

The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late

Chapter 2 Sorry, It Won't Happen Again

Tracy stayed sitting on the ground until the spinning in her head finally eased up. She slowly stood, her body stiff and aching. She didn't feel sad or wronged. She checked her pockets and found just one twenty-dollar bill, two fives, and two fifty-cent coins. Liam had told her to grab a cab, but he didn't give her a single dollar for it. He probably forgot that back when she was dumped at the Angelic Etiquette Academy two years ago, the Jackmans had stripped her of everything. They had said, "No distractions will help you learn and reform better." Not even a hair tie was left behind. The 31 dollars she had came from the previous owner of the hoodie she was wearing. Tracy clenched the cash, her chest tightening. Her nose stung. She hugged the hoodie tighter, pulled up the hood, stuffed the money back into her pocket, and kept walking down the mountain. A cold wind brushed by, and her small, lonely figure slowly disappeared into the distance. ... The weather was getting cooler, and night crept in quickly. Liam, fresh off a race win and a night out with friends, finally showed up at home. The moment he walked in, he spotted his family on the couch with grim faces. His elder brother, Andrew Jackman, frowned at him. "Weren't you picking up Tracy? Why are you back so late? And why didn't you answer any of our calls?" Liam was stunned, pulled out his phone, and saw the missed calls. He shrugged like it was no big deal. "I raced, remember? I only went to get Tracy because Erin asked me to." He strolled toward the couch and finally noticed how ticked off his parents looked—and Erin's red, teary eyes. He suddenly thought of something and asked, "Wait, Erin, did Tracy mess with you again? I knew she'd be the same! Two years didn't change her at all!" His face twisted in anger as he rolled up his sleeves. "Where is she? Go get her—I'll teach her a lesson today!" After blowing off steam, Liam noticed his family just stared at him in disbelief. Daphne asked in confusion, "Wasn't Tracy supposed to come home with you? We thought she stopped you from answering the phone." Liam froze. "She's not back yet? I told her to take a cab!" Andrew adjusted his glasses, clearly already connecting the dots. "You ditched her halfway and went to your race, didn't you?" Liam had always felt uneasy around his stern brother. He shrank under Andrew's stare but still mumbled, stubbornly, "She knows the way. I had a bet riding on that race. If I lost, I'd be treating everyone." Erin turned to Andrew with red eyes. "It's all because of me that Tracy didn't come back." She bit her lip, her eyes filling with tears. "I should've just said I fell down the stairs myself. It wasn't her fault. It was mine ... " She walked over and tugged Andrew's sleeve. "Andrew, let's go find her. I'll apologize to her. I'm sure we can bring her home." When Liam saw Erin cry, all his worry and guilt just melted away. After all, she was the one he cared about most—and always stood up for. "Why should you apologize? Erin, you didn't do anything wrong." Right then, all Liam could think about was how mad he was at Tracy. "She's the same as before—still pulling the same tricks to mess with Erin. "Andrew, if you wanna go look for her, go ahead. I won't go. There's no way she's gone for good. She just wants us to worry. Someone like her, who was greedy for money and status, wouldn't leave our family." Before anyone could respond, a maid came in from outside and said, "Ms. Tracy has returned." Everyone's attention shifted to the doorway, where a skinny girl quietly followed behind the maid. Seeing Tracy again after two years, Benjamin, Daphne, and Andrew were all stunned. It took them a second to realize that she was truly Tracy. The girl standing there looked nothing like the bright, confident version they remembered. Her head was low, and her hands were clenched tight. Liam suddenly raised his voice smugly. "See? I told you she couldn't stay away. She definitely would come crawling back. We didn't even have to go after her!" Benjamin snapped out of his daze and

looked at Tracy in displeasure. “You’re a girl. What are you doing walking around at night alone? Do you want people gossiping about us?” His voice was sharp. Everyone expected Tracy to argue like she always used to. They were even ready to lecture her as long as she did so. But Tracy just bowed her head and said calmly, “Sorry, it won’t happen again.” Those words silenced them. No one saw that coming. After a beat, Daphne stepped closer, finally taking a better look at Tracy. “Tracy, you’ve lost so much weight. Was it that rough at the etiquette school?” When Daphne’s warm, soft hand touched hers, Tracy stiffened. No one knew how many times in the past two years she had hoped that someone might care about her. But she was always disappointed. For two whole years, the Jackmans had left her in the Angelic Etiquette Academy and never checked on her. She thought she’d moved on and accepted the fact. But now, with Daphne showing just a little concern, all that buried hurt started to rise again. How could life have been good? She’d been stuck in a place that treated her like nothing, where students were treated worse than animals. Life had been awful there. Just as her grievances started to rise, she felt another hand grab hers. “Tracy, you’ve seriously slimmed down! If you dressed up like before, you’d be gorgeous again,” she said. She looked excited and a little jealous. “Not like me—I’m always trying to lose weight, trying everything, but nothing works. Mom keeps saying I’m not even chubby, but she still feeds me snacks and ruins all my diet plans. “You slim down so easily. I wish I could do that too.” In just a few words, Erin made Tracy’s weight loss sound like it was all part of some beauty plan. Daphne believed Erin right away. She didn’t seem to notice how unhealthy Tracy looked and how dry her skin was. She just let go of her hand. And just like that, the tiny spark of warmth inside Tracy froze. Her hands, which had been hovering in the air, slowly pulled back.