

The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late

#Left Behind 111 - Read The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late Left Behind 111

Chapter 111 Walter is Dead

Chapter 111 Walter is Dead

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"I just saw two police officers talking to this waiter with my own eyes, and then he rushed in to pass on the message. Tracy, if you don't believe me, you can go out and see for yourself. Those two police officers should still be outside."

Since the Jackmans were hosting a grand party today, they had booked out the entire hotel. If the police wanted to talk to someone, they would have to notify the hosts first.

Tracy's face changed slightly, but before she could say anything, Franklin, whom she was supporting, somehow found the strength to shake off her hand and head for the entrance.

At the hotel entrance, two police officers were indeed standing there.

Franklin swayed a little but forced himself to walk over. "Are you ... Are you here because of Walter..."

Franklin had been a man who had braved storms for decades, yet he could not even manage to finish a sentence at this moment.

The police had clearly done their homework beforehand and knew who the elderly man in front of them was.

They took out a document and said in an official tone, "Two days ago, there was a car accident on the highway leading into the city. This is the file of the deceased, Walter Dawson. We ... "

Franklin no longer heard anything after that. His hands trembled as he opened the file, and when he saw that the photo inside was indeed of Walter, the tension he had been holding on to finally snapped.

His vision went black. Still clutching the file tightly, he collapsed straight to the ground.

“Grandpa!”

Tracy caught him in a panic. The heavy force drove her knees hard into the floor,

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but she did not care. “Get a doctor, hurry!”

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Luckily, the Jackmans had medical staff traveling with Franklin. The doctor arrived swiftly, and after a brief treatment, Franklin was sent to the hospital.

Tracy scrambled into the car, ready to go with him.

Just as the car door was closing, her eyes caught sight of Erin curled up in Norris’s arms.

She was smiling.

A shiver ran through Tracy as a cold gust mixed with fury crept up her back.

Erin Jackman

!

What on earth have you done?

Tracy had no time to dwell on the questions swirling in her mind. Right now, the only thing she cared about was Franklin’s safety.

With such a sudden turn of events, the grand party naturally came to an end.

Given the Jackmans’ standing in Cloudville, the guests would never voice any criticism. But everyone was watching for news from the hospital.

Franklin held a considerable number of shares in Jackman Enterprise. If anything happened to him, the company would inevitably face major turmoil, and the entire Cloudville would be affected.

The Jackmans were aware that everyone was watching, so they quickly released the news that Franklin was out of danger and made a public show of retrieving Walter's body.

Walter had never married or had children. Whether to the public or in private, he was long considered part of the Jackman family.

Benjamin personally took charge of arranging his funeral, and the news media covered the matter extensively, praising the Jackmans' generosity and

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benevolence.

With public attention drawn away, no one knew that Franklin had actually remained in a coma in the ICU.

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During this time, Benjamin and Daphne were busy handling Walter's funeral, and Andrew was busy stabilizing the company. Erin stayed home, crying every day out of "worry," and Liam was busy comforting her.

Tracy, on the other hand, was nowhere to be seen—except that she showed up at the hospital each night to keep Franklin company.

Erin feigned concern over this matter. "Liam, Tracy only comes at night. Do you know where she goes during the day?"

"She hasn't been back to Jackman Villa, and she hasn't been working outside. A young woman like her ... who knows where she could be going."

Her words instantly made Liam think of that old rental apartment and of Ronald.

Liam's expression darkened. "Aside from going to that man, where else could she go?"

His face twisted with disgust. "Grandpa treated her so well, and Walter loved her like a granddaughter. With something so serious happening, she still has the mindset to go on a date? She's truly heartless!"

Erin spoke softly and gently. "How could Tracy do that... The next time I see her, I must talk to her about *it*."

"What do you want to talk to me about?" Tracy's cold voice suddenly cut in.

Her expression was grim as she walked toward Erin, holding a document folder in her hand.

She moved fast, her presence sharp and intimidating, and Erin instinctively ducked behind Liam in fright.

Liam frowned, his face full of wariness. "What are you trying to do now?"

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"What am I trying to do? That's a question you should be asking the woman behind you!" Tracy angrily flung the document folder at his face.

"Ask her why she transferred money to that waiter who ran up to Grandpa spouting nonsense! Or is it because she's so full of compassion that she just loves giving money to complete strangers?"

Erin's face went pale as she quickly shook her head and waved her hands. "I ... I didn't... "

She couldn't understand how Tracy had found out about this when she had been so careful.

"You think that just because you chose a place without cameras and gave him cash, everything would be fine?"

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Tracy pointed at the document bag in Liam's hands. "There's a dashcam video in there. You can clearly see her handing that waiter a stack of cash!"

Erin's expression went blank for a moment. Her hands clenched unconsciously at her sides.

She never imagined that even after being so cautious, she would still overlook such a massive mistake.

Why did luck always seem to favor Tracy, even in moments like this?

Erin bit her lip, and her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I didn't do it. I would never pull something like that. Liam, don't you trust me?"

The doubt that had just sparked in Liam's mind quickly melted into sympathy. "Of course I trust you."

Erin had a heart of gold—she could never commit such a cruel act.

"Liam ... " After gaining his trust, Erin looked deeply moved.

Then she faced Tracy with a mix of sorrow and disappointment. "Tracy, I get that you're upset because I stopped you from keeping secrets from Grandpa. You can lash out at me any way you like, but how could you accuse me of something this awful?"

Tears streamed down Erin's cheeks, making her appear vulnerable and devastated.

Liam felt so much pity for her that he completely lost his cool. He hurled the document bag straight at Tracy's face. "That's enough!"

"Tracy, Grandpa and Walter have treated you so well. After that horrible accident struck them, even Erin has been losing sleep from worrying and crying. But here you are, still attempting to set her up.

"If Grandpa ever learned what a spiteful and manipulative person you truly are, it would crush him with rage, even if he managed to wake up!"

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The thick document bag struck Tracy's face like a harsh slap. Its pointed edge even scraped a red line across her cheek.

She paid it no mind whatsoever.

Insults, physical blows—she brushed them all off. But she could not stand what Liam had just uttered.

Tracy spun around and delivered a stinging slap to Liam's face.

Her cold stare, laced with profound hatred, left Liam stunned. He forgot about the pain for a moment and just gawked at her.

That expression in her eyes—how could she give him such a look!

“Ah! Tracy, how dare you hit Liam!” Erin exclaimed. She hurried to Liam's side and gently touched his face with worry.

She shot Tracy an accusatory glare. “Liam only snapped because he cares about you. Why would you hit him?”

“Walter's condition shouldn't have been kept from Grandpa in the first place. He was bound to discover it eventually. I figured since Grandpa appeared upbeat, and he had survived plenty of tough times in his youth, he could take the news. Who could have predicted ...”

Her statement essentially implied she bore no fault, and if blame fell anywhere, it was on Franklin for lacking the resilience to cope.

Tracy's rationality vanished in a flash. She grabbed Erin's hair and pulled it back forcefully.

“You figured Grandpa could take it? Well, do you believe you can handle what I've prepared for you?”

Without a second thought, Tracy landed a firm slap on Erin's face.

“You can plot against me as much as you want. I wouldn't flinch if you came after my life. But you should never have gone after Grandpa!”

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Her voice dripped with malice, and her blows showed no mercy. After a flurry of slaps, Erin's face began to swell immediately.

As she delivered the blows, Tracy issued a warning. "Erin, listen up. All I have left is this meaningless existence. If you even think about harming Grandpa again, I won't hesitate to kill you!"

Erin had no choice but to tilt her head up toward Tracy. A wave of fear sent shivers racing from her spine to the top of her head.

She could sense it clearly—Tracy genuinely wanted her dead!

Once the barrage of slaps ended, Liam came to his senses and dashed forward to separate them.

"What on earth are you doing? Tracy, let go!"

Liam clutched Tracy's hands and pried Erin's hair free from her grip. Then he swiftly drew Erin into his embrace for protection.

He fixed Tracy with a furious stare. "Erin had good intentions. None of this was what she intended. What gives you the right to point fingers at her?"

"You have the nerve to mistreat her like this while I'm standing here. God knows what you do to her when my back is turned. You've crossed the line!"

Tracy shook off his grasp with revulsion and rage. "Me, bullying her? Liam, didn't you catch what she said?"

"She was aware of Grandpa's poor health but intentionally stirred up that waiter to make a fuss. She planned it all!"

Tracy's voice was hoarse as she charged forward to go after Erin once more.

Liam moved on instinct to shield her.

Tracy's anger gave her unusual strength. Liam struggled to restrain her, his own temper boiling over,

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"That's enough!"

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He reached his breaking point. He delivered a resounding slap across Tracy's face. His free hand pushed her back hard.

Tracy staggered to the side and collapsed. Her head struck the floor with a heavy thump.

At that moment, a piercing buzz filled Tracy's ears. Darkness washed over her vision in surges.

She remained sprawled on the ground. For what felt like ages, she could not muster a response.

Liam seethed with anger but then jolted back to awareness. He gazed at his hand in disbelief.

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Liam hadn't intended to hurt her. He simply wanted to calm her down to keep her from injuring Erin.

"Liam!" Erin's cry suddenly snapped him back to reality.

Her hair was disheveled, yet she still managed to look pitiful and fragile. "Don't be angry. It's my fault for not being more careful with my words. I deserved Tracy's slap.

"If this can help Tracy calm down and stop trying to pin a deadly accusation on me, I can endure it."

Her words hinted that Tracy had tried to frame her. When that attempt fell through, she had lashed out in fury.

Liam's face filled with agony as expected. "Don't worry, Erin. As long as I'm here, I'll never let her bully you!"

He drew Erin into a protective embrace. He then shot a vicious glare at the woman sprawled on the floor. "Tracy, give up those sneaky tricks. No matter how you try to defend your actions, the truth is I caught you bullying Erin with my own eyes. You ... "

"Facts? Ha!"

Tracy sneered. She lifted her bloodshot eyes to stare at Liam. “Everything I say is just an excuse to you. Even when the evidence is right in front of your face, you’ll always believe her!

“The Jackmans reserved the entire hotel for the party. Even if the police needed to get in, a waiter would have to notify the manager. The manager would then pass the message along to the Jackmans.

“If she hadn’t been bribed, why would that waiter have had the nerve to come charging out yelling like that, heading straight for Grandpa?

“Liam, do you even think before you act!”

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Tracy’s words inexplicably reminded Liam that Ronald had said the exact same thing to him before.

His heart ached as if pierced by sharp needles.

It was like a position that had always belonged to him had suddenly been taken by someone else.

Liam felt a wave of panic and instinctively loosened his protective hold on Erin. He stepped toward Tracy to help her up.

But Tracy didn’t even give him a glance. She pulled herself up from the ground on her own.

Her dizziness made her sway twice before she steadied herself. Still, her eyes stayed ice-cold as she stared at Erin.

“You’d better pray Grandpa is fine. Otherwise, I’ll make you regret it!”

Erin was so scared that she quickly shrank behind Liam. This time, Liam did not shield her as he had before.

Instead, he kept staring at Tracy. He could not shake the strange panic gnawing at his heart.

Seeing Tracy was about to leave, he instinctively wanted to follow her. Suddenly, someone grabbed his wrist.

“Liam, I’m in so much pain!” Erin whimpered, tears pooling in her eyes—waiting for comfort.

In the past, this was the expression Liam couldn’t stand to see from her.

But now, looking at it, besides his usual anguish, he kept remembering Ronald’s mocking words telling him to think before he acted.

Why did Ronald get to say the same thing as Tracy?

He was *the one* who had *grown up with Tracy since childhood*. What right did Ronald have

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to

stand by Tracy’s side?

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For the first time, Liam didn’t offer comfort when Erin showed this expression. Instead, he pulled his hand free from her grasp.

“I’ll go get a doctor for you. Stay here and don’t move.”

With that, he ran toward the main entrance. It was unclear whether he was going to find a doctor or chase after Tracy, who had just left.

“Liam ... ”

Erin tried to call him back, but Liam dashed off without looking back, running at full speed.

Damn it!

Was Liam even using his head today? First, he came to question and suspect her.

Now he was chasing after Tracy right before her eyes.

What had really gone wrong?

Erin's face darkened. Between her messy appearance and the fury in her eyes, she looked like a vengeful ghost straight out of a horror movie.

No matter what had gone wrong, she absolutely couldn't let Tracy steal everything she had.

Erin had a sudden idea and pulled out her phone to open the camera.

She put on a pitiful expression. She deliberately angled her swollen, slapped face toward the lens and snapped a photo.

From the photo, she looked like a poor victim who had suffered endless abuse. She looked as if she were just waiting for someone to come to her rescue and offer support.

She sent the photo to Andrew. Before she could even send a voice message, his messages came flooding in.

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"What happened? Who bullied you?"

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"Don't be scared, Erin. I'm coming right back to support you."

"What the hell happened? Who did this?"

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After several voice messages, before Erin could reply, his call came through.

As soon as the call connected, Erin's pitiful, disheveled face appeared on the screen.

Andrew was heartbroken and quickly asked, “Erin, who bullied you? Tell me, and I’ll take revenge for you!”

In the video, Andrew seemed very flustered. He hurriedly stood up and rushed outside.

From the background, he seemed to have just come out of a conference room. A group of company executives lingered there, all wearing confused expressions.

The executives murmured among themselves. “Based on what Mr. Andrew had said, it sounded like Ms. Jackman had been bullied by someone.

“In Cloundville, who on earth could bully Ms. Jackman?”

They were right in the middle of a key meeting. “Was Mr. Andrew going overboard by ditching them all of a sudden to back

up Ms. Jackman?”

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Back when Andrew had doted on Tracy, they had never seen him act like this.

The executives exchanged glances. They all thought the same thing, yet no one dared to voice it aloud.

On the other side of the video call, Erin’s tears immediately welled up as she cried pitifully, “Andrew, waaaah ...

“It’s all my fault. I’m to blame for thinking Grandpa was healthy enough and could handle it. So I made the waiter tell the truth.

“But I never expected Tracy to get angry over this and come back with a fake video, saying I had bribed the waiter.”

Erin sobbed and wailed. Yet she managed to explain the whole “story” crystal clear.

Andrew’s expression definitely turned very dark.

It was Tracy again!

He had been carrying guilt in his heart for hurting her due to a misunderstanding. He had been avoiding her during this time. He never expected that she wouldn't show any gratitude and would even hit Erin so harshly.

This time, he absolutely wouldn't let her off easy.

"Don't worry, Erin. I'll definitely seek justice for you."

Erin's tears finally subsided a bit. Still, she gazed at the person in the video with a pitiful expression. "Really? Andrew, you're so good to me. You're my favorite person in the whole world!"

Andrew's furrowed brow relaxed, his eyes now full of tenderness.

After exchanging a few more words, they hung up the call. Erin's expression instantly shifted from pitiful to smug.

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Andrew was much smarter than that brainless Liam. In the past, to win over Andrew, who had always been serious and calm, she had put in tremendous effort.

He definitely wouldn't be like Liam. His attention wouldn't be stolen by Tracy with just a few words.

Only then did Erin return to her room—satisfied—and go to clean herself up. As for Liam's promise to find her a doctor, she didn't take it to heart at all.

Even though she didn't care, this matter could still be used to make a fuss.

Erin immediately wanted to call Liam to demand why the "doctor" he mentioned hadn't arrived yet. She aimed to stir up his guilt and perhaps win back his attention.

But before she could call Liam, he called her first.

Erin immediately adjusted her emotions. She prepared to cry about her grievances, but Liam spoke first. "Erin, good news! Grandpa's awake!"

“You’ve been crying yourself to sleep every night worrying about Grandpa. Now that you know he’s awake, you must be so happy. So I called you right away.”

Liam’s excitement and joy could be felt even through the phone.

Originally, he had chased after Tracy, but she ran too fast, and he couldn’t catch up. So he decided to try his luck at the hospital.

He didn’t see Tracy. Instead, he happened to arrive just as Franklin woke up. So he quickly called Erin.

Little did he know, Erin’s pitiful act froze mid-performance—her gloom twisted her features into a mask of pure menace.

That old geezer should have died two years ago. How could he be so tough? He still wouldn’t die!

Erin was so angry she almost crushed her phone. Still, she had to control her voice and fake surprise. “Really? That’s wonderful! I’ll come to the hospital right away!”

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She quickly hung up the phone and threw her cosmetics to the ground in anger.

The crashing sound was harsh and jarring.

Looking at her disheveled appearance in the mirror, Erin had an idea. She quickly tidied up her appearance. Then she used a blush to make the swelling on her face look even more dramatic. Feeling satisfied, she headed to the hospital.

When Erin arrived at the hospital, only Liam was sitting by the bedside.

She looked around and didn’t see the person she wanted to see. She frowned before turning her attention to Franklin.

Franklin, who had seemed to recover much of his vitality before, now looked pale and lifeless. It was as if he had aged even more.

Erin rushed over, brimming with excitement. “Grandpa, you’re finally awake! I thought I’d lost you forever—I’ve been so upset!”

Liam, who had been standing awkwardly to the side while Franklin ignored him, quickly chimed in. “Grandpa, you don’t know how much Erin couldn’t sleep all night worrying about you—unlike Tracy.”

He instinctively wanted to compare Tracy and Erin, as he had been doing for the past few years. Somehow, he stopped mid-sentence.

This made Erin, who was waiting for him to continue, almost lose control of her expression.

She quickly jumped in, “Liam, don’t blame Tracy. Although she deliberately slandered me and even hit me, I believe she also lost her mind from worrying about Grandpa. I don’t blame her.

“Tracy is already very heartbroken. She’s been coming to visit Grandpa every night during this time, which is good to hear.”

Anyone with ears could hear the backhanded compliment. Liam’s trust in Erin had

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always been blind, though.

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He frowned and said, “Erin, she beat you up like this—how can you still defend her?”

Erin pouted pitifully. She deliberately angled the swelling on her face toward Franklin on the bed. “Tracy never liked me anyway. Whatever she does to me is understandable.”

Chapter 115 When Acting Fails

Perhaps drawn by their conversation, Franklin—who had been silent—finally turned his head.

His eyes landed on Erin’s swollen face, but the words that came out of his mouth left both of them stunned. “What did you do?”

When he saw Liam and Erin standing there in a daze, as if they couldn’t understand what he meant, Franklin spoke again.

“Tracy wouldn’t hurt you without a good reason. What did you do to push her that far?”

Perhaps because he had just woken up, Franklin's voice came out low and raspy, but it carried a firm, unshakeable tone.

Erin's face froze in an instant, panic flashing across it, though hatred burned even stronger beneath.

All these years, she had tried every trick in the book to win over this old man. That was why, two years ago, after chasing Tracy away, she had plotted to get him out of the Jackman Villa so he wouldn't interfere with her schemes.

But she never imagined that, even now, with one foot in the grave, the old fool was still sharp as a tack.

She swallowed her rising anger and put on an expression of grief and fear as she defended herself. "I didn't do anything.

"My face is like this because Tracy hit me. I swear, I didn't do a thing to her."

Before arriving, she had intentionally messed up her appearance to make it look worse. Paired with her pitiful expression, it was enough to break anyone's heart.

Yet Franklin remained ice-cold. "Tracy has a gentle nature. If she hit you, it's because you must have bullied her first."

The absolute certainty in his voice nearly twisted Erin's face with rage.

She shot a pleading glance at Liam, hoping he would stick up for her like he always did.

But Liam just stared blankly at Franklin on the hospital bed. His heart pounded as if struck by a heavy blow.

Erin looked so ragged, and she had laid everything out so clearly. So why did Franklin still believe Tracy?

No. He used to trust Tracy deeply too, more than he trusted his own parents or Andrew.

But when did he start doubting everything Tracy said and did as his first instinct?

In the silent hospital room, Erin endured Franklin's piercing stare. She felt more awkward than ever before.

After a brief hesitation, she tugged at Liam's sleeve and softly called out, "Liam ... "

Liam snapped out of it and saw her ashen face. He immediately asked with worry, "Erin, what's the matter?"

“I’ve been crying so much these past few days, worrying about Grandpa. I ... I ... ”

Erin suddenly rolled her eyes back and slumped right into his arms.

Liam jumped in surprise and quickly caught her. All those swirling thoughts vanished from his mind. He glared at Franklin with fury. “Grandpa, Erin has never been in great health. She’s been so anxious about you that she hasn’t eaten or slept properly, and then Tracy treats her like this. How can you be so hard on her?”

Franklin had long ago seen through the Jackmans’ blind favoritism toward Erin, so he didn’t get angry.

Someone who could so easily cast aside her sister he’d grown up with wouldn’t hesitate to criticize a grandfather who wasn’t even blood-related.

Franklin shot a cold look at the “unconscious” Erin. His voice laced with fury, he said, “Get out!”

Liam started to say something, but when his eyes met Franklin’s gaze, an inexplicable fear gripped him, and he swallowed his words.

He glanced at the woman who had fainted in his arms. “I’ll take Erin to see a doctor. Grandpa, get some rest.”

Franklin didn’t care if they stayed or left. He replied coldly, “If I find out you’re bullying Tracy ... ”

Even lying there pale in the hospital bed, his presence was overwhelming, far beyond what an ordinary person could handle, let alone Liam, the most infamous spoiled rich kid in Cloudville.

Liam’s body went rigid, and he hurriedly carried Erin out of the room.

Only after the door clicked shut did Franklin seem to relax, his commanding presence ebbing away.

He hadn’t even had a chance to mourn Walter before he began worrying about Tracy.

Since he was awake now, Tracy would surely come to visit him. Erin had

deliberately spouted those things in front of him earlier. His poor Tracy must have been mistreated!

While Franklin thought about Tracy, Liam had already rushed Erin to a doctor.

Because of Erin’s “frail health,” the Jackmans had arranged a personal doctor for her.

The doctor said it was due to “overwhelming stress” and that she needed plenty of rest.

When she woke up, Benjamin, Daphne, and Andrew were all hovering by her bedside with concern.

Daphne was so upset that her eyes were red from crying. “My poor Erin, how did your face end up so swollen?”

Benjamin wore a dark expression. “That kind of arrogant, overbearing attitude really proves she’s not a true Jackman by blood.”

Clearly, they already knew who was responsible for hurting Erin this way.

Liam had been sitting off to the side in a fog, especially as he watched everyone fuss over Erin with such care. His mind kept drifting to Tracy’s isolated figure.

Earlier, he’d called to announce that Franklin was awake, casually mentioning that Erin had passed out from worry—though the doctor assured him she’d be fine.

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Chapter 116 Safe in His Arms

Once they hurried to the hospital, they went straight to her room without mentioning Franklin at all.

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Liam had a nagging feeling that something wasn’t right. Still, when he saw how fragile and vulnerable Erin looked, he realized he was just imagining things.

But then Erin turned to him and said, “Liam, you look awful. Did I freak you out when I passed out?”

In that moment, all his doubts melted away. His heart swelled with warmth from her concern. “Since you know how worried I am, just focus on getting better. From now on, put your health first.”

Erin beamed happily and nodded in agreement. “Sure, I’ll do whatever you say.”

Touched by her response, Andrew, who had stayed quiet until now, reached out and gently patted her head.

“Don’t worry, Erin. I won’t let you go through this in vain.”

Andrew adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses. His eyes sharpened behind the lenses, just like when he faced rivals in the business world.

He looked at Liam and asked, “Where’s Tracy?”

Benjamin and Daphne glanced over, too. They seemed eager to confront Tracy right away.

Erin appeared torn, like she wanted to talk them out of it but couldn’t find the words.

Liam paused, suddenly realizing he had completely forgotten to tell Tracy.

He jumped up quickly. “I’ll call her now.”

He pulled out his phone but stopped cold.

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He realized he had no idea how to reach Tracy.

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Everyone stared at him in confusion as he struggled to find the right words. Finally, he just cleared his throat. “I’ll go find her.” He hurried out of the room to search for Tracy.

Meanwhile, Tracy had just woken up at the hospital.

After stumbling out of the Jackman Villa in a daze, she blacked out right after getting into the taxi. The driver panicked and sped her to the hospital.

Liam’s hit had not left any visible marks, but it did cause a mild concussion.

She felt too woozy to even stand. The doctor ordered her to stay put and rest. She had no choice but to skip visiting Franklin for now.

The next day, after feeling a bit better, she freshened up quickly and headed to Franklin's room.

The moment she opened the door, she spotted Franklin propped up in bed. He had on his reading glasses and was flipping through some documents.

Tracy stopped in her tracks, her eyes filling with tears. "Grandpa ... "

Her gentle voice reached not just the man inside but also Erin. Erin was walking by and spotted Tracy hurrying in with excitement.

For some reason, Erin's face brightened. She crept closer on tiptoe right away.

"Grandpa, you ... you ..."

Tracy's eyes brimmed with tears. She was so thrilled that words failed her.

Franklin put the documents down, removed his reading glasses, and looked at her with a big smile. "Tracy, you're here. Come closer so I can see you. Did I scare you?"

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Tracy's nose stung, and the tears she had fought back finally streamed down her cheeks.

She couldn't hold back any longer and rushed over, throwing herself into Franklin's arms. She mumbled into his chest, "Grandpa ... "

Franklin gently rubbed the top of her head, his expression overflowing with love and kindness. "Don't worry, don't worry. I'm feeling just fine. I haven't watched my dear Tracy walk down the aisle yet, so there's no way I'd leave you now."

The warm, steady hand on her head helped Tracy's heart, which had been racing with fear all this time, finally calm.

She broke down sobbing and pressed her face deeper into Franklin's chest, crying softly.

She had been terrified!

Between Walter's unexpected crash and Grandpa slipping into a coma, she feared losing the only two people who truly mattered to her anymore.

She would have nothing.

Her very reason for living depended on the people around her.

If Grandpa had left her too ...

Tracy couldn't bear to think about it. She just hid her face even more.

When he felt her grip tighten around him, Franklin's chest ached deeply. He wrapped his arms around her in return.

Neither of them realized that Erin stood at the slightly ajar door, phone in hand. She had just snapped a photo of the moment.

"Erin?"

Suddenly, Liam's voice came from behind her. It startled Erin so badly she nearly dropped her phone.

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She quickly tucked it behind her back and spun around with a forced grin. "Liam ...

Liam eyed her hidden hand curiously. Before he could say anything, Erin jumped in. "Are you here to check on Grandpa?"

She pocketed her phone and nudged Liam away from the door. "I noticed Grandpa and Tracy are having a nice talk. We shouldn't bother them.

"After all, Grandpa and Tracy don't like me much. If I barge in and break up their moment now...'

As they walked off, Erin's words trailed away. Still, it was easy to tell she wasn't saying anything kind.

Their voices were loud enough for the pair inside to hear them. But neither bothered to react.

Once she got her feelings under control, Tracy wiped her tears and eased out of Franklin's hug.

When she glanced up, she noticed the damp patch on his shirt.

Tracy felt her cheeks heat up. She rubbed her nose sheepishly, and her eyes drifted to the documents stacked by the bedside.

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Chapter 117 The Hunt Begins

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Tracy quickly changed the subject. "Grandpa, what caught your eye earlier?"

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Ever since Andrew became the CEO of Jackman Enterprise, Franklin kept out of company affairs, even though he still owned shares.

Especially after Walter's accident, Franklin hardly had the heart *to* worry about business.

Franklin could tell she was embarrassed, so he just smoothed out his shirt without teasing her about it.

He handed Tracy the documents from beside him. "Take a look at this."

The content of the documents wasn't what Tracy had expected—it was an investigation into Walter's accident.

Right after the crash, Tracy sent people to look into it.

But now that she wasn't the Jackmans' heiress anymore, she lacked the resources. All she uncovered was proof that Erin had schemed with that waiter.

Tracy quickly scanned through the document contents, her forehead creasing in a deep frown.

Even though her major was art, she'd picked up a lot about business from Franklin growing up. She read through the report in a moment.

"An accident? There's no way that was just an accident."

Walter had brought his most reliable team along. They were sharp and careful, so there's no way they'd wait so long to check in—especially right in the middle of Franklin's birthday bash.

Then there was the truck driver who caused the wreck.

His son was gravely ill and needed cash for surgery badly. When he was desperate, he got a sudden call about a donor willing to help. He got excited and sped home

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to tell his family. But in his rush to beat the red light by a couple of seconds, the awful crash occurred.

The donor turned out to be a well-known local philanthropist.

Besides the truck driver's family, several others received donations around the same time.

It all lined up as a string of perfect coincidences, with zero red flags—just like a textbook accident.

But Tracy's gut screamed that it wasn't that straightforward.

She recalled her last call with Walter, when Erin was eavesdropping outside. He'd warned her to watch out for Erin.

She was convinced the crash was somehow connected to Erin.

Franklin saw the look on her face and understood her thoughts. "You think this wasn't just an accident, too?"

Picking up on the "too" in his question, Tracy nodded.

But voicing her suspicions about Erin felt tricky.

She knew Franklin had never truly warmed to Erin, but they were still grandfather and granddaughter by blood. Tracy never wanted to make him choose between her and Erin.

It had always been Franklin who backed her without question.

Franklin patted her head affectionately. "You've always been so sharp, my dear Tracy. I trust you to handle this investigation."

He was getting on in years and sensed he didn't have much time left.

They needed to dig deep into Walter's crash, and Tracy would need support down the road.

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He had to set things up for her while he could.

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Franklin kept these thoughts to himself, but Tracy wasn't the innocent Jackman heiress from two years ago anymore. She could read between the lines easily.

Her eyes welled up again. She blinked back the tears and squeezed Franklin's hand. "Don't worry, Grandpa. I'll get to the bottom of this for sure." Walter had left Cloudville because of her troubles. She felt responsible for what happened to him, so she owed it to him to uncover the truth.

As Franklin's condition improved and he appeared at Walter's funeral, the public chatter finally quieted.

The whole thing was ruled an "accident," but Tracy kept digging quietly. She used the influence Franklin lent her to chase the real story behind the crash.

No matter how hard she looked, no clues turned up. Even investigating around Erin led nowhere.

It all seemed perfect, like it truly was an accident.

But that very perfection made Tracy suspicious. She kept going with the search anyway.

While investigating Walter's crash, Tracy also used Franklin's connections to track down someone else.

It was a classmate named Patricia from her year at Sunderpeak High School. She'd transferred out abruptly right before the SATs.

Tracy had made it out of Angelic Etiquette Academy alive to honor the unfinished dreams of those who didn't.

Patricia was the girl that guy cared about endlessly and worried about nonstop.

He had a message he wanted Tracy to pass on to her.

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With all this on her plate, Tracy's days were split between visiting Franklin in the hospital and hustling around town. She hadn't set foot in the Jackman Villa in ages.

That chilly, unwelcoming house wasn't somewhere she cared *to* go back to anyway.

When she was wiped out from all the running around, she'd stay at her rented apartment instead.

What she didn't know was that Andrew, who'd been pulling late nights at the office searching for her, had started heading home early the past few days to wait for her. But she never showed.

Andrew hadn't forgotten his vow to support Erin.

Tracy was hardly ever around, and he'd been swamped stabilizing the company after Walter's death. That put things on hold until now.

Finally catching a break, he let his pent-up frustration loose. He tracked down Tracy's location to face her head-on.

But he never imagined she'd be living with some guy behind everyone's back—and in such a run-down, shabby place!

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Chapter 118 Street Fight

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Andrew's face darkened with rage. His usual cool-headedness was almost swallowed up by frustration and anger.

His fury boiled over when he spotted Tracy carrying grocery bags. She was giggling and talking with some guy as they left the supermarket.

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He jumped out of his car without looking. He nearly caused the vehicle behind him to smash into his door when it couldn't stop fast enough.

Ignoring the honks and yells from the driver behind, he marched right up and grabbed Tracy's wrist. "Come home with me!"

Andrew appeared out of nowhere and squeezed her wrist so tightly that her grocery bags slipped and crashed to the pavement.

The eggs they'd just bought shattered. They spilled a gooey puddle across the sidewalk.

Tracy's expression turned cold. She stumbled a couple of steps to catch her balance, then shook off Andrew's hand. "Is there something you need, Mr. Andrew?"

Her icy, standoffish vibe was like adding fuel to Andrew's blazing temper.

"Tracy, how long are you going to keep pulling this stunt?"

Raised as the Jackmans' heir from a young age, Andrew seldom lost his cool in public—especially not out in the open like this.

But Tracy just thought he was being absurd.

Lately, she'd been tied up digging into Walter's crash and hadn't set foot in the Jackman Villa much. What could she have possibly done wrong this time?

Right as Tracy opened her mouth to respond, Ronald jumped in. "Hey, mister, from where I'm standing, you're the one making a scene here."

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He positioned himself between them like a shield. He eyed Andrew warily. “You just grabbed Tracy and tried to drag her off. You’re not some creep trying to kidnap her, are you?”

Andrew’s expression soured. He shot Ronald a chilling, intimidating stare.

Having been the CEO of Jackman Enterprise for years, Andrew was used to having a commanding presence. When he got serious, most folks couldn’t meet his eyes.

But Ronald shrugged it off like it was nothing. He glanced sadly at the smashed eggs on the ground. “Those were real farm–fresh eggs that Tracy worked hard to pay for. Don’t you think you owe us for them?”

He stuck out his hand boldly toward Andrew. He added, “The eggs are ruined, so we’ll need to buy more. And don’t forget to toss in a bit for the emotional damage.”

His cheeky demand for cash didn’t come off as greedy on his bright, boyish face. It actually felt pretty genuine.

That sincerity strangely brought back memories of the Tracy he used to know.

His heart skipped a beat. Panic hit him, though he couldn’t figure out why.

He hid his confusion behind his anger. “You have the nerve to try and hustle me? Tracy, where’d you dig up this loser?!”

Ronald didn’t flare up at the insult. Instead, he puffed out his chest proudly. “Of course, Tracy chose me specially. I’m her favorite.

“Unlike you, some rude guy who popped up out of nowhere. Can’t you tell how ticked off Tracy is?”

No one had ever sassed Andrew so boldly before. It left him speechless for a second.

Tracy had been fuming at first. But with this guy shielding her, her anger faded. Even the ache in her wrist from Andrew’s grip eased up.

Today was one of those rare good days. She wasn’t about to let anyone spoil it.

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She tugged at Ronald's sleeve. "Let's go, we should go back."

Ronald, who'd been all bold seconds ago, softened instantly like a kitten. He nodded agreeably at Tracy. "Whatever you say, Tracy."

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He glanced at Andrew, who stood there zoned out. A shadowy flicker crossed Ronald's lively eyes, gone in a blink.

Tracy didn't give Andrew a second look. She spun around to walk off with Ronald.

Andrew never imagined she'd brush him off like that. For a second, his heart sank.

His mind drifted to the old days.

Whenever he dragged himself home, wiped out from work, Tracy would hand him a warm mug of milk. She'd sweetly call him "Broski."

She'd even learned massage techniques just to ease his headaches.

He was the one she relied on the most.

She'd never ignored him like this before.

Tracy pulled some cash from her pocket and handed it to Ronald. "Here, take this and grab more eggs. I'll head home with the rest of the stuff."

Her words jolted Andrew out of his daze. Panic surged through him. He lunged forward without thinking to cut them off.

In the same instant, Ronald blocked his way. "We told you there's no need to pay up. What more do you want?"

"I ..." Andrew tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat.

He hadn't planned what to say. Some gut feeling just pushed him to block them. It was like an inner voice urging him on.

After a moment of silence, his eyes landed on the cash in Ronald's grip. He suddenly had an idea for an argument.

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He stared at Tracy with disappointment written all over his face. “This is how you’re spending the money the Jackmans gave you?”

“You’re using it on this sketchy guy, and you’re stooping to scam cash from us by playing the victim? You’ve seriously disappointed me!”

Andrew seethed. His face twisted in rage. But he clung to his last bit of composure to keep his cool.

Congratulating himself for being gracious, he added, “Since we’re out in public, I’ll cut you some slack and skip the lecture for now.”

Chapter 119 Threats

Chapter 119 Threats

+5 Free Coins

“Come back with me right now, own up to what you’ve done, and promise you’ll cut all ties with this guy. Do that, and I’ll pretend none of this ever happened.

“Tracy, be smart and just listen for once.”

Tracy stood there with a blank face, letting Andrew lay down his so-called verdict.

He kept acting like he was giving her a chance to make things right, but here he was, pointing right in her face and scolding her in the middle of a busy street—like even breathing was some crime.

Did he not realize how ridiculous he looked?

Ronald caught the look on her face and felt a pang in his chest.

The Tracy he knew was warm even to strangers, not this cold and shut off.

What had the Jackman family done to make her like this?

He stepped forward, putting himself completely in front of her, forcing Andrew to look straight at him instead.

Before Andrew could get a word out, Ronald snapped, “Is being brainless some kind of family tradition with you people?”

“First there was Liam, now you. You’re all the same—walking around with no brain in sight.”

Andrew froze, clearly not used to being cursed at so directly. His perfect gentleman mask slipped for a moment behind those gold-rimmed glasses.

“How dare you talk to me like that?”

Ronald smirked. “What? You didn’t hear me the first time? Should I carve it into a sign for you?”

“You ... “Andrew’s face turned an ugly shade of green, but he could not think of a

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Chapter 119 Threats

comeback.

+5 Free Coins

He had been raised to keep a polished image. When he was angry, he would glare or slam a file, not spit insults.

Now, his handsome face twisted with rage.

“Pfft!”

Tracy let out a short laugh, and it felt like all her earlier frostiness melted away.

For once, she did not feel sad, angry, or numb at their accusations. Instead, it was like she was listening to some random stranger who did not matter at all.

Turns out, the words that used to cut her deep could also be completely powerless.

She stepped out from behind Ronald, her eyes even calmer as she looked at Andrew. “If you’re trying to prove you’re good at ‘teaching people,’ you picked the wrong target.

“I’m not a Jackman, and I’m not your sister. Whether I’ve done something wrong or not has nothing to do with you.”

That word-“nothing“-was like a slap, mocking his arrogance.

“Tracy, do you even hear yourself?” Andrew snapped. “We may not be related by blood, but the Jackmans raised you for over 20 years! Everything you’ve eaten, worn, or lived in came from us. Even the money you waste on this boy...

”

“You left home without your brain and your dignity, didn’t you?” Ronald suddenly cut in.

He moved to stand shoulder to shoulder with Tracy, giving Andrew a mocking look.

“Tracy earns her own money, and it’s got nothing to do with you or your family. If you had any brains at all, you’d check your facts before running your mouth.”

“Delusion’s an illness. You should get that checked!”

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Getting called out like that in public would get under anyone’s skin, especially someone like Andrew, who had been spoiled his whole life.

He suddenly lunged forward, fisting Ronald’s collar and yelling, “Who do you think you are to interfere in our family’s business? I’m the one who knows her best!

“Ever since she was a kid, she’s loved being in the spotlight and always needed to stand out. That was only because the family gave her that shine.

“Once we stopped spoiling her, she pulled every stunt she could to get our attention—even faking a kidnapping to squeeze money out of us.

“When that didn’t work, she switched strategies—never turning down a guy’s attention—just to feed her ego.

“She’s so vain, for all you know, the money she spent on you might have come from other men!”

It was the first time Andrew had ever lost his cool this badly, to the point he probably did not even know which parts he meant and which were just spite.

Tracy stepped up fast, grabbing his wrist with a cold, sharp look. “Let go! The mighty CEO wouldn’t actually start a fight in public, would he?”

The guarded, hostile look in her eyes hit Andrew like a needle. “You’re worried about him?”

Back then, if he accused her of something, she would rush to explain herself.

He always brushed it off as an excuse, but at least she seemed to care about his opinion.

Now, she was worried about this so-called gigolo instead.

Tracy either did not get what he was implying or just did not care. Her voice was even colder this time. “I said, let go.”

Andrew’s grip only tightened as he stared at her, stubborn and silent.

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Right then, Ronald slid his hand over hers, flashing an easy smile like he was not even being threatened by a guy holding him by the collar.

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Chapter 120 Staged Kidnapping

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“Tracy, relax. I’m fine. Not worth wasting your energy on someone like him.”

With one hand, he gently held hers; with the other, he twisted Andrew’s wrist hard enough to make him grunt.

The sharp pain made Andrew’s face tighten, and he instinctively let go, stumbling back a few steps.

Still holding Tracy’s hand, Ronald calmly brushed off his collar. “They say your family’s the top name in Cloudville, but who knew the heir would be this clueless?”

He shot Andrew a challenging look. “You claimed Tracy’s money came from other men. Got proof? Any evidence at all? If you’re just making stuff up, watch yourself, I might sue you for defamation.

“And about that kidnapping ... ” he let out a short laugh, “Since you dug into my oh—so—mysterious background, you should’ve found out that Tracy and I met during that incident.

“If you’d actually looked deeper, you’d know whether it was her doing or not. But you didn’t bother, so you just assumed it was all her fault. So, is it that you don’t give a damn about her, or are you just naturally brainless?”

Andrew flinched at the string of questions, his voice sharp with frustration. “Who says I didn’t check? The kidnappers admitted themselves—they were paid to fake the kidnapping!”

Because of Walter’s words, and with Liam hinting they might have been wrong about Tracy, Andrew had ordered a special investigation.

The kidnappers had escaped, but he still managed to get an answer from them. The kidnapping was indeed staged.

Convinced she had brushed it off like it was nothing, and thinking of her past behavior, he had come here furious.

However, no matter how firm he sounded, Tracy did not even blink.

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The truth was, yes, it had been staged, but the one pulling the strings was Chris.

If Andrew had actually cared enough to dig, he could have uncovered it easily. Jumping straight to her was just sloppy.

While she was thinking this with a bitter little smile, the hand holding hers gave a gentle squeeze, the warmth oddly comforting.

In the past, whenever the family brought a storm her way, she had to face it alone.

Now, someone else was standing with her, and it felt like a dream.

She turned to look at Ronald, and for a moment, his sunlit, rugged features seemed to glow faintly.

Ronald kept his eyes on Andrew, smiling even while hearing all that supposed “evidence.”

“You believe a criminal’s word over the girl you basically raised? Wow. And you say you are not the brainless one?”

The question shut Andrew up.

Yeah, why did he believe them over her?

She had been like a sister he had cared for his whole life.

His eyes drifted toward Tracy, only to find her gaze fixed on Ronald.

Those eyes, which had been so cold and distant since she had come back from the Angelic Etiquette Academy—more distant than with total strangers—now held a glimmer of light for someone else.

It was like this man had stepped into a part of her heart that had been locked away from everyone else.

A sudden wave of panic hit Andrew, and he blurted at Ronald, “What do you even know? I’ve watched Tracy grow up, so that’s why I know her best!”

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“How long have you even known her? Do you know what she likes? What she can’t stand? You don’t know anything about her!”

His voice got louder and louder, ignoring the curious stares from the crowd, as if raising the volume could make him more convincing.

Ronald stayed completely cool. “Whether I get Tracy or not—that’s for her to decide, not you.

“Even if I don’t fully understand her, I’ll still trust her. As long as she doesn’t walk away from me, I’m not going anywhere either.”

Trust

her...

Not going anywhere ...

The simple words felt heavy in Tracy’s chest, almost making her tear up.

Everyone who had once chosen her without hesitation was gone. She had thought she would never have someone stand beside her again.

If even the “family” who had spoiled her since she was a kid could turn their backs, why would she expect anyone else to stay?

Andrew was caught off guard by Ronald’s certainty, especially when he saw the way Tracy was looking at him.

The unease twisting in his gut spiked.

“Just because she pulled *you* out of that kidnapping, you trust her this much?” Andrew’s voice dripped with doubt. “The kidnappers were working for her. Did it ever cross your mind she staged the whole thing just to win your trust?”

Ronald stared at him like he had grown two heads. “So you’re saying Tracy had herself kidnapped, then rescued me just to make me trust her, so she could spend her money on me?”

If he really meant that much to her, he would honestly be thrilled.

Chapter 120 Staged Kidnapping

Andrew had no comeback.

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He had been so desperate to prove himself right and Ronald wrong that he had not even noticed how little sense his argument made.

