then warned her solemnly, "Ms. Tracy, you must be cautious of Erin while you're at the Jackman Villa."

Tracy's breathing instinctively tightened. "Erin ... what's wrong

what's wrong with her?"

She couldn't help thinking of what Walter had said before about Tom's connection to Erin, and an indescribable, unsettling feeling welled up in her chest.

She didn't even know why she felt this way.

Walter hadn't said anything yet, but it was as if she were pushing through heavy fog and on the verge of uncovering a hidden truth.

Walter seemed to consider his words before finally speaking again, his voice grave and heavy. "There's something strange about this. I'll explain in detail when I return, but Erin, she ...

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Click!

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A sudden sound came from the doorway, unnervingly loud in the stillness of the night.

Tracy jumped in fright, instinctively stepping back as her hand closed around the pair of scissors she always kept by her bed.

When she saw that it was Erin standing at the door, she lowered her hand holding the scissors, but her face remained wary. "What are you doing here?"

Erin did not miss that startled, almost skittish reaction, and a trace of curiosity stirred in her heart.

Since when had Tracy, who had been pampered and sheltered in her ivory tower since childhood, become so timid and guarded?

She didn't ask the reason. She only explained obediently, "Tracy, I wanted to talk to you about something. I saw that the door wasn't locked, so I came right in. You don't mind, do you?"

Tracy didn't know how long she had been there or how much she had overheard.

But she was certain she had locked the door.

It was a habit of hers. Whenever she stepped into an enclosed, safe space, she always locked it without thinking.

Tracy hung up the call and put her phone away. "What do you want from me?"

Erin stayed at the doorway without coming in, looking concerned as she asked, "I heard from Winona that you asked her out for something. Nothing happened between you two, right?"

Winona had already called her earlier, claiming she would make use of this chance to teach Tracy a lesson. But Erin had waited for hours and never received a single word about the

outcome.

She had called back pretending to persuade Winona not to be impulsive, when in truth she wanted to find out exactly what had happened.

Normally, with Winona's temper, Erin wouldn't have to ask—she would pour out all her plans

in one go.

But this time, Winona had actually gone along with her words and said, "Erin, you're right. I

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shouldn't stoop to her level. For your sake, I won't bother her again in the future."

Upon hearing those words, Erin had nearly ground her teeth to bits.

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She had "persuaded" her countless times before, and she'd never listened, so who cared if she was stepping back for her sake this time?

Of course, she couldn't say that out loud. So she had come to Tracy, hoping to get some information. But when she reached the door...

Erin's eyes flickered as she stared closely at Tracy's expression, trying to read something from

1. it.

But ever since Tracy had laid eyes on her, there had been nothing on her face but wariness and coldness.

"If you want to know whether anything happened, you can just go ask Winona. You two are friends, aren't you?"

Tracy kept the scissors in her hand, stepped toward the doorway, and lifted her arm.

Seeing the scissors, Erin instinctively took a step back, her guard going up as well.

But when Tracy reached her, she simply shut the door, clearly with no intention of talking further.

She knew all too well the cost of being alone with Erin—she had learned that lesson two years

ago.

And since this was her room, if Erin came in and anything happened, she wouldn't be able to clear her name no matter what she said.

Tracy locked the door and stared at it with a serious expression.

She didn't know how long Erin had been listening outside, but it was better to be cautious.

She hadn't been on speakerphone earlier, so Erin shouldn't have heard who she was talking to. At most, she might have caught the few words Tracy had said.

And now that she had nothing left to lose, even if Erin wanted to cause trouble, there was nothing to fear.

Outside the room, Erin stared at the door before her, her gaze dark and cold.

If it had been anyone else, with the phone not on speaker, they wouldn't have been able to

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hear who was on the other end or what was said.

But Erin had her own methods.

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She hadn't expected that old geezer Walter to have actually tracked down Tom and even claim to have found someone...

Erin's eyes grew darker, tinged with killing intent.

She suddenly turned and walked away, heading toward her own room as she said, "Create the perfect accident for me. That old geezer must not come back alive!"

She wasn't on the phone, nor was anyone else nearby, yet the words sounded as if she were giving instructions to someone.

The empty hallway was filled with an eerie silence.

Once Tracy grew wary, she kept her guard up against Erin, doing her best to avoid any contact with her.

Fortunately, Erin didn't come closer and, after noticing Tracy's attempts to avoid her, even began to keep her own distance.

That should have been a good thing for Tracy, but she couldn't shake a lingering unease.

It was the kind of unease that felt as though something serious was about to happen.

Carrying that feeling, Tracy was distracted even while talking with Phoebe.

Seeing her absent-minded, Phoebe asked with concern, "Tracy, did something happen to you?"

She took Tracy's hand. "If you have any difficulties, just tell me. As your teacher, I will definitely help you."

Her words snapped Tracy back to her senses. Just as she was about to say she was fine, Trina, who had been standing nearby, cut in first. "You've already retired early. You're not a teacher anymore, so what can you possibly help her with?"

"Mom, just enjoy your retirement at home. Why do you have to meddle in other people's business?"

If it hadn't been for Tracy helping to clear her mother's name, she wouldn't even have let her

in earlier!

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Tracy knew she still held it against her, and it was true that she had gotten Phoebe involved. Trina had every right to be angry with her.

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Tracy turned to clasp Phoebe's hands. "Professor Dinwiddie, I appreciate your kindness, but I'm really fine. I was spacing out because I was wondering if your resignation had anything to do with me."

The president of the university had already issued an announcement clearing Phoebe's name. As compensation, the president had promised her other benefits. There was truly no need for her to resign.

Knowing she would blame herself, Phoebe quickly reassured her, "Don't overthink it. I didn't resign because of you, but because of myself."

She sighed. "A university should be a place to nurture talent, not a breeding ground for power and money. I became a teacher out of a love for art. That university no longer suits me."

Tracy could tell she meant every word.

Losing an excellent teacher like Phoebe was the university's loss.

Tracy didn't pursue the topic further and instead took out one of her recent paintings for Phoebe to look at.

It felt as if they had gone back to two years ago, before anything had happened.

When Trina came in, she happened to see that very scene.

It feels like forever *since Mom has been this relaxed.*

Ever since becoming a professor, she had been busy every day with all kinds of academic matters, often angered by students who acted out under the banner of art. Especially after what happened with Tracy, there had always been a hint of worry on her face.

She had almost forgotten how carefree and unburdened her mother had been when she was immersed in the world of art.

Trina knew her mother well. She knew that although Phoebe now appeared to have let everything go, deep down she still felt guilty for not being able to help Tracy and for losing the hard-won evidence.

This was something that might haunt her mother for the rest of her life.

Because of this, Trina had stolen glances at Tracy several times, wanting to say something but holding back.

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It wasn't until after she walked Tracy to the door that she finally asked, "About the plagiarism incident, are you really planning to just let it go?"

Tracy had long noticed Trina's glances, but since she hadn't spoken, she hadn't asked.

She hadn't expected Trina to bring up this matter.

Tracy stayed silent for a moment, then said only, "It's all in the past now."

All she wanted now was to survive. Whether or not she had truly let go of the past, it no longer mattered.

Trina seemed to hear the deeper meaning in her words. She opened her mouth to speak but ultimately chose silence.

With Phoebe's matter resolved, it felt as though a heavy weight had been lifted from Tracy's heart.

But another weight still hung over her heart—Walter, who had promised to be back before Franklin's birthday, had suddenly become unreachable.

Just the day before yesterday, Tracy had spoken with Walter on the phone. He had said he was already on his way back and would arrive no later than the following day.

But two days had passed, and not only had Walter failed to return, but she still couldn't reach him at all.

The unease Tracy had been forcing down surged back, but she made herself hide it so Franklin wouldn't notice.

When Franklin asked her why Walter still hadn't returned, she made up an excuse to reassure him. "I spoke with Walter on the phone. He's already on the way. He'll go straight to the hotel later."

Franklin seemed more amused than angry. "That old geezer... when he was young, the one thing he hated most was being late, I didn't expect him to become so unpunctual at this age."

He glanced at the other new outfit placed beside him. "Tracy, put this away. If that old geezer dares not show up, he's not getting this outfit!"

He acted as if it didn't matter, but Tracy knew he was only speaking out of frustration.

Having been by Franklin's side for so many years, she knew Walter was never late for anything, especially not for something as important as Franklin's birthday party.

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If he still hadn't shown up by now, it was likely something had delayed him.

Tracy knew Franklin wouldn't admit it, but he was worried too.

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"Grandpa, go on ahead to the hotel. I'll call Walter and see where he is, then have him put on the new outfit when he gets here."

Tracy picked up the new outfit beside her with one hand and held her phone in the other as she walked out.

She had already called Walter countless times in the past two days without success. This time was no different.

The cold, mechanical auto-reply made her heart sink.

Walter had brought several men with him. If something really had happened, there should have been some news by now.

Maybe... maybe he

was just caught up in something and couldn't get away for the moment.

Maybe nothing had happened to him!

Clinging to that thought, Tracy kept calling.

But no matter how many times she tried, there was still no answer.

As time passed, the lively sounds from inside the hotel began to spill out, but she still couldn't reach Walter.

After hesitating for a long while, she finally turned back toward the hotel.

If something had happened to Walter, she needed to tell Grandpa right away.

But when she saw Franklin leaning on his cane, chatting spiritedly with others and not even sitting in his wheelchair, she froze in place.

Today is Grandpa's birthday, and he's been happily *anticipating* it for so long. If he finds out that *Walter* might be in trouble, will his body be able to take it?

Chapter 110 He's Not a Liar

Just as Tracy hesitated, a hotel waiter suddenly rushed toward Franklin in a panic. "Mr. Franklin, something terrible has happened!"

On such a joyous occasion, the waiter's shout instantly drew everyone's attention.

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Benjamin, who had been smiling as he greeted guests, immediately darkened his face and barked, "Where did this insolent waiter come from? Where's your manager? Get the manager

here!"

The Jackmans had planned this party for a long time, and every prominent figure in Cloudville was in attendance. There was no way Benjamin would allow a mere waiter to tarnish the Jackmans' reputation.

The sudden commotion piqued everyone's curiosity, but Tracy's heart jolted violently.

A wave of fear and dread surged toward her like a crashing tide, threatening to swallow her whole.

She moved without thinking, hurrying forward to stop what she sensed was coming—but the waiter didn't give her the chance. He shouted at the top of his lungs, "Walter is dead! Mr. Franklin, that Walter who always follows you around is dead!"

Walter is dead?

Thud!

Franklin's cane slipped from his hand and hit the ground as his knees buckled. He nearly collapsed, but Benjamin caught him just in time.

Benjamin's face had also gone pale as he stared at the waiter in disbelief. "What did you just say? Who... who died?"

In Benjamin's memory, Walter had never married or had children, so he had always treated him like his own son.

That news hit him like a blow; he couldn't believe it.

With so many distinguished guests staring, the waiter's eyes flickered. He opened his mouth to speak again, only for Tracy to shove him aside.

"Where did this lying con artist come from? Trying to con the Jackmans?" She quickly turned to support Franklin. "Grandpa, don't worry. I just spoke to Walter on the phone. He's stuck in

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traffic, but he'll be here soon."

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Franklin's face was chalk white, his hand trembling uncontrollably as he gripped hers. "You ... you mean it?"

Tracy didn't dare hesitate for even a second and nodded repeatedly.

Seeing Franklin's condition now, there was no way she could tell him the truth.

"Grandpa, let me take you to rest. They can handle this here."

She turned to Andrew, who had been standing calmly nearby, her tone carrying a hint of warning. "Today is Grandpa's birthday. It should be a joyous occasion. Whoever this liar is, he needs to be dealt with."

The Jackmans all stared at Tracy in a daze, and for a moment it felt as though the dazzling, confident old Tracy had returned.

As the heir of the Jackman family, Andrew was the first to recover and understand what Tracy

meant.

He nodded. "I ... "

"Tracy, how can you say that? Who would joke about a person's life?"

Erin appeared out of nowhere, wearing a fluffy princess dress and holding the arm of Norris, who was dressed like a prince. A small entourage followed behind them, making her seem like the star of the evening.

In a tone of reproach, Erin said, "Tracy, I know you don't want Grandpa to worry, but something so serious can't be hidden. Grandpa and Walter are as close as brothers. This shouldn't be kept from him ...

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"Shut up!" Tracy snapped, her voice sharp enough to cut, as if she were about to strike her.

Erin ducked her head, stepping back in apparent fright.

She didn't even need to say anything before Norris immediately pulled her into his arms protectively. Andrew and Liam also instinctively stepped in front of her.

They all looked at Tracy with guarded, hostile eyes, as though she were some villain who had done countless wrongs.

Seeing this, the ache in Franklin's chest only worsened.

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So this was the "good life" in the Jackman family that Tracy had told him about?

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Franklin's face grew even paler, the scene before him seemed to waver, and his breathing quickened.

Tracy was the first to notice something was wrong with Franklin. She asked urgently, "Grandpa, what's wrong?"

Franklin was still gasping for breath when Erin's voice cut in sweetly. "Tracy, don't be angry. I just didn't want you to let Grandpa miss any news about Walter, so I kindly reminded you not to misjudge this waiter.

"If I upset you, I'll apologize. I'm sorry

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Her eyes brimmed red, as if she were wronged and being forced to apologize.

Norris quickly pulled her back into his arms to comfort her. “Erin, this isn’t your fault. You don’t need to apologize to her.”

“Really?” Erin looked up at him, her eyes full of admiration and dependence.

Norris nodded firmly.

Erin is simply too *kind, which is*
why Tracy keeps bullying her again and again.

It was also
my fault for spoiling Tracy too much in the past. I was partially responsible for letting her
develop such a temper.

Erin lowered her head shyly, though the glimmer of triumph in her eyes was impossible to conceal.

When she looked up again, she had put on that pitiful, obedient expression. “Tracy, you’ve really misunderstood this waiter. He’s not a liar.”