

The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late

#Left Behind 41 - Read The Unwanted Daughter: When Love Comes Too Late Left Behind 41

Chapter 41 Put on Shows Together

This scene felt all too familiar to Liam.

This is exactly how Tracy used to be—right in the middle, surrounded by the family.

Maybe sensing his stare, Erin suddenly turned and smiled warmly. “Liam, you’re back.”

She waved gently. “Did you talk to Tracy? As long as she stops using Grandpa to put on a show and make Mom and Dad worry, I don’t mind feeling a little hurt—I don’t even need her to say sorry.”

Liam froze for a second, unintentionally remembering what Walter had said. “No one would risk their life for a show. If we hadn’t gotten there in time, the ashtray really would have hit Ms. Tracy’s head.”

The hospital room fell quiet.

Erin’s eyes suddenly filled with tears. “Liam’s right. Nobody would risk their life just for a show. I definitely misunderstood Tracy.”

That was when Liam realized he’d accidentally repeated Walter’s words.

He panicked, about to explain, but Andrew and Daphne gave him angry looks.

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“Liam, think about what you’re saying! Do you really think Erin accused Tracy wrongly?” Daphne glared.

Andrew looked serious. “You shouldn’t blame Erin like that. Say sorry to her!”

Liam stood there, stunned.

He’d never seen Daphne and Andrew look at him like that—as if he’d done something awful.

But I was just repeating something someone else said—a truth, even...

He looked at Erin silently, confused and helpless.

Erin seemed to notice and quickly spoke up. "Mom, Andrew, don't blame Liam. I

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think he just saw how bad Grandpa's health is and felt sorry, so he was trying to speak up for Tracy."

She looked a little hurt but wanted to clear things up, and Liam felt a sharp pang of guilt, wishing he could slap himself.

Erin *is* so kind, but

I even blamed her a little because of Mom and Andrew's attitude. That's so wrong!

When Erin spoke, Liam nodded quickly in agreement. "Yeah, that's right. I just saw how old Grandpa is and how much he's been through—even fainting from stress- and I felt sorry. I wasn't trying to defend Tracy."

Whether or not Tracy used Grandpa to put on a show, if she hadn't caused such a scene, Grandpa wouldn't have fainted, I

wouldn't have been hit, and Erin wouldn't have gotten so scared she ended up in the hospital.

It's all Tracy's fault!

Erin smiled more deeply, clearly happy with what Liam said.

But then worry crept onto her face. "Grandpa's seen every storm in his youth. How could he suddenly faint, and right when Tracy was here?

"Does Grandpa have some hidden illness we don't know about?" Erin asked anxiously. "Andrew, should we ask the doctor?"

Andrew's eyes darkened. "The hospital sends us monthly reports on Grandpa's health. There's no hidden illness we don't know about."

He pushed up his gold-rimmed glasses, his expression cold.

Since childhood, Grandpa has spoiled Tracy the most. He often plays along with her little acts, fooling the family,

Tricking Dad into coming home for dinner, making

Mom go see movies with her, having me bring back gifis, making Liamh buy cakes...

*Those were harmless little things the family went along with.
But this time, Grandpa really got caught up in Tracy's crazy stunts,
almost fooling all of us!*

Daphne's face darkened, remembering those times when Franklin and Tracy put

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on shows together.

"Erin, since your health isn't good, don't think about all this messy stuff." She looked at Erin with gentleness and affection. "Just focus on getting better and getting ready for your graduation in a few days."

Erin smiled and nodded happily. "Okay."

After promising Franklin over and over that she was fine, Tracy finally left the hospital.

The first thing she did was rush back to work at the restaurant.

Her boss had been a little annoyed about her unexplained absence and not being able to reach her.

But when he saw the clear handprint on her face, he softened and didn't say much, even giving her some anti-inflammatory medicine at the end of his shift.

A few days later, after getting her very first paycheck, Tracy paid back the butler what she owed, then bought a cheap used phone, got a new SIM card, and saved Franklin's number first.

That was the only contact in her phone.

After that, Tracy went back to waking up early for work, carefully avoiding the Jackmans.

If something like the incident at Sometime Hotel happened again, she might not be so lucky.

That night, Tracy came home as usual after dark.

The usually quiet Jackman Villa was brightly lit and full of lively noise.

She immediately knew it/was a private dinner party.

Given the Jackmans' status, even a private dinner meant all the guests were important, well-known people in Cloudville.

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Chapter 42 The Disheartened Peacock

Without hesitating, Tracy turned and headed toward the garden.

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The Jackman Villa was huge, and from the garden side, she could circle back to the servant quarters, where she stayed.

She tried to avoid any old "familiar faces," hugging the corners, but the sounds from the party center echoed now and then.

"Tonight's dinner is specially arranged by Mrs. Jackman for Ms. Jackman's graduation ceremony...

"... Next, please enjoy Ms. Jackman's graduation piece—The Disheartened Peacock!"

Tracy's quick steps suddenly stopped, and she snapped her head toward the voice.

Even in the dim light, her lips looked pale, almost white.

She couldn't hold back; stepping out of the shadows, her feet trembled as she moved toward the glowing center of the room, hands clenched tightly.

The party was held in the mansion's grand hall, dazzling with bright lights. People wore high-end designer dresses and had perfect makeup.

Tracy, on the other hand, stood outside in a plain T-shirt. Through the spotless glass window, she watched the painting hanging high above.

The painting showed a peacock with its head bowed, tears falling from its eyes. Its tail, which should have been beautiful and bright, looked like autumn leaves dropping, dull and faded in color.

The host's voice came from the hall. "This is Ms. Jackman's sophomore work. Back then, it was coveted by many, causing some bad incidents, and it was never finished. It became a deep/regret for her.

"Ms. Jackman, once a proud golden child, suffered outside for 18 years. Inspired by her experiences, she combined the proud peacock with disappointment to create this masterpiece....

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Listening to the host, Tracy's face turned even paler.

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Behind the thick glass, she seemed to feel the peacock's tears stabbing her heart like needles.

No...

When I originally *created that peacock*, it *wasn't meant to show disappointment*.

That peacock is always proud—even if it cried, it held

its head high!

"Tracy?"

A voice rang out behind her, sounding unsure.

She quickly wiped away her feelings and turned, only to see a gentle-looking woman smiling in surprise.

The familiar face made Tracy freeze before she remembered—this was Phoebe Dinwiddie, her closest mentor in college.

Phoebe was happy to see Tracy again, but noticed something was off in her mood. She glanced toward the hall.

From here, she could just see the high–hung painting.

Erin and Tracy were both students at the art academy, and Phoebe was their mentor.

Phoebe knew the whole story behind The Disheartened Peacock and the drama it caused between the two.

Everyone once said Tracy plagiarized Erin’s work, but Phoebe believed Tracy, who was the most talented and spirited student she had ever taught. They’d talked privately too, so Phoebe was sure Tracy wouldn’t do that.

But all the evidence pointed to Tracy, and the painting didn’t match her usual style. Phoebe wanted to believe her but couldn’t find proof,

Two years without seeing her, Phoebe didn’t want to bring up those painful memories.

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She gently pulled Tracy aside and asked with concern, “When did you come back?”

“Just over a month ago.”

Tracy tried to look natural, but after two years without contact and those bad memories just now, her smile seemed forced.

Phoebe knew a little about the Jackmans’ situation and felt sorry for her.

She didn’t understand how the once so–loved Tracy became someone everyone turned against.

Phoebe carefully asked, “I heard you were abroad for the past two years. Is that true?”

The Jackmans had prepared this story not only to explain things to Franklin but also to outsiders like Phoebe, who cared about Tracy.

Tracy accepted the explanation and nodded.

But Phoebe was suspicious. “Then why didn’t you transfer your enrollment? I asked the Jackmans a few times, and they didn’t process a leave or transfer your records. Did you really go abroad?”

Because of this, Phoebe often wondered if something had happened to Tracy. Going abroad doesn’t *mean no internet—how could she be unreachable for* so long?

Even days before disappearing, Tracy had cried, telling Phoebe she didn’t plagiarize Erin’s work, that The Disheartened Peacock was her own original inspiration, begging Phoebe to believe her.

But since Daphne and the rest insisted that Tracy had gone abroad, no matter how much Phoebe doubted it, there was nothing she could do.

This nagging suspicion always stayed with Phoebe. She eventually gave up on Erin -the only other talented student besides Tracy—and almost got punished by the

school for it.

Tracy caught the doubt in Phoebe’s voice but also felt her concern. For once, a rare warmth rose inside her.

But those two years at the Angelic Etiquette Academy—she couldn’t tell anyone

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Chapter 42 The Disheartened Peacock

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So she forced a smile. “Professor Dinwiddie, please don’t overthink it. I really did go abroad.”

Phoebe still sensed something was off, but saw Tracy clearly didn’t want to talk.

She couldn’t pry into someone else’s family matters too much, so she sighed. “It’s good you’re back... So, what are your plans now?”

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Phoebe’s question was something Tracy hadn’t really considered before.

Back when she was at the Angelic Etiquette Academy, she didn't even know if she'd make it through those two years, so thinking about the future wasn't really an option.

Now that she was finally out, all she wanted was to get through each day. Working long shifts in the back of the restaurant, she didn't have the energy to dream like she used to.

Phoebe immediately noticed the confusion and sadness in Tracy's eyes, and it felt like someone had squeezed her heart.

When I first took Tracy in as a mentee, her last name was still Jackman. Back then, she talked about dreams and the future with bright hope.

How did she change so much?

Phoebe gently took Tracy's hand. "Kid, your painting talent is the best I've ever seen. Don't give it up so easily.

"Before you left for abroad, I showed your work to Ms. Nicholls. She loved it and wanted to meet you. Too bad you left so suddenly, or I would've told you sooner."

Jane Nicholls was a famous painter known for her orthodox style. Many people learned about domestic culture through her art. She was highly respected in the art world.

If Tracy had heard this before, she'd have been so excited she couldn't sleep. But now, she just felt nervous and scared.

Painting comes from the heart.

But my heart isn't the same as it was two years ago.

Still, I really love to paint

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Tracy didn't refuse Phoebe's kindness. "Don't worry. I'm not giving up painting."

It had been her true love since she was a kid. Only while painting did she feel a calm peace inside.

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Chapter 43 The Whole Story

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So no matter what, she wouldn't quit. But maybe she'd never get that same old feeling back.

Phoebe saw there was still something unsaid, and her heart tightened again.

She always felt this new Tracy was different, though she couldn't say exactly how.

But as long as Tracy didn't quit painting, Phoebe believed her talent would keep her shining.

"Alright, as long as you don't give up." She patted Tracy's hand. "Is your contact info still the same? If you need anything, come to me anytime. You'll always *be* my student."

Phoebe truly valued Tracy's talent. If Tracy gave up painting, it might be her biggest regret.

After Phoebe's strong encouragement, Tracy finally added a second contact to her phone.

They talked a while longer before saying goodbye.

But they didn't know their parting had been watched by a group nearby.

"Isn't that Professor Dinwiddie? Today is Erin's graduation party. She gave up being Erin's mentor when Erin hadn't done anything wrong. So why is she here now?" someone complained.

"I invited Professor Dinwiddie," Erin quickly explained. "She was my mentor once. On a day like this, I want to share my happiness with her."

Phoebe had brought up the plagiarism scandal over the past two years, even causing Erin to be the first student ever pushed out without making a mistake.

So on a day like today, Erin wanted her to see what kind of student she missed.

The girl who spoke earlier linked her arm with Erin's. "Erin, you're way too soft. If it were me, I wouldn't just glare at that woman—I'd give her hell!"

Erin smiled gently. "Professor Dinwiddie has always liked Tracy. I understand her."

Though she said that, her expression clearly showed she felt hurt.

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Then another girl spoke up. "Speaking of Tracy, didn't the person with Professor Dinwiddie just now look exactly like her?"

That girl was Winona Miller, known in Cloudville for openly disliking Tracy.

Since Erin came back, Winona was the loudest, mocking Tracy for stealing someone else's place.

Erin glanced at her, her smile softening. "Yeah, that was Tracy. She came back just over a month ago. I even threw a welcome party for her at Sometime Hotel. But, you know, something happened in the end..."

The welcome party was for Tracy's old friends, but today's guests were Erin's classmates and alumni. The Jackmans and the Dunns both ordered silence about the Sometime Hotel incident, so very few knew about it.

Hearing Erin speak about it made everyone curious.

Erin told the whole story, her voice full of pain. "I really wanted to welcome Tracy back, but she seemed to hate it. She showed up wearing worn-out, cheap clothes and said I wasn't sincere.

"Simon got angry and tried to stand up for me, asking her to apologize. But I don't know what Simon said that set her off. She suddenly lunged at Simon, hitting and biting him, and Simon ended up in the hospital."

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"Later, Mr. and Mrs. Dunn came to apologize to Tracy, but she went crazy again- biting Simon so hard she nearly tore the skin off his arm, and it made Grandpa so angry that he fainted ..."

"Tracy's behavior is getting worse and worse!" someone complained angrily.

Another agreed, "Yeah, she's just treating kindness like dirt!"

"If it were me, I wouldn't let her get away without a few slaps."

Everyone was harshly judging Tracy's wild, out-of-control actions while praising Erin's kindness.

It seemed like they needed to put the two of them side by side to make the difference even clearer.

"Tracy's gone too far. She needs to learn a lesson," Winona said angrily.

Her words got quick agreement from the whole group.

Erin looked unsure. "Isn't that ... a bit too much?"

"What's too much about it?" someone shot back right away. "She acts like that because no one ever puts her in line/ She'll only learn if someone really teaches her a lesson."

Winona nodded. "Exactly. She came back and immediately started cozying up to Professor Dinwiddie. Maybe she's why you got pushed out!"

Erin's face went pale, disbelief all over it. "No way. Why would Tracy do that to me?"

"Because she got caught plagiarizing your work and now she's holding a grudge," Winona said firmly. "People like her need a hard lesson, or who knows what trouble she'll cause next!"

Erin looked hurt, clearly not wanting to believe Tracy could hurt her like that.

Seeing Erin's kindness, Winona sighed. "Don't worry, Erin. We're just going to

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teach her a lesson. We won't actually hurt her."

Out of respect for Erin, we might go easy on Tracy—but the lesson has to happen.

Erin seemed convinced. "O—okay then. But don't go too far."

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Back in the servants' quarters, Tracy didn't rest early like she used to. Instead, she pulled out her brand-new, unopened painting supplies.

She thought her love for painting had died during those two years at the Angelic Etiquette Academy. But the moment she held the brush, she realized her passion hadn't faded.

With brush in hand, Tracy sank deep into her own world.

No one knew how long she had been painting before a sharp knock interrupted her. "Ms. Tracy, Professor Dinwiddie is waiting by the pool. She said she forgot to tell you something."

Being interrupted in the middle of something she loved made Tracy's real impatience show for the first time since she came back.

She didn't want to answer, but since Phoebe was asking to see her, she put the brush away and went out.

The pool was far from the party hall, and almost no one came there at night, so Tracy didn't suspect anything.

But when she arrived, the lights were on and no one was around—a sudden unease crept into her heart.

It was an instinct she'd developed after countless traps and humiliations at the academy.

Without thinking, Tracy turned and hurried away as fast as she could, as if waiting one second longer would let those demons catch her.

But she was a moment too late.

Before she reached the door, a group blocked her path. Leading them was Winona.

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"Been a while. How come you don't even say hi to your old friends? Where are you rushing off to?"

Their hostile faces were all too familiar, and Tracy instinctively wanted to grab something to defend herself.

But the place was empty except for the pool filled with water.

Her face went pale.

I've worked so hard to avoid them—why wouldn't they just leave me alone?

The crowd quickly closed in, eyes full of hate. Tracy couldn't even remember some of their names.

It seemed since Erin came back, everyone—whether they'd met her or not- started hating Tracy.

Only Winona had been against her from the start.

Winona had feelings for Norris, and back then, he only ever had eyes for Winona.

Now Norris's attention was all on Erin, yet Winona still had an issue with Tracy- she even became friends with Erin.

It was like Erin had some kind of magic that made everyone like her.

Tracy's eyes caught sight of Erin hiding at the back of the crowd. "It's your graduation party tonight. Do you want to cause a scene like at Sometime Hotel?"

Tracy knew they had lured her there on purpose, but she didn't have the energy to fight.

Erin looked worried, but didn't stop anyone. When asked, she just looked troubled and said, "I-I..."

"Why are you bullying Erin again?!" Winona stepped in front of Erin, looking fierce.

Tracy couldn't understand how, trapped in the middle like this, she suddenly became the one accused of bullying Erin.

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Erin held tightly to Winona's hand, trying to hide her feelings as she said, "Winona, I'm really fine."

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"How can you be fine?" Winona snapped, furious. "She got caught stealing your work, ran off abroad to hide out of shame, and still holds a grudge against you."

“You forgave her so generously and didn’t make a fuss. But she cozied up to Professor Dinwiddie, causing you to get pushed out for no reason, making you look like a joke, and almost ruining your graduation.”

Tracy didn’t know Erin had been pushed out. Phoebe never told her.

She remembered crying to the professor back when she was sent to the Angelic Etiquette Academy, insisting she hadn’t copied anyone.

Back then, Phoebe said she believed her, but Tracy thought that was just to calm her down.

Now she realized Phoebe really did believe her.

Her eyes warmed.

Winona kept yelling with disgust. “Tracy, stealing Erin’s work wasn’t enough—you had to secretly hurt her behind her back? That’s disgusting!”

Tracy didn’t care how harsh the words were. Her voice stayed steady. “I didn’t plagiarize her.”

Everyone stared at her in disgust. “Erin finished the whole piece and earned praise from every teacher, and you still won’t admit it?”

Tracy didn’t care what they thought. She looked directly at Erin. “Ms. Jackman, you say that peacock painting was your inspiration. Can you explain where that inspiration came from, and what you felt when you created it?”

No one knew the inspiration and feelings behind that painting better than Tracy. Erin might’ve copied the image, but she couldn’t steal those two things.

Erin’s eyes filled with tears. “I never wanted to fight you. Please don’t hate me.

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“I—I’m willing to admit you didn’t plagiarize. I’ll give up the peacock painting. I don’t want anything. It’s all yours. Sob ...”

Erin's tears spilled like a dam breaking, as if she'd been bullied.

People around her crowded close with soft words of comfort, their eyes full of even more hatred and anger aimed at Tracy.

Tracy found it ridiculous.

I just asked Erin *to explain the inspiration and feelings behind the painting—who says anything about fighting?*

Seeing Tracy show no regret, Winona gave a glance to the others.

"Tracy, we called you out to catch up, and this is how you act?

"Don't think we're scared just because you have Professor Dinwiddie at your back. We've all graduated—I don't believe Professor Dinwiddie can do anything to us!

"Erin's always been patient with you, but you humiliate her in front of all of us— who knows what you do when no one's watching?"

With Winona's signal, the group closed in on Tracy again.

They cursed her with disgust and shoved her roughly.

Tracy was pushed backward, stumbling a few times.

Their voices and faces mixed with cruel, twisted memories from the Angelic Etiquette Academy, like wolves ready to tear her apart.

Her body chilled, the familiar nightmare threatening to swallow her whole again.

"Stop it," Erin said, eyes red, stepping forward like a defender, blocking their hands.

"I believe Tracy just hasn't figured things out yet. When she does, she'll accept me." She looked at Tracy with hopeful eyes. "Right, Tracy?"

She reached out to grab Tracy, but halfway there, her face suddenly changed. She took a big step back. "What's that smell? It's so gross!"

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As she said it, she covered her nose with one hand and fanned the air with the other.

Hearing this, the others finally noticed the sharp, sticky smell around Tracy.

Everyone covered their noses and stepped back, faces full of disgust.

“Oh, my God! How can someone smell this bad? Did she fall into a bucket of garbage or something?”

“Look at those ragged clothes—she probably picked them out of the trash. No wonder she stinks.”

“I don’t think it’s the clothes. That smell comes from deep inside her—it’s disgusting!”

Their loud voices and actions seemed meant to shred Tracy’s pride and stomp all over it.

But Tracy stayed calm, as if she wasn’t the one being hated.

They tricked *me out here just to humiliate and mock me.*

At this level of dignity crushing, she didn’t even flinch.

She worked in a restaurant kitchen of course, she smelled like cooking grease.

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Those rich kids who’d never worked a day didn’t know how many things smelled worse than cooking oil.

After they laughed enough, Tracy quietly said, “If you’re done playing, can I leave now?”

She would rather be painting in her room than wasting her time here.

Her calm reply froze all their sneers, making their taunts sound silly instead.

Chapter 46 Fell Back In

The large poolside suddenly fell quiet.

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Erin stepped forward and grabbed Tracy's hand. "Tracy, don't be mad. We're all classmates here. Sometimes people just say things bluntly—they don't mean to hurt you.

"Although, yeah, you kinda smell bad...

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She looked like she was trying hard not to gag, but still wanted to be polite.

"But it's okay. You can just wash it off. Right, everyone?"

She glanced around, silently begging like her face said, "Please don't say anything bad about Tracy, for my sake."

"Erin's right. Just wash up, and you'll be fine." Winona smiled cruelly and suddenly reached toward Tracy.

"Tracy, let me help you get clean!"

A strong shove made Tracy stumble backward, losing control.

Erin still held her hand and didn't let go when Winona pushed her, almost like she wanted to pull her back.

But only Tracy felt the force—Erin was actually pushing her backward.

After two steps back, Tracy's foot slipped, and she fell straight into the pool.

Everything around her seemed to disappear in that moment. She clearly saw Erin's worried face flash a smile, and then she let go of her hand.

She did it on purpose!

As long as she's

around, I'll always be stuck in the mud, always the one everyone steps on.

Erin's proud smile hadn't even faded before her wrist was grabbed.

Now the same smile was on Tracy's face.

Chapter 46 Fell Back In

If they say I stink, how much cleaner can Erin

be?

Since we're both dirty, might as well wash together!

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Everything happened so fast that no one noticed the brief look Tracy and Erin shared.

Splash!

Two bodies crashed hard into the pool, splashing water everywhere.

"Help! Help ... Gulp, gulp ... Help!"

Erin panicked underwater, thrashing and screaming without worrying about her image.

"Erin! Hurry, save her!"

"Don't worry, Erin! We're coming!"

"Be careful, Erin!"

The people by the pool panicked, all eyes on Erin. Two who could swim jumped in at the same time to rescue her.

But both of them aimed only for Erin.

Tracy guessed no one would pay attention to her. After falling in, she flipped herself over and climbed out on the nearby ladder.

Her soaked hoodie hung heavily on her shoulders, weighed down by water.

The sudden fall made her swallow a lot of water, She bent over, coughing violently, her chest aching badly.

Just as she started to recover and hadn't stood yet, she heard a familiar voice. "Erin, what happened?"

Norris appeared out of nowhere, draped his jacket over Erin's wet shoulders, and

held her with a worried look.-

Tracy looked up, her heart twisting painfully.

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Chapter 46 Fell Back In

That familiar care and concern—but the name he called wasn't hers.

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"It's Tracy!" Winona suddenly shouted, pointing. "She pulled Erin into the pool. We all saw it."

The crowd immediately agreed.

They all knew how much the Jackmans and Norris cared about Erin. They refused to believe Tracy was pushed in and that Erin got caught up in it.

Erin's eyes were red-rimmed, her wet hair stuck to her face, looking utterly pitiful.

She grabbed Norris's hand, her voice shaking with tears. "Norris, don't blame Tracy. It was me—I fell because I was careless ... Sob ...

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Tracy clenched her fists and looked toward Norris, meeting his angry and disgusted eyes.

Her face turned pale.

Two years ago, Erin said the same thing.

She said, "Don't blame Tracy. I—I accidentally fell from upstairs. I shouldn't have come back. Sob ...

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Back then, the Jackmans looked at her with those same eyes. Then she was sent to the Angelic Etiquette Academy.

Tracy shook her head, panicking as she explained, "They pushed me. It was Erin ...

Norris's face darkened. After releasing Erin, he strode over with heavy steps.

Everyone clustered around Erin protectively, watching nervously as Norris stormed toward Tracy.

"If you like pulling people into the water so much, then stay there yourself!"

Norris's face was full of anger and disgust. He kicked Tracy hard in the shoulder.

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Chapter 46 Fell Back In

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Tracy, just out of the water, fell back in again. The sharp pain in her shoulder made it impossible to lift her arm. She swallowed water several times.

When she finally surfaced, Norris stood by the pool, ordering a nearby bodyguard, "Keep an eye on her. If she tries to climb out, kick her back in immediately!

"Wait until she realizes her mistake—then maybe let her out."

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Norris didn't even want to glance at Tracy again. Instead, he turned around and gently helped Erin up, his voice soft and caring. "Don't worry. Nobody's gonna mess with you. Let me take you to change your clothes first."

"But..." Erin hesitated, her eyes flicking to Tracy, who looked pale and shaky in the pool. She seemed like she wanted to say something for Tracy.

Still, she couldn't say no to Norris. Weak and worn out, she let him hold her as they walked away.

The others followed, naturally, but before they left, they all shot sneering looks toward the pool, their faces twisted with cruel enjoyment.

The water wasn't cold, but Tracy couldn't stop trembling.

She learned to swim here—Norris was the one who taught her, right in this same pool.

Back then, the younger Norris held the swimming ring for her, his eyes honest and steady. "Tracy, don't worry. In this pool, I'm your knight. I'll always protect you. I won't ever let you drown!"

But now, it was the same pool—and the same guy who promised to protect her had kicked her in and told others to keep her from getting out.

The pain in her shoulder was worse than any punch Simon had ever thrown.

She bit her pale lips, trying to get out of the pool, but the bodyguards who'd been given orders wouldn't let her climb up.

They pushed and kicked her even when she only wanted to lean on the pool's edge to catch her breath.

Even the bodyguards knew Norris was deliberately making things hard for Tracy, so they made sure she never got a break.

The pool was deep, so Tracy had no choice but to keep floating on the surface.

Her injuries hadn't healed yet, and after Norris's kick, the long time in the water

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Chapter 47 Derek

was wearing her down.

Then, out of nowhere, her calf cramped sharply.

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Her face changed. Before she could say anything, her body lost control and started sinking below the water.

The bright lights bent and twisted through the waves, and the crushing pressure came from all around, filling her nose and mouth.

It was unbearably awful.

I don't get it.

I've already given up hoping for anything from the

Jackmans. I accepted my place and just want a simple life. Why won't they ever leave me alone?

Fine, then!

*I should've died a long time ago—after
all, those people risked their lives so I alone can leave the Angelic Etiquette*

Academy alive, even though I'm not worth it.

Guess I'll just *die*..

Splash!

Suddenly, a huge splash erupted, and Tracy saw a blurry figure moving toward her.

"Ugh... cough, cough, cough!"

She spat out water and coughed hard, nearly gasping for air as she lay there, exhausted on the ground.

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A heavy, soaking wet jacket was suddenly thrown over her, nearly making her lose balance.

She looked up and saw a dripping wet man staring at her with deep concern—the same guy who'd just jumped into the pool to pull her out.

His voice was soft, full of gentle worry. "Are you okay? Do you feel any pain? Need help?"

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Chapter 47 Derek

He acted like he really knew her, showing his fullest kindness.

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His sharp, handsome face and gentle expression made Tracy pause for a second.
"Derek..."

His face suddenly froze, the concern fading fast, and his hand gripping her shoulder tightened without meaning to.

"What did you call me?"

He grabbed right where Norris had kicked her, and the sharp pain pulled Tracy back to reality.

She pushed him away, looking down. "Sorry, I thought you were someone else."

How could he be Derek? He's dead.

He died *right in*

front of me.

She told herself this quietly, but she couldn't help looking at the man in front of her.

He looks just like *Derek—as if they were made from the same mold.*

Her gaze made the man's eyes darken. "Ms. Yarwood, did you mistake me for one of your friends?"

Tracy didn't deny it and looked at his face again. "Yeah, you look alike, but I know you're not him."

"Can I ask your name?"

He studied her for a moment, then smiled gently again. "My name's Chris Woodward. I transferred here as a sophomore. If I'd come back to Cloudville earlier, maybe we could have been classmates."

Chris Woodward.

Derek Woodward.

It really is him...

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Chapter 47 Derek

Tracy's lips curved into a faint smile. "Is that so? What a shame."

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Seeing that she wasn't upset and even seemed willing to talk, Chris reached out boldly. "Let me help you up."

Tracy hated anyone getting close.

But when Chris touched her shoulder, she clenched her fists and didn't pull away.

Chris's smile softened even more. "You're soaked. Go change your clothes first."

Tracy stayed quiet and instead looked at the bodyguards standing nearby.

Not long ago, they had orders not to let her out of the pool—not even to rest at the edge. Now, they didn't stop her at all.

Noticing her glance, Chris reassured her. "Don't worry. The Woodwards aren't as powerful as the Jackmans, but these bodyguards aren't dumb enough to mess with us."

Chapter 48 Not One of the Jackmans

Tracy lowered her eyes and gave a small nod. "Thanks, Mr. Woodward."

Chris smiled gently. "No need to be so formal. Just call me Chris."

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Tracy didn't answer and turned down his offer to walk her back to her room. She kept her head down and hurried away.

Her body looked tense and shy as she left.

But once she reached a quiet spot, Tracy quickly took off the heavy, wet jacket hanging on her shoulders and tossed it into a nearby trash can.

Her calm, cold face showed a hint of disgust.

Chris didn't notice any of this. Watching her walk away, his soft smile shifted into one of confident determination.

I expected Tracy Yarwood, once so bright and bold in Cloudville, to be tough. But turns out, she's quite gentle!

Feeling more confident, Chris started hanging around the Jackmans' place a lot, hoping to catch Tracy's attention.

But she always left early and came back late, never giving out any contact info. Out of ten visits, Chris only spotted her once.

Liam, however, saw Chris more often.

Since the Woodwards and Jackmans had business connections, Liam had heard of Chris—the illegitimate son who appeared suddenly—but they hadn't really met.

Seeing how obsessed Chris was with Tracy, Liam invited him to a gathering with friends.

The Woodwards didn't have Jackmans' status in Cloudville.

So when Liam invited him, Chris showed up dressed to impress, acting sincere.

But at the party, people treated him like he didn't exist. Even when he tried

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Chapter 48 Not One of the Jackmans

talking, no one paid attention.

Only Liam spoke to him, mostly asking him to pour drinks or carry plates.

Chris wasn't stupid. He knew they were ignoring him on purpose.

+5 Free Coins

Still, he didn't get mad. He kept smiling softly, pouring wine for Liam. After a while, he carefully asked, "Did I offend you, Mr. Liam?"

Liam glanced at him, feeling a bit generous because Chris was eager to help. "You've been bothering Tracy a lot lately, haven't you?"

Chris didn't get why he asked. After thinking a moment, he explained, "She and Ms. Jackman fell into the pool together. My jacket is still with her. I just want it back."

Liam laughed. "You're the Woodwards' only son, and you're hung up on a jacket? Don't think I don't know what you and Winona are up to."

He'd overheard Winona and Chris talking that night at Erin's graduation party- those little plans they had against Tracy.

Tracy probably deserved some punishment, so Liam didn't stop them.

But since Tracy was still family to the Jackmans, Liam warned Chris, "Do what you want, but don't go too far."

Chris felt relieved right away. "Don't worry, Mr. Liam. I know my limits."

He poured Liam another drink. "I heard Tracy wasn't in Cloundville these past two years but went abroad."

Only Simon's close circle knew where Tracy really was during those two years. Chris wasn't in that group.

Liam gave him a sharp look. "Why do you wanna know?"

Chris hurried to explain, "Customs abroad are different. I want to understand Tracy better."

Liam frowned. "Whether she went abroad or not doesn't matter for what you're planning. Don't poke your nose where it doesn't belong."

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Chapter 48 Not One of the Jackmans

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+5 Free Coins

From that, Chris figured there was more to the story about Tracy being sent away two years ago.

Makes sense. If she really went abroad

, why would she call me "Derek"?

After all, I'm the one who sent that guy to the Angelic Etiquette Academy.

If she knew Derek, maybe she knew other secrets too?

Chris looked carefully at Liam.

Anyone cold enough to send someone to a place like that probably doesn't care much for Tracy either. Liam setting all this up is just to save face for the Jackmans.

Chris relaxed, feeling more confident.

After failing to find Tracy at the Jackmans' again, he had people check where she was.

That was when he learned that the once proud Tracy was now working in a restaurant!

Finding this info was easy if you looked, but even though Tracy had been back almost two months, no one in the Jackmans knew about it.

Because she left early and came home late, avoiding everyone on purpose, the Jackmans thought she was finally behaving and was no longer competing with Erin.

Benjamin even kindly let Tracy eat at the table with them.

For such a "big favor," Tracy just said, "Thank you for your kindness, Mr. Benjamin, but I'm not one of the Jackmans. I won't bother you."

Benjamin was so mad that he knocked over his glass. "We showed her kindness, and she acts like she expects us all to tiptoe around her!"

Daphne looked unhappy/too. "She says she's not a Jackman, but why does she still live with us? In the end, she's just blaming us."

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Chapter 49 Hero Saves the Girl

Chapter 49 Hero Saves the Girl

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Usually, Liam was the most quick-tempered one, but this time, he stayed quiet, not joining in the insults. Still, his face looked troubled.

I even warned Chris before, worried that Tracy might get hurt.

But honestly, someone like her—with such a

nasty heart—doesn't deserve my care at all!

Tracy had no idea what the Jackmans were saying behind her back.

Right now, her boss was leading her to apologize to a group of really difficult customers.

These people had been coming for days. Every time, they'd order a huge table of food, eat like animals, then find either hair or bugs in their dishes.

Even if the boss offered apologies or money, they refused to accept it. They kept claiming the kitchen didn't wash the plates properly.

Whenever the boss tried to check the security footage, they'd slam tables and throw chairs, acting like they wanted a full-blown fight.

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Even if the police got involved, the next day, those same people showed up again, right on schedule.

Only when Tracy, the one who washed the dishes, came out personally to apologize and offer compensation did they finally back off.

Of course, the money for all that came straight out of Tracy's paycheck.

It was clear someone was targeting her on purpose, and Tracy could see it plain as day,

She didn't know who was behind it, but if these people kept making trouble, her tiny salary wouldn't cover the costs.

So she decided to confront them. "I know someone sent you. Can I talk to him?"

She hadn't been back for two years. The ones causing trouble were probably the same few who pushed her into the pool that day—mostly doing it for Erin.

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Chapter 49 Hero Saves the Girl

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+5 Free Coins

The troublemakers refused to admit it and got angry instead. “What *do* you mean by that? You’re saying we’re causing trouble on purpose?”

“We’re customers. If there’s a problem with your food, isn’t that your fault? What kind of attitude is that?”

When they suddenly got aggressive, the boss tried hard to calm them down, but they still demanded that Tracy get fired.

The boss looked at Tracy, clearly uncomfortable.

He didn’t really know what was going on with her, but when she started, she had no phone, no spare clothes, and she was hurt—she looked like a helpless little girl.

Even though he knew these people were after Tracy, he tried to protect her, hiding her in the back kitchen and telling the troublemakers she’d been fired. But they kept coming back every day.

He was just an ordinary guy. He couldn’t afford to anger these obviously powerful people.

Tracy noticed the boss struggling and looked down.

He was a good man; he didn’t deserve to be dragged into her mess.

She finally spoke up. “Boss, I quit ...”

“You didn’t do anything wrong. Why would you quit?”

Right then, Chris appeared with two big, tough bodyguards, like a hero arriving to save the day.

The troublemakers who had been so bold before suddenly lost their nerve. Bowing and forcing fake smiles, they said, “Mr. Woodward, what are you doing here? This is all a misunderstanding. We were just joking with the girl.”

“Take your misunderstanding to the police,” Chris said flatly, clearly not buying it.

Then he told his guards, “Take these people to the station. And if anyone tries to bail them out, that means they’re going against my family.”

The troublemakers, who had acted so tough, started crying and confessing as the

Chapter 49 Hero Saves the Girl

guards dragged them away.

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The loud scene had already grabbed the attention of customers and passersby. When the troublemakers were thrown out, everyone looked at Chris, standing tall and confident.

Several girls whispered excitedly, “He’s so handsome,” “He makes me feel safe,” and stuff like that.

Chris didn’t even notice the attention. He turned to Tracy.

His cold eyes softened. “Ms. Yarwood, are you okay?”

Seeing his caring face, Tracy couldn’t help but give a small smile.

Looking at his gentle worry, the excited whispers around them, and the bullies who’d been chased off—it felt just like one of those classic hero–saving–the–girl scenes from a novel.

If it had been two years ago, or back when she first arrived at the Angelic Etiquette Academy, Tracy might’ve been so grateful for Chris’s help that she’d trust and lean on him.

But now, she just thought it was ridiculous.

She’d seen these childish, boring tricks way too many times at the Angelic Etiquette Academy.

Every time, they reminded her how much it hurt to get fooled.

Chris noticed her slight smile and smiled even softer. “Don’t worry. With me around, no one will mess with you.”

The girls nearby let out quiet cheers, trying not to get too loud.

Tracy nodded smoothly. “With you here, I’m sure they won’t cause trouble again.”

And those people really did stop coming back. But Chris kept showing up at the restaurant every day.

Since Tracy worked in the back kitchen and he couldn’t get in, he started driving her to and from work himself.

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Tracy never said no. Every time, she thanked Chris and even smiled at him.

It seemed like, because of that earlier “hero saves the girl” moment, she’d actually started to trust and like Chris.

Chapter 50 Are You Done, Mr Andrew?

Chapter 50 Are You Done, Mr Andrew?

But that was all there was to it.

Every time Chris tried to get closer, Tracy stayed cold and distant.

Chris didn’t get mad about it.

After all, she used to be the Jackmans’ spoiled little princess—of course, she wouldn’t open up easily.

He decided to take it slow. When he drove her to and from work, he always brought her a bouquet of 99 bright red roses.

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“I didn’t know your favorite flowers, so I picked the ones that say how I feel best. Tell me what you like, and I’ll get those next time.”

Those bold, fiery roses in his hands, along with his polite, thoughtful words, made a lot of people jealous—even ones who didn’t know their story.

Looking at that familiar face in front of her, Tracy almost felt her feelings break through a few times.

She squeezed her own hand tight, forced a smile, and took the flowers. “This is enough. Thank you, Mr. Woodward.”

Chris’s face lit up with happiness.

After dropping her off at the Jackmans, he even helped her out of the car.

Before, Tracy always opened the door herself. But this time, seeing Chris's hand reach out, she quickly handed him the heavy bouquet. "It's pretty heavy. Thanks for holding these, Mr. Woodward."

Chris's expression stiffened for a moment, then softened again, keeping his gentle smile.

He walked her up to the Jackmans' front door and handed her the flowers. "If you like them, I'll bring more tomorrow,"

Without thinking, Tracy bit her lip and nodded.

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Chapter 50 Are You Done, Mr Andrew?

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She refused his offer to walk her inside. Holding the bright red roses close, she hurried away.

Just around the corner, she bumped right into Andrew, who was standing there with a dark, serious look.

He stared coldly at her. "What's going on between you and the Woodward guy?"

Tracy hugged the flowers tighter, her face unreadable. "Mr. Andrew, didn't you see everything yourself?"

If he were just asking *a normal question*, he wouldn't look like that.

Sure enough, Andrew's face darkened even more.

He'd been standing there since Chris's car arrived, watching their interaction—and that sharp, bright bouquet of roses.

He was an adult and knew exactly what it meant, so he couldn't hide his anger.

For Tracy's sake, he hadn't shown up sooner, but her attitude made him even angrier.

“What do you mean? Are you planning to date him? Do you even understand Chris and the Woodwards?”

His questions came fast, each word burning with anger Tracy.

But Tracy stayed calm. “My relationship with Chris is my own business.

“Mr. Andrew, don’t worry—I’m not a Jackman. I won’t drag you all into this.”

“Why do you have to be so sarcastic?”

Andrew suddenly lost his temper and swung his hand, knocking the bouquet out of her arms.

That big bundle of 99 roses was heavy and bulky, like a hammer hitting Tracy’s forearm. The stiff wrapping paper scraped across her chin and cheek, leaving deep red marks.

Anyone with a heart would’ve noticed those clear bruises.

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Chapter 50 Are You Done, Mr Andrew?

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+5 Free Coins

But Andrew just glared at her angrily. “Mom and Dad changed your last name only because you bullied Erin and made mistakes. They had to explain to Erin.

“You grew up with the Jackmans; Mom and Dad treated you like their own daughter. Why can’t you be a little considerate?”

The burning pain on her chin and cheek was nothing new to Tracy; she’d long learned to ignore it.

“In your eyes, is it so wrong for me to choose my own friends? How does it mean I’m not being considerate about Mr. and Mrs. Jackman?”

“Just friends? Why would a friend give you such a huge bouquet?” Andrew looked disgusted. “Mom and Dad may have changed your name, but they didn’t kick you out. They still see you as their daughter.

“But you don’t appreciate it. You put yourself down, accepting favors from a man you barely know.”

He pushed up his glasses with frustration. “The Woodwards have some status in Cloudville, but they’re not even half as powerful as our family. How did your standards get so low, chasing after their empty pride?”

To Andrew, the proud Tracy who once looked down on everyone was only interested in Chris because she thought the Jackmans had abandoned her. She couldn’t let go of her past luxury and power, so she clung to Chris’s attention.

I can’t believe we *raised her for 18 years only to have her become so shallow and vain.*

Andrew sighed heavily, his eyes full of disappointment. “Tracy, when will you finally grow up and stop making mistakes?”

His familiar tone and expression stabbed into Tracy’s heart like a knife—it was so painful.

But she’d long been numb to that pain.

To Andrew

, no matter what I say or do, I’m always wrong and childish. My explanations are just excuses to him.

If that’s how he sees me, what is left to say?

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Chapter 50 Are You Done, Mr Andrew?

Tracy quietly met his gaze. “Are you done, Mr. Andrew?”

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