

The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late

#Left Behind 151 - Read The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late Left Behind 151

Chapter 151 Four Days

Chapter 151 Four Days

The accusations against Tracy grew louder and sharper than before.

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Benjamin's face tightened with pain as he admitted, "This is my failure as a father. I raised a scheming, ungrateful child, and now I'm the one being laughed at."

Even if some secretly agreed, no one dared say it out loud. Instead, they rushed to comfort him.

"Mr. Jackman, it's not your fault. I'd say it's in her blood. Some people are just rotten no matter how you

raise them."

"Exactly. Look at Andrew and Liam—they turned out great. And even Erin, though she wasn't raised by you, still grew up so kindhearted."

Ronald stood silently, watching the scene unfold. His usually bright, youthful face had turned to ice.

He realized he was mistaken.

Setting up a trap for Andrew was too kind.

No, he should drag the entire Jackmans down into hell, where they'd never climb out again.

Ronald was just about to speak when Tracy, who had been standing quietly behind him, suddenly tugged him.

She looked calmly at the officers in front of her. "I'll go with you."

Her steady tone made it seem as if she weren't the one being arrested.

Ronald quickly grabbed her hand, worry written all over his face. "CeeCee, I won't let them frame you."

The determination in his eyes was burning brightly, searing something deep inside her.

When the Jackmans scolded her, when the whole crowd pointed fingers at her, she hadn't felt anything.

But Ronald's raw concern and unshakable belief in her suddenly made her realize she felt wrong.

Tracy pressed her lips together, forcing down the wave of emotion.

"Do nothing, Ronald."

She didn't know what tricks he might have hidden up his sleeve, but she had her plan for today.

Tracy hadn't planned to explain herself. Yet when she met Ronald's honest gaze, she finally said, "If you really want to help me, keep this from my grandpa. Just for three or four days."

Ronald understood she had her own arrangements. Though worry gnawed at him, he trusted her decisions.

After a long pause, he let go of her hand and watched helplessly as the police led her away.

From beginning to end, Liam stood frozen, pale, and speechless.

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Chapter 151 Four Days

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He still hadn't recovered from the shock of Tracy being accused of kidnapping. Liam struggled to process everything.

After all, he had been the one digging into the case, and it was his lead that brought the police here. He knew Tracy had nothing to do with this.

So why had the investigation been directed at her?

When Ronald turned around, he caught sight of Liam staring blankly at the doorway, lost in thought.

He remembered—when everyone else was condemning Tracy, Liam alone had stayed silent.

Could it be that Liam hadn't suspected Tracy at all?

A spark lit in Ronald's eyes; he had an idea.

Liam was the simplest of the Jackmans—reckless, hotheaded, and easy to sway. That also made him the easiest to break.

Ronald strode toward him and said coldly, "You strutted in here earlier, showing off to CeeCee. Is this the result you wanted?"

Liam's face went even paler. "N—no, I didn't... I was worried about her. I wanted to help CeeCee."

"Help her? Haha!" Ronald sneered contemptuously. "If you really cared, you'd ask yourself how long it's been since CeeCee spent a single cent of your family's money after Erin returned.

"Even an outsider like me can find that out. If you had any brains at all, you'd uncover much more."

To the Jackmans, whatever Tracy did, they always assumed she was after their money. If they really wanted the truth, then they should investigate how much she had actually used.

Crack open that door, and they'd find more than they ever expected.

And with fools like the Jackmans, it was better to let them uncover the truth themselves than to hand them proof directly.

Once Ronald saw that Liam had taken his words to heart, he held his tongue. He turned sharply and walked out of that stifling, toxic place.

He didn't know what Tracy had planned, but he could wait—four days, no longer,

Four days from now, regardless of what plan Tracy had, he'll get her out.

Waiting was torture,

Though he worried about Tracy, Ronald didn't forget what she had asked of him.

He knew how important Franklin was to her, so the very next day, he went to see Franklin at the hospital.

Franklin was unaware that Tracy had been living in a rental apartment—or that Ronald even existed.

When Ronald appeared out of nowhere, claiming to be Tracy's friend, Franklin was stunned. "You're someone she met abroad?" he asked, bewildered.

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Chapter 151 Four Days

When he mentioned abroad, Ronald's brow lifted slightly.

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Smart as he was, even without knowing exactly where Tracy had been these last couple of years, he could guess where that story had come from.

He shook his head honestly. "No. I met CeeCee in Cloudville. I'd gotten into an accident, and she saved

me."

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Chapter 152 Hidden Shadows

Chapter 152 Hidden Shadows

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Ronald could see Franklin wasn't in the best shape. He also knew Tracy didn't want her grandfather to worry, so he gave a brief version of how they met, leaving out many details.

But Franklin had lived long enough to see through most people. He easily caught the things Ronald left unsaid but chose not to call him out.

Instead, he smiled faintly and struck up a conversation.

First from Tracy, then to everyday life, philosophy, and finally, business.

No matter what the subject was, Ronald handled it with ease, even throwing in a few sharp insights of his

own.

This kind of knowledge and poise wasn't something Franklin had seen in Andrew, the pride of the Jackmans.

Franklin knew right away that this young man, who looked barely older than a college student, was far more complicated than he appeared.

If they had met at a business occasion, Franklin would have admired him. But here, in a hospital, as Tracy's friend, things were different.

Franklin could sense a shadow deep in Ronald's eyes—something dark and dangerous, like a beast lurking in the night, waiting for the right moment to tear someone apart.

He hid it well, wrapped in his attractive face and a disarming smile, so most people never noticed.

But Franklin noticed.

He thought Tracy was way too genuine and too trusting. Someone like Ronald doesn't belong in her world.

On the outside, Franklin still wore a smile, but his cloudy, time-worn eyes held a calm depth that gave nothing away.

Ronald, as if blind to it all, kept chatting happily, his grin steady, his smile never faltering.

The more Franklin watched, the more he admired how steady this young man was under pressure.

But admiration was as far as it went.

After a while, Franklin grew worn out and spoke directly. "Tell me the truth. Has something happened to Tracy?"

He might have been old, but he wasn't senile.

Yesterday had been Tracy's birthday. With her personality, she would have stopped by after celebrating.

But she hadn't, and today she had sent a friend in her place. Something was clearly wrong.

Ronald had prepared excuses ahead of time, confident he could handle Franklin.

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Chapter 152 Hidden Shadows

But once he was face-to-face with him, Ronald realized this man wasn't easy to fool.

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After a moment's pause, Ronald nodded. "She did run into some trouble, but CeeCee can handle it."

Franklin's face stayed calm, but his body tensed. "What kind of trouble? Is she hurt?"

Straight-faced, Ronald shook his head slightly. "It's nothing serious. She just didn't want you to worry, so she asked me to keep it from you. But you're not easy to fool—I can see that. It's better to be honest than leave you guessing. But believe me—CeeCee can take care of this herself. You should trust her."

When Ronald insulted people, his words could cut deep. But when he spoke kindly, his voice carried a warmth that felt convincing.

And with those boyish dimples, he looked almost too sweet and sincere.

Franklin knew Tracy's character well. No matter how big the problem, she'd always hide it to spare him

worry.

But Franklin didn't know Ronald. He couldn't judge how much of his words were trustworthy.

Sensing Franklin's doubt, Ronald added calmly, "You've assigned plenty of people to look after CeeCee. Do you think anything serious could happen without you finding out?"

Franklin had indeed assigned half his men to protect Tracy while she investigated Walter's accident. He'd given her those resources to both support and shield her.

Ronald knew about it too. Yesterday, instead of coming to the hospital, he'd been making sure those men stayed quiet and didn't report anything that would alarm Franklin.

Franklin was not aware of the arrangements, but he was surprised. "How do you know I assigned people to watch over Tracy?"

Not even the Jackmans knew.

Ronald poured him a glass of water with a cheerful smile and passed it to him. "CeeCee never meant to keep that from me. Of course I knew."

If Tracy didn't want him to know something, he would never go digging.

When he said he was on her side, it didn't mean prying into her secrets.

He understood all too well how painful it was to be forced to live without privacy.

Franklin caught on.

The more he spoke with this young man, the more he admired him.

But that admiration came with one condition—that this complicated young man's closeness to his granddaughter wasn't driven by/any hidden or harmful intent.

Franklin studied him for a moment, then calmly sipped his water and continued their talk.

After a while, Ronald rose to leave.

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Chapter 152 Hidden Shadows

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Franklin didn't keep him. Instead, he asked him to come back sometime to keep him company, openly showing his admiration and fondness.

Yet in his heart, Franklin knew—when it came to Tracy, admiration and fondness toward Ronald weren't enou

Chapter 153 The Leverage

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Just as Ronald was about to head out, Franklin smiled suddenly and said, "Next time you want to visit, come on your own. There's no need to bring Tracy."

He knew Ronald was sharp enough to catch what he meant.

Ronald froze mid—step.

Of course, he understood exactly what Franklin was hinting at.

But he was never the kind of man who let others decide what he should or shouldn't do.

So instead of answering, he simply smiled and kept walking without looking back.

As Ronald's figure disappeared through the hospital doorway, Franklin's smile faded.

Turning to the bodyguard at his side, he ordered, "Look into Ronald. And while you're *at* it, find out what's really happening with Tracy."

Outside the room, Ronald was heading for the exit when something caught his attention. He snapped his head toward the corner.

On a chair sat a man in a face mask and baseball cap. The moment Ronald's eyes landed on him, the man ducked his head in a panic, tugging the brim lower to hide his face.

He pretended to be busy scrolling on his phone, but his nervous movements made it seem like he wished he could disappear.

Something crossed Ronald's mind; he glanced back at Franklin's hospital room.

Given Franklin's reputation, collapsing at a birthday party and ending up in the hospital was bound to attract attention.

That masked man was probably planted there by one of the Jackmans' rivals.

Still, Franklin's room had guards posted at all times, and every doctor and nurse had been hand-picked. Even if someone were spying, no one would try anything.

Deciding not to waste energy on that weird man, Ronald walked on.

He had bigger problems—Tracy was still in trouble, and he needed to get ready and find a way to get her out safely,

While Ronald was busy making plans, Tracy had been locked up in police custody for three days.

At first, the kidnappers Liam had pointed out claimed Chris was behind everything. But soon after, they changed their story—suddenly saying it was Tracy who had given the orders.

They even produced a video showing Tracy paying them off in cash.

With hard evidence, Tracy was dragged into the interrogation room over and over. Yet no matter how many times they questioned her, she insisted she had been framed.

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Chapter 153 The Leverage

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For three days, she barely moved from the back corner of the holding cell. She only got up to eat, use the bathroom, or face another round of questioning.

Occasionally, she shut her eyes to rest, but the slightest sound had her snapping awake, alert and tense.

She hadn't gotten a wink of sleep in three days.

Her bloodshot eyes and the dark circles beneath them were impossible to hide.

But this kind of torment was nothing new. For the last two years, she had lived through it again and again.

Her body might have been worn down, but her mind stayed sharp and on guard.

“Tracy, come out. Someone’s here to see you.”

The officer’s voice broke the silence. Tracy’s eyes flew open, and she slowly stood.

Three days had passed without a single visitor.

She already knew who this visitor would be—though he came later than she expected.

Sure enough, separated by a glass panel, she found herself staring at Chris.

Tracy’s lips curved into a mocking smile, her eyes gleaming with contempt as she looked at him.

Noticing that smirk, Chris’s already dark expression turned grim.

His jaw tightened, and his glare was cold enough to cut glass. “That email ...

He stopped, then changed tack. “That video—where did you get it?”

”

His voice was low and soft. If Tracy hadn’t already known exactly what he was talking about, she might have been confused.

But she did know. And she didn’t bother to keep her voice down. She ridiculed, “Who else could’ve gotten it if not your brother?”

Chris was startled, not with shock, but with the helplessness of someone who had just had his worst suspicions confirmed.

Tracy pressed her lips together, not feeling the slightest bit of sympathy. Instead, a strange mix of bitterness and melancholy stirred inside her.

She had always known Derek was brilliant. But each time, his foresight and careful planning still managed to surprise her.

He had realized long ago that Felicia’s attempt to drag both him and Chris back into the family would only bring disaster. So, he had installed hidden cameras, capturing evidence of her crime. That gave Chris a bargaining chip to protect himself.

He’d already guessed that if she ever helped him track down Chris, his brother might grow suspicious- and might even try to silence her. So Derek left her a way to stay alive.

The video she picked up from the internet café was his insurance, meant to keep Chris in check.

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Chapter 153 The Leverage

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Derek had installed a hidden camera to protect Chris's safety, and it happened to capture the whole scene of Chris drugging him.

Derek was gone now, which meant that footage could also be used as evidence that Chris was responsible for his death.

Derek had taught her what to do: upload the file to a specific email account and sign in every day.

If anything happened and she missed a login, the system would send the video to Chris within two days- and to every major news outlet in Cloundville within five.

Chapter 154 Habit

Chapter 154 Habit

Derek had planned for everything—except one thing. He never imagined the brother he risked his life to protect would be the very one to shove him into the flames of hell.

Chris's face twisted several times before he finally calmed down enough to ask, "What do you want?"

Tracy gave a cold laugh. "What do I want? Don't you already know, Mr. Woodward? If it weren't for you, maybe this video would never have seen the light of day."

She had expected trouble ever since Liam came bragging to her.

Especially after learning the kidnappers had named Chris, she sensed trouble would come knocking. That's why she had pulled out the video Derek had prepared ahead of time.

Staring at Chris's dark expression, Tracy curved her lips but had no desire to keep talking.

"Mr. Woodward, you've got two days to decide," she said coldly. "Will you gamble everything just to drag me down as your scapegoat? Or will you prove my innocence and get me out of here?"

She stood, ready to walk away.

But she paused and glanced back. "I need a pocketknife. Or scissors will do."

The police had dragged her in so suddenly she hadn't brought anything.

Even though she knew the holding cell was safe, still

Tracy didn't bother with Chris's sour expression. Without giving him another look, she walked back into the cell.

Seeing her walk away without giving an inch, Chris shot up from his chair, slamming the table. "You! Stop there, you—"

He bit down on the words, not daring to shout in this place. Rage boiled in his chest, but there was nothing he could do.

Chris wanted nothing more than to strangle this woman so she'd never speak again.

But instead of silencing her, he had only two days to get her released—while facing Felicia's crushing pressure.

No, he couldn't wait two days.

He needed her out as soon as possible.

He did have leverage against Felicia, but if that witch were easy to handle, she wouldn't have kept him under her thumb all these years/

If that witch found out Tracy was holding such a dangerous piece of evidence against him....

Chris didn't dare imagine the consequences. He rushed off to make arrangements.

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Chapter 154 Habit

+20 Free Coins

The kidnappers, however, were Felicia's people. The only way to change their testimony was to get Felicia herself to do it.

Tracy, unaware of what he was scheming, spent another day in the corner of her cell.

She still didn't sleep, but having a pair of scissors in her hand gave her a little sense of safety.

After four nights without sleep, her face was pale and gaunt.

Fortunately, the next day the police released her, saying, "We've found evidence that proves you're

innocent."

Walking out of the station, Tracy blinked against the blinding sunlight, dazed for a moment.

Then a cold, cutting voice broke through her haze. "Don't just stand there. Come with me."

Tracy snapped back to reality and saw Chris standing beside his car; his face was cold, his eyes sharp as blades, as if he could tear her apart with just a look.

Her fingers tightened around the scissors in her hand, and she even lifted them, ready to defend herself.

Chris, who had been burning with anger a moment ago, froze at the sight of her stance. His fury slipped away in surprise. "What's wrong with you?"

It took Tracy a second to realize what she was doing. She slowly lowered the scissors.

She had no intention of speaking to him. But just as she turned to leave, something struck her.

Lifting the scissors again, she leveled her gaze at Chris. "Do you know why I asked you for these?"

Chris frowned, unsure what she meant. But something in her eyes made his gut twist with unease.

It was the same sinking dread he had felt the first time she told him Derek was dead.

Instinctively, he stepped back, his eyes locked on the scissors, his whole body recoiling in fear.

Tracy noticed, and a laugh slipped out of her throat.

The smile was wicked, like a demon crawling out of the pit of hell.

“At the academy,” she said coldly, “everyone learned to fall asleep holding a weapon. Your brother did too.”

Her voice sharpened. “Can you guess why we had that habit?”

Chris staggered, nearly losing his balance.

“I—I don’t know...” he stammered, his lips trembling.

He wanted to explain, but after struggling, those were the only words he managed.

Tracy’s face was as cold as stone.

Of course he didn’t know.

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Chapter 154 Habit

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Just like the Jackmans never knew what she went through after they shipped her off to that academy.

But what was done was done. Scars carved into her soul couldn’t be erased by a simple word that they didn’t know.

Not hating them didn’t mean forgiving them.

She sneered, tossing the scissors at his feet. “Keep your excuses. Save them for Derek.”

Tracy pulled her contemptuous gaze away and was ready to leave.

And there, not far ahead, Ronald was waiting, a broad smile on his face, a sprig of sage in his hand.

Since she seemed to have handled things on her own, he finally stepped forward. “CeeCee,” he said lightly, “if you’d stayed in there any longer, I might’ve had to make a move.”

Chapter 155 Guarded Rest

Ronald had promised himself to wait four days, and God knew how hard it was to hold back the urge to

act.

Tracy finally relaxed. Without thinking, she gave him a smile. “You must have been worried.”

Ronald shook his head, his grin warm as he held up a bundle of sage. “CeeCee, open your hands. Let me chase away the bad luck for you.”

Something about his bright, easy grin lightened the heavy mood that had been pressing on her.

Tracy raised her arms, letting Ronald sweep the sage smoke over her.

When he was done, he tossed the bundle aside and guided her into a nearby SUV.

Before closing the door, he glanced back at Chris, who still stood frozen. A shadow crossed Ronald’s eyes.

If it weren’t for that man, Tracy wouldn’t have gone through all this.

She might not hold a grudge, but Ronald could not let it go.

Since Ronald didn’t have a license, Tracy took the driver’s seat.

The SUV wasn’t borrowed—it was brand new, something he had bought outright just to pick her up.

After he first gave her a bank card, Ronald had been depositing money into it every month.

It was meant as living expenses and payment; he would continue to deposit, whether she used it or not.

This month, instead of transferring the money, he had used it to buy the car for her.

He knew how often she had to shuttle between/the hospital, the Jackman Villa, and her rental apartment. A car would make her life easier.

When she realized the vehicle was meant for her, Tracy froze. She looked at Ronald for a long moment.

The car was already bought and registered in her name, so she didn't bother with false modesty. Instead, she said quietly, "I'll pay you back."

Her bluntness caught Ronald off guard. Then he chuckled. "Fine. You can pay it back into that same bank

account

Since the card and account were under her name anyway, he had arranged everything for her.

Unaware of his real thoughts, Tracy drove straight back to her apartment.

No matter how much the Jackmans despised her, after being taken away by the police at Erin's birthday party, she knew they would soon come looking for her.

But she was too drained to face them now.

She hadn't slept a wink in four days, her nerves stretched thin the entire time. Now that she was finally

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Chapter 155 Guarded Rest

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safe, the exhaustion crashed over her.

The moment she stepped inside the apartment, she headed straight to bed, not even bothering to close

the door.

Ronald followed quietly behind. Watching her tiptoe even when exhausted, shrinking into a ball under the covers, made his chest ache.

He knew exactly what those small habits meant.

Ronald had lived like that for most of his own life.

Looking at her was like looking into a mirror of himself.

He slipped into the room, meaning only to pull a blanket over her. That's when he noticed her hands folded over her chest, gripping a pair of scissors.

Ronald had known she kept scissors under her pillow, but he always thought it was just for convenience.

Now he realized the truth.

A sharp ache stabbed his chest. His eyes darkened.

Still, he draped the blanket gently over her.

The instant the blanket brushed her body, Tracy's eyes snapped open.

Though hazy with sleep, her hand jerked up, scissors ready to strike..

Ronald reacted quickly, catching her wrist.

He bent close with his warm, boyish smile, dimples deepening. "Go back to sleep. I'll watch over you."

Her drowsy eyes lingered on his face for a long moment before she slowly closed them and drifted back to sleep.

Ronald gently lowers her hand and steps back, closing the door softly behind him.

The moment the latch clicked, his sunny expression disappeared, replaced by cold fury and hostility.

Whoever had shattered the peace he wanted with Tracy—whoever had pushed her to this—deserved to pay.

He stared at the closed door, drew a long breath, and forced the rage back down,

Since he had promised Tracy he'd stay. He wouldn't break that promise.

The rest could wait until she woke.

So he stayed. Other than stepping onto the balcony to take calls, he never left the apartment. He moved quietly, making sure not to disturb her.

He hadn't expected her to sleep for an entire day and night.

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08:17 Wed, 10 Sept

Chapter 155 Guarded Rest

If he hadn't checked on her every hour, he might have thought something was wrong.

When Tracy finally stirred, her head was foggy from so much sleep.

She lay still for a while before her stiff body obeyed her again.

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+20 Free Coins

Habitually, she tucked the scissors back under her pillow and opened the door. Coincidentally, Ronald was in the living room, facing her.

His face lit up. "CeeCee, you're awake!" Relief softened his voice. "You must be starving. I'll get you some food."

In no time, he returned with a steaming bowl of creamy pork grits, still warm and fragrant.

Chapter 156 Doubts in the Shadows

Tracy blinked in surprise. "When did you make this?"

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Ronald didn't hide the effort he had put in. "I didn't Chapter 155 Guarded Rest

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know when you'd wake up, so I kept it warm on the stove. Your stomach's not in great shape, and you've been asleep for a whole day. For now, you can only handle some grits. Tomorrow, I'll make you something better to build your strength back up."

At first, Tracy hadn't felt hungry; she'd gone longer without food before.

But the moment he said it, her stomach tightened, and suddenly she realized how hungry she was.

She took a spoonful of the hot grits, and the warmth spread from her chest down into her stomach.

While she ate, Ronald told her what had happened during the day and night she'd been asleep.

The police had found evidence, and the kidnappers finally confessed. They admitted it was just them—no one had ordered them to do it.

Their original plan was to kidnap the Jackmans' heiress. They grabbed Tracy first, but when they realized she wasn't worth any ransom, they turned their attention to Erin instead.

When they were caught, they tried to pin the blame first on Chris, then on Tracy, just to escape punishment.

This story was far more believable than their earlier excuses. After all, everyone knew how much the Jackmans valued Erin. When Tracy was kidnapped, the family hadn't paid a single cent.

Once the case was officially closed, everyone seemed relieved and pleased.

The Jackmans' partnership with the Woodwards could continue, and the family wouldn't have to carry the shame of raising a criminal. To everyone else, it was the perfect ending.

To make up for Erin's ruined birthday party, the Jackmans even doubled her gifts and started planning to throw her another party.

It seemed like everyone had forgotten Tracy—the one who'd been falsely accused and locked up for days, who still hadn't come home.

Everyone except Liam,

It wasn't that he remembered Tracy's birthday or the apology he owed her. What nagged at him was the police report—it didn't sit right.

He had been the one who first dug into the case, and aside from the police, he knew the details best.

While tracing the kidnappers, he had sensed someone else helping them from the shadows. Now, with this confession, none of it made sense.

And after they were caught—when they tried to frame Chris and then Tracy—That only made him **believe** that the truth hadn't come out.

He wanted to voice his doubt, but when he lifted his head, he saw Erin smiling happily, **surrounded by** her

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Chapter 156 Doubts in the Shadows

family.

Strangely, it reminded him of Tracy at the party.

.43%

+20 Free Coins

Erin's birthday had been full of music and laughter, but Tracy had stood alone in the corner, looking like she didn't belong at all. The air around her wasn't festive—it was heavy with loneliness.

But that wasn't how Liam remembered her.

In his memory, even when Tracy was alone, she carried a quiet calm around her, not isolation.

"Liam, what are you thinking about? Erin's been calling you for a while." Daphne held Erin's arm, her eyes full of reproach as she looked at him. Erin stood on the side and looked hurt.

Snapped out of his thoughts, Liam saw everyone staring at him. He hesitated, then said slowly, "I just think

maybe there's more to the kidnapping than what we've been told. I can't shake the feeling there was someone behind the kidnappers who hasn't been revealed. Maybe it wasn't about money at all. Maybe it was a scheme aimed at our family or even at Erin."

Erin nearly dropped her act, but she forced herself to hold on to her hurt expression.

Inside, she seethed. *Is he crazy?*

Everything's *already settled*, and now *he wants to stir things up* again?

Digging her nails into her hand to keep control, she let her eyes fill with tears.

"Liam, are you saying this is my fault? Do you think I arranged the kidnappers myself?"

Her tears made Liam panic. He tried to explain, "No, that's not what I meant—"

But Daphne cut him off, her voice sharp. "Liam, how could you say that to your sister? That's way out of line!"

Benjamin's face darkened. "Boy, are you asking for trouble? Maybe you need a good beating to remember your place."

Andrew said nothing, but behind his gold-rimmed glasses his glare burned with rage.

Liam stood frozen, confused.

That wasn't what he meant. Why were they twisting his words?

Erin pressed against Daphne, her tears threatening to spill as she looked at him with wounded eyes.

“Liam, what’s happened to you? Why do you always take Tracy’s side and doubt me? I was a victim too. I’ve never done something as awful as planning a kidnapping. If anything-”

Her voice cracked as she sobbed. “If anything, it’s Tracy... Why do you always point at me?”

As she spoke, Erin could no longer hold them back—her tears finally fell.

Her crying tore at Andrew’s heart.

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Chapter 156 Doubts in the Shadows

+20 Free Coins

He couldn’t hold back his anger anymore. He glared at Liam. “You’ve really lost your mind. How dare you even think Erin would do such a thing? She’s too kind and pure for that. If anyone in this family would stoop so low, it’s Tracy. Don’t forget—years ago, she was the one who hired someone to kidnap Miranda.”

8/3

Chapter 157 Shadows of Doubt

+20 Free Coins

Andrew’s voice cut off suddenly, but the anger and pain in his eyes only grew sharper.

Everyone in the family knew that Miranda was a taboo of Andrew’s—someone none of them should bring

1. up.

Liam knew it too. He wanted to explain, but didn’t know how.

He hadn’t meant to doubt Erin—he only worried that if the person behind everything wasn’t caught, something like this could happen again.

But as he looked at Andrew struggling with his grief, Erin looking wronged, and Benjamin and Daphne seething with anger, Liam felt like someone had choked off every word in his throat.

It was the same suffocating feeling he'd had before—misunderstood, wronged, and unable to defend himself.

Andrew, seasoned from years as the CEO of Jackman Enterprise, quickly forced his emotions under control.

Still, when he looked at Liam, his eyes burned with anger and reproach. "What you did today went *too far*. Apologize to Erin right now."

Liam froze, strangely unsettled. Those words felt painfully familiar.

He realized Andrew had said them often in the past—only then, they weren't directed at him.

They had always been directed at Tracy.

In that instant, a chill jolted through him.

The shouting, the scolding, the harsh demand for an apology, and Erin standing there as the wounded victim—it was all the same scene he had watched play out countless times over the years.

Only this time, the target wasn't Tracy. It was him.

And Tracy...

For no reason at all, Liam remembered what Ronald had told him at the birthday party; he asked him to find out how long Tracy had gone without using a dime of their money.

Had the family really treated Tracy as kindly as he always believed?

The thought stabbed his chest. Another thought followed close behind.

When Tracy had been scolded and blamed, had she felt the same way he did now? Lost, hurt, disappointed, and powerless?

"Andrew, don't be upset with Liam," Erin spoke gently, quick to smooth things over. "I'm sure he didn't mean it. Maybe he just heard something bad and misunderstood me."

While Liam stood there frozen, Erin stepped in kindly to explain for him.

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9.43%

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The way Erin spoke made it sound as though Liam had only said those words because someone else had influenced him.

And that someone was clearly Tracy.

Picking up on the hint, Andrew turned cold and warned Liam sharply, "Stay away from Tracy. Stop running to her for no reason!"

What has gotten into Liam *lately*? *Why is he paying so much attention to Tracy and barely noticing Erin?*

Doesn't he realize *how devastated Erin was when the birthday party was ruined?*

"I... "Liam tried to explain, but when he saw the angry, icy faces of his parents and Andrew, a heavy sense of helplessness rose inside him.

It felt like no matter what he said or did, it would all be pointless.

So he fell silent, lowered his head, and said quietly, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said something that caused a misunderstanding."

He let out a sigh and looked at Erin with sincerity. "Erin, can you forgive me?"

Feeling him soften back into his usual self, Erin secretly breathed a sigh of relief.

She quickly wiped away her tears, forcing a smile through them. "How could I ever blame you, Liam? I know you didn't mean it."

With Erin being so gracious, no one else pressed the matter.

The atmosphere warmed again, filled with the same show of family harmony, as though nothing had happened.

But when everyone drifted away, Erin returned to her room, and her smile instantly darkened.

Nothing had gone her way lately.

Since entering this family, she had never once slipped up—but now she could clearly feel Liam's attitude shifting.

What on earth *is* wrong with that fool?

And Felicia

Erin had thought the old hag was clever, but she had screwed up—big time.

She couldn't care less about the Woodward's inner squabbles—what really infuriated her was Felicia pulling Chris into it and dragging her along with the mess.

Alas, she had managed to cover those problems. They wouldn't leave behind any real trouble.

But what truly worried her was something Tracy had said.

Tracy claimed she was investigating Walter's car accident—and that she had already uncovered some things.

2/3

Chapter 157 Shadows of Doubt

What had she found?

A wave of panic tightened Erin's chest.

+20 Free Coins

She couldn't stop herself from whispering, "You're sure that old man's death won't cause any problems?"

The elegant room stayed utterly silent. No answer came.

Still, Erin exhaled heavily, as if reassured.

But Tracy's words lingered above her like a blade, leaving her uneasy and afraid.

3/3

Chapter 158 A Dangerous Trap

No—I have to do something!

Erin acted on her whim. She quickly pulled out her phone.

43%

+20 Free Coins

She switched to a hidden SIM card she almost never used and sent a message to a number saved under the name Tom.

I'll send you more money. Go overseas right now and don't come back anytime soon!"

After hitting send, she carefully hid the number again.

But even then, she still felt unsettled.

She didn't know how much Tracy had discovered. If Tracy ever found out about Tom...

No, she had to distract her, keep that woman too busy to look anywhere else.

She had no idea why, but ever since Tracy returned from the academy, she seemed like a different person. Her whole attitude toward the Jackmans had changed completely.

Thankfully, the family had already been swayed by Erin and didn't notice anything wrong.

Now, the only person Tracy seemed to care about was that stubborn old man in the hospital.

After sleeping a full day and night at the rental apartment, Tracy was forced by Ronald to stay another two days to recover before she finally returned to Jackman Villa.

Those days away meant plenty of unfinished business piled up for her. And Ronald had things to handle too—like settling a score with Chris.

That night was dark and heavy.

Chris dismissed his bodyguards and drove alone into a rundown neighborhood on the edge of town.

Sneaking away from his bodyguards to come to such a chaotic place with no cameras was a dangerous.

move

But he had to do it.

Someone had promised him dirt on Albert—a piece of leverage too tempting to ignore.

He already had Felicia's secrets in hand. If he could add Albert's...

It was a huge temptation. He didn't know who was offering it, but he wasn't about to walk away from something this valuable.

Still, he hadn't sent his bodyguards too far. If something went wrong, they were close enough to respond.

At the meeting spot, Chris found no one.

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43%

+20 Free Coins

The street was dim, the only light coming from a weak, flickering streetlamp. The silence pressed in, making him uneasy.

He reached for his phone to call the contact. But before his hand touched his pocket, a sack was yanked down over his head.

"Who—"

Before he could finish, a powerful kick slammed into his stomach.

With a sickening thud, Chris's body flew backward and hit the ground, pain twisting his face.

What

the hell?!

Panic shot through him. He tried to pull out his phone, but before he could, a heavy boot crushed his hand into the pavement.

"Ahhh!" he screamed.

"You—who are you? Who sent you? What do you want from me?"

His voice shook with fear, but his attacker didn't answer. Instead, the pressure on his hand grew even harsher.

"Ahhh!" Chris howled again.

But that was only the beginning.

Kicks to his ribs, fists smashing into his face, a club cracking across his back, even bricks slamming down- every kind of blow rained down on him. The pain was so unbearable he wished he could just pass out.

But every time he started to slip into the darkness, a fresh strike jolted him awake.

Under the dim light, Chris's screams echoed from inside the sack. The man who was beating him repeatedly wore an eerie smile.

It was the bright, sunny face of a college kid, dimples softening his cheeks. He looked pure, innocent, and almost boyish.

Yet every punch and kick he threw was merciless, as if the violence itself gave him joy.

In his sharp, clear eyes, a flicker of bloodlust shone.

If Tracy had been there, she would have recognized him instantly—Ronald.

But the familiar face she knew was now twisted with frenzy, burning with madness, thrill, and a wild sort of excitement.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Tracy had worked so hard to patch him up. He couldn't risk tearing **his** wounds **open again—not for**

Ronald didn't know how long he had kept it up. Only when the ache from his half-**healed**

injuries began to sting again did he finally **stop**.

this 3

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Chapter 158 A Dangerous Trap

8.43%

+20 Free Coins

worthless fool.

Still, it was a shame. He hadn't had his fill yet.

Looking down at the figure groaning inside the sack, Ronald let out a sharp, disdainful laugh.

This loser thought he could hurt CeeCee?

If it weren't for the quiet life he wanted to protect, Ronald would have had no problem sending him straight to the grave.

Pulling out a tissue, he wiped his hands as though disgusted by touching something filthy. His cold, composed expression gave him the air of a gentleman, calm and untouchable.

At the trash can, he tossed the tissue away, as if discarding not just dirt but the rage with it.

And just like that, his bright, boyish smile returned. The pure, innocent face he showed Tracy was back- no trace of the madness that had twisted him only moments before.

On the ground, Chris hadn't even managed to rip the sack off his head when his expression suddenly froze. His face went pale as he clutched his chest in agony.

His heart condition—it had struck.

Mouth wide open, Chris gasped desperately for air, but it felt like the night itself was pressing down on him, crushing the breath from his lungs.

Chapter 159 New Leads

/ couldn't die...

9.43%

+20 Free Coins

Not now, not after everything. He had clawed his way this far, even causing the death of the brother who once meant everything to him. He couldn't just end here!

Maybe it was sheer willpower keeping him alive. Just when Chris felt like death was reaching out for him, his hand brushed against the pills in his pocket.

It took a while after swallowing them, but finally, he felt his breathing steady. He ripped the sack off his head.

The narrow alley was pitch dark, the only light coming from a dim streetlamp flickering above. Not even a rat scurried across the pavement. The place was completely empty.

That's when it hit him—he'd been tricked.

But by whom?

Was this just a beating to send a message, or was there something bigger behind it?

Chris didn't dare linger. If they came back, he knew he wouldn't be so lucky a second time.

Back home, he didn't tell a soul what happened.

His only small relief was that his attacker had avoided his face. Outwardly, he looked untouched.

But every step sent pain shooting through him, and walking straight was nearly impossible.

Ronald didn't bother following up on Chris's condition. He could already guess—Chris would be furious and humiliated but too scared to let it blow up..

And Chris wasn't the only one who needed to learn a lesson. There was another player in the game beside the Jackmans.

Winona.

While Ronald was plotting how to deal with Winona, Tracy uncovered suspicious activity from Erin,

After setting her bait, Tracy had been waiting for Erin to bite.

She hadn't expected Erin to hold out this long.

But when Erin finally made a move, Tracy was stunned.

Her bank account suddenly showed a large cash withdrawal.

Erin had her bodyguard carry the money while they wandered through the mall for an hour, and then... nothing.

When Erin returned home, the money had vanished without a trace.

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Chapter 159 New Leads

+20 Free Coins

Meanwhile, the people tailing Tom reported that he suddenly came into a pile of cash and blew it recklessly at the casino.

Tracy didn't believe for a second that Tom's money had just appeared out of nowhere. She immediately had people trace his movements and discovered that the day after he went to a shopping mall, he suddenly came into cash.

And that mall? It just happened to be the same one where Erin had withdrawn a large sum of cash and gone shopping with her bodyguard.

There was no way Tracy could accept that as coincidence.

But no matter how much she investigated, there wasn't a single trace linking Erin and Tom. It was as if her suspicions were nothing more than imagination.

Not wanting to tip Erin off, Tracy chose not to make any bold moves. Still, she was certain Tom's money had come from Erin.

If Erin couldn't be cornered directly, then Tom had to be watched.

He had taken Erin's money, and he was bound to make another move.

Whenever Tracy uncovered useful leads, she had developed the habit of sharing them with Franklin. She knew he was still haunted by Walter's death.

This time was no different. She didn't mention Erin's name—she only said the lead came from Walter's trail, which had pointed toward Tom.

She understood her grandfather well. He might not like Erin, but Erin was still his granddaughter by blood. More than anything, Franklin had always wanted peace between Tracy and the rest of the family.

Tracy hid the truth well, but Franklin—who had weathered countless storms in his youth—saw through her in an instant.

He knew Walter's death had hit Tracy hard and that she had been burning herself out chasing answers. So whatever she told him, he simply believed her, never asking too many questions.

Instead, his attention shifted to Ronald, who was quietly slicing fruit at the table. "You seem to have a lot of *free* time lately," Franklin asked. "Not working?"

Naturally, he had already tried digging into Ronald's background.

But it was like the man had appeared out of thin air—no records, no history, nothing.

In Cloudville, Franklin had never seen someone he couldn't trace at all.

syen

Ronald's fruit knife paused for a split second.

He remembered Franklin's remark the last time they met and realized the man had just questioned him again—this time right in front of Tracy.

Do Franklin despise me?

But **in a** blink, Ronald's expression shifted into his usual sunny smile. He turned to Franklin and **answered**

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Chapter 159 New Leads

easily. "I do have a job, Mr. Franklin. I'm CeeCee's assistant now."

That stunned not only Franklin but Tracy as well.

43%

420 Free Coins

She knew Ronald didn't just waste his days lounging around their rental apartment. He was always busy with his things. But when had he become her assistant?

As if he hadn't noticed her puzzled look, Ronald set down the half-peeled fruit, pulled out his phone, and opened Tracy's online art account.

"This account? I manage it for her," he explained. "Editing, promotions, fan interactions—it's all handled by me."

He didn't exaggerate or boast. He simply laid it out clearly, his voice steady and serious, showing the quiet effort he had poured into everything.

*

3/3

+20 Free Coins

Franklin had always known his sweet granddaughter loved painting. But until now, her drawings had only been admired by teachers, classmates, and a few close friends.

Seeing strangers online fall in love with her work made him beam with pride. For a moment, he even forgot how he despised Ronald, happily chatting with him as though they were old friends.

Ronald, clever as ever, showed Franklin some glowing comments from fans. The old man was so pleased he nearly forgot the pain that had been weighing on his chest for weeks.

Tracy stood off to the side, stunned at how quickly the two of them had warmed up to each other, almost as if she had been left out of her achievement.

She had known Ronald could talk his way through anything—that was why she had trusted him to cover for her when the police had taken her in.

But she hadn't expected him to be so capable; he managed to charm her sharp, wise grandfather.

Still, when she saw Franklin's rare, relaxed smile, her heart softened.

Since Walter's accident, her grandfather had always acted tough in front of her. But she could see his sorrow and the weight he carried.

His daily medication dosage had increased, and the doctors had warned them again and again that he couldn't endure another major shock.

Because of this, Tracy had even arranged for security to stay inside the hospital room, making sure no one could take advantage of Franklin's vulnerable state,

Not wanting to break the warm moment, Tracy quietly picked up the fruit Ronald had left on the table and went back to peeling it.

It was rare to see Franklin in such good spirits, so she lingered at the hospital longer than usual. She even pushed his wheelchair through the garden for a stroll before finally leaving at sunset.

Just as she stepped out of the hospital room, she turned to say something to Ronald—but her expression changed in an instant,

Sensing it, Ronald opened his mouth to ask what was wrong, but before he could, Tracy suddenly bolted past him, racing toward the far end of the hallway.

There, a man in a baseball cap and **mask**

spun around at the sight of her and broke into a run,

That man...

Ronald thought of something. He sprinted after them.

By the time he caught up, Tracy had already cornered the man, her face cold as ice. "What were you just taking pictures of?" she demanded.

The man looked startled. His first instinct was to deny it. "Pictures? I don't even know you. You've got the wrong person."

1/3

08:18

43%

Chapter 160 A Tail

+20 Free Coins

He tried to brush past her, but Tracy blocked his path. "Show me your phone. If it's a mistake, I'll pay you for the trouble."

Tracy was firm.

She knew without a doubt that this man had been aiming his phone at her grandfather's hospital room.

Since it involved her grandfather, she had to get to the bottom of it—no matter the reason.

Of course, the man refused to admit anything. His voice grew sharp with anger. "I told you, you've got the wrong guy! Who are you to go through my phone?"

He shoved Tracy, trying to push her aside, but Tracy sidestepped smoothly.

The next instant, Ronald stepped forward and clamped down on the man's wrist. His smile was cold.

Ronald threatened, "If you're unwilling to cooperate, then we'll just call the cops. We can't look through your phone, but the police can."

Though his face was hidden beneath a cap and mask, the man's eyes gave him away—wide with fear and

nerves.

Ronald let go of his wrist and reached for his phone to dial.

Panicked, the man grabbed his arm. "Wait—don't call the police! I'll ... I'll let you check."

He looked back and forth between Ronald and Tracy before finally handing over his phone with a defeated sigh.

As Tracy suspected, the gallery was filled with dozens of sneakily taken photos. Almost every picture showed her pushing Franklin's wheelchair through the garden.

Her brows tightened. Why would anyone take these?

She fixed him with a hard stare. "Who sent you?"

"I ... "The man's gaze darted nervously. He stammered, but no name came out.

Ronald lifted his phone again. "If you won't say it, you can say it to the cops."

"No, no! I'll talk!" the man blurted, panicked now. "It was Ms. Miller—Winona Miller."

Hearing the name didn't surprise Tracy.

She had once cornered Winona with leverage, forcing her to leave Phoebe alone. But with Winona's spiteful nature, Tracy knew she would hold a grudge. That was why Winona had acted out at Erin's birthday party.

Her last scheme had failed, and Tracy had expected she wouldn't let it go. Still, she hadn't expected Winona to resort to hiring sonicone to follow her, especially not to get so close to her grandfather.

Tracy's expression darkened, and the man stumbled over his words in fear. "Don't blame me—**go after** Ms. Miller! I'm just doing a job. Today was my first day."

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Chapter 160 A Tail

+20 Free Coins

Tracy pressed her lips together and didn't bother answering. She deleted every photo from his phone herself, carefully checking for hidden backups.

Only after confirming nothing remained did she hand the phone back.

3/3