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Zinnia clenched her fists tightly, her knuckles turning white as she defiantly declared, "I won't serve you." Her jaw tightened, emphasizing her determination and resolve. Bella and Lisa exchanged quick glances, trying their best to conceal their amusement at the unfolding confrontation.

Duncan, taken aback by Zinnia's unexpected defiance, attempted to reason with her, saying, "You can't say that. We had a deal..."

Zinnia interrupted him, her voice filled with fury, "To hell with the deal, and you better listen to me clearly. I'm not going to serve a riffraff like you!"

Laila couldn't contain her anger any longer. Her eyes blazed with fury as she snapped at Duncan, "You worthless man! Get up and make room for my daughter to sit. How dare you suggest she serves you? She's not a househelp!"

The shock of Laila's outburst resonated in the room, causing Duncan to momentarily freeze. He pretended to be taken aback by the strength of Laila's reaction while knowing too well she was going to blast in her daughter's defense. However, he quickly regained his composure and retorted, "I am not the househelp either." Laila gasped, clearly taken aback by Duncan's audacity to challenge her.

The tension in the room escalated, with each party standing their ground in the heated exchange. The air crackled with anger and defiance, leaving the outcome uncertain as the confrontation continued.

Laila's eyes narrowed, her anger intensifying at Duncan's provocative response. "Such disrespect!" she cried, her voice quivering with

indignation as she pointed accusingly at Duncan. "You've become bold lately, huh?"

Duncan, seemingly unperturbed by Laila's outburst, maintained a smug smile that only fueled Laila and Zinnia's anger further. He relished in the discomfort he was causing them, feeling a sense of satisfaction that it paled in comparison to the misery they had inflicted upon him. Folding up his sleeves, he leaned forward, casually resting his elbow on the table, deliberately adding to the growing tension in the room.

In response to Laila's remark, Duncan addressed her with a touch of sarcasm, "Mother-in-law, at this moment, I'm no one's help. You can still teach Zinnia to be respectful."

His words hung in the air, thick with defiance and a challenge, as the room bristled with animosity. Laila's face reddened with fury, her hands trembling with anger. Zinnia's jaw dropped in disbelief as Duncan audaciously talked back to her mother. Her eyes flashed as she was on the verge of erupting in a torrent of retorts.

The room fell into stunned silence, everyone astounded by his unexpected defiance. Sensing the attention he had garnered, Duncan swiftly changed his demeanor, adopting the role of the innocent and obedient son-in-law.

He shifted his gaze to Ma'am Luna, who had unwittingly facilitated Duncan's manipulative game due to her intolerance for failure. With a change in expression, he spoke softly, addressing her, "Grandmother, if I have made any mistake, then I am willing to serve and..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Ma'am Luna cut him off sharply, her voice firm and unwavering, "No. You'll be served."

Duncan's attempt to manipulate the situation paid off as Ma'am Luna's stern refusal left no room for negotiation. The weight of her words hung in the air, signaling the end of Laila or Zinnia's attempt to take control of the situation.

As the shock settled in, everyone in the room blinked uncontrollably, their disbelief palpable. They exchanged surprised glances, silently processing the unexpected turn of events. It was a rarity for Duncan to dine with the family, especially since Ma'am Luna's husband had passed away, making her the matriarch. Both Laila and Ma'am Luna harbored their own reservations about Duncan, albeit for different reasons.

Laila, her voice trembling slightly, managed to stutter, "M... mother, you mean he will have a meal with us?"

Ma'am Luna responded with a touch of sarcasm, her tone cutting through the tension, "I wasn't speaking Chinese when I said that earlier, daughter."

Zinnia, clinging onto a glimmer of hope, mustered the courage to ask, "And... me?"

Her question hung in the air, laden with uncertainty. Zinnia yearned for her grandmother's validation and acceptance, hoping that this unexpected turn of events could alleviate her for the moment. The room fell into a momentary silence, all eyes fixed on Ma'am Luna, awaiting her response, which held the power to reshape the dynamics of the family.

Ma'am Luna finally spoke with a light smile, "Oh, you, my dear incapable granddaughter." Ma'am Luna's words cut through the air like a sharp blade, inflicting pain upon Zinnia's already wounded spirit. Her grandmother's harsh remark struck deep, reminding her of her



perceived inadequacies. "Zinnia, as expected, you'll serve and be the last one to eat."

Hearing that, Bella and Lisa, witnessing the exchange, narrowed their gazes in disapproval, their amusement fading as they realized the extent of Zinnia's humiliation. They suppressed their laughter, understanding the gravity of the situation.

Zinnia's shoulders slumped, her face reflecting a mixture of hurt and resignation.

Duncan, on the other hand, seemed to relish in the unfolding drama. He hung his head, a cruel smile playing on his face, reveling in the power he held over Zinnia. Without hesitation, he grabbed a plate and set it in front of himself, his actions a blatant display of his arrogance and disregard for Zinnia's feelings.

"Grandmother, I..." Zinnia, attempting to speak up once again, was swiftly interrupted by Ma'am Luna's command. "Start serving. I'm hungry," she declared, dismissing Zinnia's attempt to defend herself or seek understanding.

Duncan chimed in, adding insult to injury. "Me too," he chirped, casually placing a napkin on his lap, further asserting his entitlement and lack of empathy.

The room grew heavy with tension and resentment, the power dynamics firmly established. Zinnia reluctantly acquiesced, her heart heavy with a sense of defeat, as she began the task of serving the very people who had belittled her. Swallowing her pride once again, she mustered the strength to walk to each person's seat, her movements slightly restrained. She took their plates and began dishing out the food, suppressing the bitterness that threatened to overwhelm her.



As Zinnia approached Lisa's seat, Lisa's blunt tone pierced the air. "Please don't dish out too much for me," she stated, her words laced with condescension. Laila couldn't help but shoot a disapproving glare at Lisa, recognizing the cruelty in her comment.

Lisa continued, a smug smile playing on her lips, "Well, you know, I need to keep doing great things to retain my position in the company as the CIO, right, Mom?" Her attempt at humor was met with a chuckle from Bella, who played along with the joke. It was evident to Laila that they were mocking Zinnia at this moment.

Laila's expression hardened, her eyes narrowing as she observed the mockery unfolding before her. She could see through their thinly veiled insults and felt a surge of protectiveness for her daughter, though she struggled with her own biases.

Another voice chimed in, adding insult to injury. "Serve me a little to stay fit, my dear wife," Duncan remarked, his words dripping with disdain as he attempted to assert his dominance over Zinnia. His comment further exacerbated the humiliation she already felt.

Zinnia bit her lip, her hands trembling slightly as she complied with their requests. She continued serving, her movements becoming more mechanical, her spirit weighed down by the constant belittlement. Each plate she handed out was accompanied by a silent plea for understanding and compassion, but it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

The room remained heavy with tension, the atmosphere poisoned by the palpable resentment and the callousness of those around her. Zinnia, determined to survive this ordeal, pushed her own feelings aside, focusing solely on the task at hand, as she served the very people who seemed determined to keep her in a state of subservience.

Duncan maintained his composed demeanor as he savored each bite of his meal, seemingly unaffected by his upset wife, Zinnia's presence. She stood behind him, observing their interaction with a cold and calculating gaze. Duncan was aware of her presence but chose to ignore her, focusing instead on his dinner.

As Marcus continued to observe Duncan, curiosity got the better of him, and he couldn't help but inquire about Duncan's recent activities. Wiping his mouth with a napkin, Marcus leaned forward and asked inquisitively, "Duncan, what have you been up to lately? You seem preoccupied as if you're involved in a significant business venture. I've noticed you haven't been showing up at the company as often as before to do your work."

Duncan, well aware of Marcus's attempts to uncover his secrets, couldn't help but inwardly chuckle at his audacity. He knew Marcus was trying to see through him, but he also believed that Marcus was foolish to think he could succeed. Despite his amusement, Duncan maintained his calm facade and replied smoothly, "Oh, Marcus, have been busy managing a few personal endeavors."

With a slight smirk, Duncan took another sip of his drink, relishing the taste while Marcus pondered his response. Duncan knew that maintaining an air of mystery would keep Marcus guessing and prevent him from delving too deep into his affairs. After all, Duncan had carefully crafted his web of deception, and he had no intention of letting anyone, especially his wicked wife or the nosy family members unravel it.

"Really, Duncan?" Marcus, not yet comfortable with Duncan's answer, asked.

Duncan, feigning a cough to add a touch of authenticity to his response, answered Marcus with a pitiful expression on his face. "Well, Marcus,

since I lost my job at the restaurant, I've been tirelessly searching for new opportunities," he explained, hoping to evoke sympathy from him, especially Ma'am Luna who stared at him, piqued.

As Duncan glanced across the table at Lisa, he noticed a strange look on her face. At that moment, Lisa recalled what the Manager of the restaurant had told her the other day that Duncan had willingly resigned and had even behaved poorly towards him. Lisa couldn't comprehend why Duncan would voluntarily give up his job and subject himself to the hardships of job hunting.

Sensing Lisa's confusion, Duncan took another quick glance at her and couldn't help but derive amusement from her thoughts. He knew that Lisa was trying to make sense of his supposed job loss, and her puzzlement only fueled his satisfaction. Duncan was well-versed in the art of manipulation, and he took pleasure in the control he exerted over others, particularly his wife at the moment and the other members.

Maintaining his facade of innocence and victimhood, Duncan smiled inwardly, relishing the power he held over their perceptions of him. He was confident that his carefully crafted web of deception would continue to entangle those around him, allowing him to manipulate the narrative to his advantage.

"It's good you're being hardworking, Duncan," Ma'am Luna commented to everyone's surprise. "At the moment, I can say you're acting more capable than your wife." Zinnia glanced at Ma'am Luna and gulped, swallowing the words she intended to spill.

As Laila, feeling compassion for her daughter Zinnia, observed Duncan's callousness while he continued to eat, she mustered the courage to speak up. "Mother, I kindly request that you allow Zinnia to eat," she pleaded, her voice tinged with both humility and frustration.

However, Ma'am Luna, displaying her disdain for Zinnia, interrupted Laila dismissively. "I don't dine with house helps. She is merely a house help for the time being," she declared, rolling her eyes in contempt.

Meanwhile, Duncan, still maintaining his smile, felt his phone vibrate in his pocket before it began to ring. Retrieving his phone, he noticed that it was an incoming call from an unknown number. As Ma'am Luna and Laila exchanged heated glances, with Laila appearing fearful and cowering, Duncan decided to answer the call, intrigued by the unfamiliarity of the number.

As Duncan answered the call, he immediately recognized the voice on the other end and a knowing smirk formed on his face. Sensing his advantage, he remained silent, his eyes briefly meeting Zinnia's behind him. Zinnia, struggling to contain her frustration, fought the impulse to lash out at Duncan.

"Hello? Duncan?" the voice on the phone spoke, seeking confirmation. Duncan maintained his silence, reveling in the power he held over the caller. Aware of Ma'am Luna's disapproving gaze, he swiftly decided to dismiss the caller without revealing their identity.

Interrupting the conversation, Duncan responded with a firm tone, not out of fear but to prevent Ma'am Luna and the others from discovering who had called. "Wrong number," he curtly stated, his words meant to deflect any suspicion.

Desperate to convey a pressing matter, the caller insisted, "Please, I need ..." but before they could finish their sentence, Duncan abruptly ended the call, not interested in entertaining his request.

Duncan's actions showcased his manipulative nature and his willingness

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to cut off any potential threats or unwanted intrusions into his carefully constructed façade. He understood the importance of maintaining control over information and ensuring that no one, especially Ma'am Luna and Laila, would uncover his hidden motives or past actions. With each calculated move, Duncan continued to weave his web of deception, protecting his secrets and advancing his own agenda.

"Let's see how far the tortoise is willing to crawl without a head," he thought as he went on eating, his smile broadening.

 **Gem Lynne** author

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. It's going to be taking a heat tone now. While Duncan steps up the game, you guys should pray Zinnia don't get to catch him or maybe kill him at night 🤔🤔🤔...

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