

My Accidental Husband is a Billionaire !

C – 691–700

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Erin immediately inquired, “What’s this Plan B? Haven’t we failed?”

Keira turned to her, “What exactly did we accomplish?”

Erin scrutinized the two of them. They had done nothing more than travel a long distance, arriving here only to witness Professor Barry Brandt being captured.

Erin frowned, and after a moment of thought, she seemed to understand. “So, it’s all a diversion! The real rescue mission must have already been set in motion!”

Lewis checked the time and nodded. “Everyone knows the quickest route from Country A to Crera is through this river, so it’s heavily guarded here. But Professor Brandt took a different route.”

Erin’s eyes widened in realization. “Another route would take a whole day by sea and pass through a dangerous strait. No one would expect him to go that way... Lewis, you’re quite cunning!”

Lewis gave her a sidelong glance but didn’t respond. Instead, he turned his gentle gaze to Keira and explained, “Professor Brandt has just boarded a ship and left Crera. He’ll likely return to Crera around this time tomorrow.”

Keira nodded in understanding.

Erin, however, scoffed. “I doubt Professor Brandt will make it back.”

Keira looked at her. “Why do you think that?”

Erin pulled out her phone, opened a map, and showed it to Keira. “Are you familiar with maritime routes? Although this river is the shortest route from Crera, the authorities there are aware that Professor Brandt might choose an alternative route. But they haven’t fortified the other direction because it involves the Trident Strait!”

She pointed to a location on the map.

Keira stared at it, puzzled. “The Trident Strait?”

Erin's disdain was palpable. "Don't you know anything? The world's largest surface is the ocean. Maritime routes are crucial for global trade."

Keira nodded. "I'm aware of that."

"Good," Erin continued. "Sea transport is essential for trade because it's much cheaper compared to air freight. But you should also know that pirates still exist."

Keira blinked in surprise. "Pirates?"

Erin pointed to a spot on the map. "There's an island here where a group of pirates live. They survive by raiding ships. They're known as the Trident Pirates!"

She continued, "Because of these pirates, this sea route has never been opened up. Ships always have to detour, making it dangerous for Professor Brandt to travel through there."

Keira's eyes widened in disbelief. "Are there still pirates in the world?"

Lewis chuckled softly. "Yes, there are. The competition over maritime routes happens behind the scenes, so it's not well-known. These pirates control key straits, making them very important for navigation."

He added, "If a maritime route is opened up, the time and fuel savings are significant, lowering the cost of shipping goods substantially. So, there's fierce competition over these straits."

Keira was astonished, feeling like she had discovered a new world.

She understood the importance of transportation and how essential it was for economic development. Disruptions in transportation could lead to isolation.

But she hadn't realized there were still maritime challenges in the modern era.

Erin spoke again. "You mentioned the pirates, but you didn't say how fierce they are. Do you know that anyone passing through their territory has to pay a hefty toll? The fees are so high that ships prefer to detour rather than risk encountering them. Professor Brandt would certainly be detained!"

Keira turned to Lewis. "Did you make arrangements with the pirates?"

If the pirates could collect tolls from cargo ships, they could certainly do the same with people!

Before Lewis could answer, Erin snorted. "It wouldn't help if he tried. No amount of money would work. We all know Professor Brandt's value is immeasurable. The pirates know it, too! They're involved in weapon development and research, and Professor Brandt is the scientist they need!"

Erin glared at Lewis, clearly frustrated. “Don’t underestimate the pirates. If they were weak, they’d have been taken down by surrounding nations long ago. They’re formidable opponents, familiar with the sea and its geography. They’re a tough nut to crack!”

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Keira glanced nervously at Lewis upon hearing Erin’s words. Lewis’s lips curled into a faint smile.

Realizing that Lewis must have already made arrangements with the pirates of the Trident Strait, Keira understood that they would likely release Professor Barry Brandt.

Seeing the two of them so relaxed, Erin grew more anxious. “You need to inform the higher-ups immediately! This is serious! I’ve dealt with the Trident Strait’s King before—he doesn’t respond to reason.”

Keira raised an eyebrow. “King?”

Erin nodded. “Yes, their leader is called King. He’s a notorious pirate who took control of the Trident Strait five years ago. His crew is formidable, and he’s known for his ruthless methods.”

She leaned in and whispered to Keira, “If you can build a good relationship with King, it could significantly boost your chances for the successor position!”

Keira fixed her gaze on Erin. “So you’re actually helping me rather than being a rival.”

Erin looked puzzled. “What are you talking about?”

Taking a step back, Erin tossed a pistachio into her mouth and said, “I’m just trying to warn you about the Trident Strait issue. Can you focus on that?”

Keira crossed her arms and stared at her. “The fact that you’re helping me does matter. What’s our relationship really like? That’s a crucial issue.”

Erin frowned. “I’m trying to talk about serious matters here. Can you stop interrupting?”

“To me, who you are and what our relationship is is the most important issue.”

Keira spoke calmly.

Erin’s frustration was evident. She seemed nervous, her anxiety almost palpable. “Why are you making this so complicated? I just don’t want you to get killed off too soon. I want you to compete with the other successors so I can benefit in the end!”

With that, Erin hurriedly retreated into the cabin, looking somewhat guilty. “Enough about this. I’m tired. You’ve been on the road all this time, aren’t you tired too? Get some rest. We’ll have a tough fight when we get back home tomorrow!”

Keira asked, “What kind of fight?”

Erin replied, “You’ve lost Professor Brandt. Even if you explain to the authorities, there’s no evidence! Isn’t that a tough situation? Also, I heard that the Horton Group is holding a press conference tomorrow to announce something. Uncle Olsen promised to address the issue of you being kicked out of the house.”

Erin yawned and went into the cabin.

Keira watched her leave and turned to Lewis. “She doesn’t seem like a rival at all. In fact, she’s helping me. I feel like she’s hiding something from us.”

Lewis nodded. “I haven’t sensed any hostility from her either. That’s why we didn’t suspect her when we first met.”

But why would Erin, Fox, be so helpful to her, Rabbit? It was an odd situation.

Keira frowned, unable to make sense of it. After a while, she shook her head. “I’ll set it aside for now. She’ll reveal what’s necessary when the time comes. By the way, what’s your connection to the pirate leader of the Trident Strait?”

Lewis replied calmly, “We studied abroad together years ago. I’ve helped him, so he’s inclined to help me. Don’t worry. Professor Brandt will return to Crera. on schedule tomorrow.”

Keira nodded. “Got it.”

They both went into their cabin.

Exhausted from the journey and the sleepless night, Keira fell asleep as soon as she hit the bed. She woke up just as the ship docked.

Stretching, Keira, Erin, and Lewis disembarked together. Keira pulled out her phone and saw several messages.

Most were from James. “Cousin, where have you been? Uncle is holding a press conference today and wants you back home.”

He also sent a news link.

When Keira opened it, she saw a video of the previous day’s incident on the street, where people had surrounded her. Netizens were criticizing her for her attitude.

Keira frowned. She realized her stern expression had drawn unwanted attention, and now she was being criticized online.

James's next message read, "Cousin, did you go abroad? If so, enjoy your time there a bit longer. Don't come back just yet; people are hunting for you. I'm worried you might be recognized on the street."

Keira replied, "I'm heading home now."

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The entrance of the Olsen Group was swarming with people. Reporters clustered together, and the conference room inside was packed to capacity. Those without an invitation were left to wait outside. Some resourceful journalists had managed to sneak in and had even started live-streaming the event.

"Hello, everyone, I'm here at the Olsen Group headquarters," one of the reporters began. "Yes, the Olsen Group is expected to make a decision today regarding Miss Olsen's alleged support of espionage. As many of you know, insider sources claimed last week that the Olsen family had already kicked her out. Let's see what Mr. Olsen, the head of the family, has to say today!"

This situation had captured a lot of attention, especially since "Keera" had been trending online. The livestream quickly attracted a massive audience. The comment section exploded with activity.

"Today's press conference must be to announce that they've kicked Miss Olsen out of the family, right?"

"I heard she was only recently acknowledged as Mr. Olsen's daughter, but she grew up outside the family. Did she get so dazzled by wealth that she forgot who she really is?"

"If she keeps this up, she won't even remember her own name..."

"The Olsen Group better give us an explanation. Patriotism is non-negotiable. I have zero tolerance for anyone who doesn't love their country!"

"With the way things look, they're definitely here to announce something big..."

"Where is this Miss Olsen anyway? Why isn't she here yet?"

"Maybe she's too scared to show up! If she does, we'll roast her!"

"..."

Similar comments flashed rapidly across the screen.

Meanwhile, at Freeman Sect...

Trevor Freeman, the Sect Leader, was watching the live-stream on his phone. Seeing the flood of negative comments, his expression darkened. He stood up abruptly and barked, "Get everyone in the sect over here, now!"

James, standing nearby, was taken aback. "Why are we gathering everyone?" he asked, confused.

"Just do it!" Trevor snapped.

"Alright, alright," James replied, quickly leaving to gather the members.

Soon, a group of disciples assembled in front of Trevor Freeman. James reported, "Sect Leader, we've got about 347 members in Clance, and there are 320 here. The rest had other obligations. What's going on?"

Trevor's face turned serious as he addressed the group. "I've called you all here for one reason: to defend your senior sister's honor!"

James was the first to jump in, "Where do we go to defend her honor? Just say the word! Is it the Olsen Group?"

His last question was asked with some hesitation. He remembered seeing how protective Uncle Olsen and Trevor Freeman were of "Keera" during a previous incident. It couldn't be anyone else they were defending, right?

But wasn't today's press conference supposed to be about Uncle Olsen officially recognizing "Keera's" place in the family? So, who could've offended her?

The rest of the group exchanged puzzled looks.

Trevor's voice cut through their confusion, "Now, listen up! Attention!"

The disciples immediately stood at attention, determined not to be outdone by their peers. None of them wanted to be the one who got whacked by Trevor's stick. Then he commanded, "Horse stance, now!"

Everyone was confused.

Weren't they supposed to be standing up for their senior sister? Why were they doing horse stance exercises?

As they tried to figure out what was happening, Trevor took out his phone and ordered, "Take out your phones!"

The group, still in horse stance, quickly grabbed their phones. Trevor then shared the live-stream link in their group chat. “Alright, join this livestream and start posting positive comments!”

Everyone was dumbfounded.

Trevor glared at them. “A bunch of clueless bystanders are smearing my disciple’s name, and you think I’ll just let that slide? Start posting! I want a thousand positive comments from each of you, with a minimum of fifteen words per comment! If you don’t hit the target, you’ll stay in horse stance all day!”

The disciples couldn’t believe their ears.

A thousand comments?

How were they supposed to manage that?

Muttering under their breath, the disciples began furiously typing on their phones while holding their horse stances. Soon enough, their comments started to flood the livestream, burying the negative ones.

“Miss Olsen is the most beautiful woman in the world! What nonsense are you all spouting?”

“Miss Olsen is incredibly strong! I’m sure she’s got impeccable character!”

“There’s got to be more to this story! Anyway, I believe Miss Olsen wouldn’t do something like that.”

“Oh my god, Miss Olsen is so kind-hearted and beautiful!”

“I had a big breakfast today, five bagels and a latte.”

Trevor, pacing between the disciples, noticed this last comment and smacked the disciple on the head. “I told you to praise your senior sister, not talk about what you ate! That one doesn’t count!”

“And you!” he pointed at another, “What’s with all the ‘oh my gods’ and ‘ahs’? Are you stuttering or something? This isn’t a web novel where you pad the word count!”

The disciples were speechless.

James watched the scene unfold, feeling a sense of dread for the poor souls in front of him. Just then, one of the disciples suddenly stood up straight, glaring angrily at Trevor, “Sect Leader, why do we have to sit here and post praise for Senior Sister? What she did, even the special forces wouldn’t approve of, and I’m embarrassed by it!”

The others quickly chimed in.

“Yeah, the first rule of Freeman Sect is to love your country!”

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“Just because she’s our senior sister, does that mean she’s allowed to be unpatriotic?”

“I’m not okay with posting positive comments either! Why should we clean up her mess when she’s the one who screwed up and ran off?”

“Look, I admire Keira, but what she did was wrong! I’m not posting anything!”

“Me neither! Let’s stop. This whole thing is humiliating!”

“I trained in martial arts to serve my country, not to defend someone who doesn’t love it!”

“...”

The disciples who had been dutifully following Trevor Freeman’s orders now hesitated, all eyes turning toward him. Trevor saw those who had spoken up were the disciples knew to be particularly stubborn, so he frowned. “Your senior sister has her reasons for what she did. Who are you to judge?”

“I’m judging her as a patriotic man!” one of the disciples shot back, defiantly. “Are we supposed to go easy on her just because she’s your disciple?”

“I won’t do it!”

“And I’m certainly not going to humiliate myself by defending her!”

“Neither will I!”

“Me neither!”

“...”

More and more of the Freeman Sect disciples put down their phones, their expressions turning from confusion to firm resolve.

Trevor felt a surge of anger in his chest. “I didn’t train you all to just follow the crowd like sheep! Don’t you trust your own senior sister?”

One of them spoke up, “It’s not that I don’t trust her, it’s just... she didn’t grow up with us. She didn’t train with us from the start. How are we supposed to know what kind of person she really is?”

“Yeah, Sect Leader, what if you’re wrong about her? What if she’s actually a spy for another country? She defended Mr. Sims, and now I can’t even show my face around the Special Division!”

“...”

As the group continued to voice their grievances, Trevor’s frustration grew. “You ungrateful brats! You dare defy me? I said a thousand comments, and if you don’t hit that number, you’ll be in horse stance until you do!”

But the Freeman Sect disciples were known for their obstinacy. One of them immediately shouted back, “Even if I drop dead from this horse stance, I won’t defend a traitor!”

“Me neither!”

“Same here!”

“Count me in!”

As more and more disciples lowered their phones, they all glared at Trevor with unwavering defiance.

Trevor was practically trembling with fury. He could hardly contain himself as he pointed at them, shouting, “Fine! Just wait! You’ll regret this!”

He was confident that Keira would prove her innocence within the week, just as she had promised.

The others, however, stood their ground, their eyes locked on their leader as they stubbornly held their positions in the horse stance. “Then we’ll wait. We’re not afraid of you!”

Trevor was astonished.

Meanwhile, at the Special Division headquarters...

A group of agents gathered together, their focus on the live stream. Brian Dawson and Luke Dawson were watching along with the rest of the team, all of whom had felt the pressure from the Freeman Sect’s influence.

Luke, remembering how Keira had saved him in the past, couldn’t bring himself to speak ill of her. But the others had no such reservations.

“Heh, when she stood up for Mr. Sims, she probably didn’t think it would come back to bite her like this.”

“Yeah, just because she’s the Sect Leader’s prized disciple, she thought she could push us around. We couldn’t beat her in combat, but public opinion is another story!”

“Look at the comments—people are tearing her apart! Serves her right for backing Mr. Sims!”

Lately, Keira had been relentless in her efforts to protect old Mr. Sims, even assigning her own people to guard him day and night, fearing someone might betray him in her absence.

As someone mentioned this, they saw a delivery person hand Mr. Sims a bag of takeout food, which was promptly taken inside...

The agents couldn’t hold back their anger. “Is he under house arrest or on vacation? He’s even ordering takeout! This is ridiculous! What does that make us, the Special Division?”

“Of course, he’s getting away with it—he’s got Keera Olsen on his side!”

“Who cares how strong she is? We don’t need a senior sister who doesn’t care about our country!”

“Didn’t you hear? The Olsen family is holding a press conference to disown her, and word is the Freeman Sect might kick her out, too. If that’s true, she won’t be able to lord over us anymore.”

At this, they all turned their gaze toward old Mr. Sims’ study.

Meanwhile, Keira, who was at the center of all this, was sitting in the passenger seat of Lewis’s car as they headed toward the press conference.

Reclining slightly, Keira asked, “How long until Professor Brandt is safely home?”

“Half an hour until he lands,” Lewis responded calmly.

“Good,” she replied.

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Keira finished her sentence just as they approached the Olsen family’s press conference, which seemed about to start.

She exchanged a glance with Lewis, and they both decided to stay in the car. They’d wait until Professor Brandt landed safely and the news was released before stepping out.

Keira sent a message to Uncle Olsen, advising him to delay the press conference by thirty minutes.

At the press conference...

Reporters were buzzing with anticipation. Everyone was eager to find out how the Olsen Group would handle the situation.

Tension filled the air as the crowd waited for the family to address the scandal, but what they got instead was...

Ellis slowly ascended the stage, microphone in hand. "I apologize, everyone. The traffic in Clance is terrible today. My uncle will arrive in about thirty minutes. We appreciate your patience, and the press conference will be delayed by half an hour."

Ellis, ever the charmer, had the staff distribute gifts to the reporters.

His polite demeanor and thoughtful gesture made it hard for anyone to stay upset. The reporters were familiar with the Olsen Group and begrudgingly accepted the situation. They settled down, ready to wait—until someone in the crowd suddenly shouted.

"I just saw Uncle Olsen walk in! How could he still be stuck in traffic? Ellis is obviously lying!"

Keira was monitoring the situation from the car and immediately sat up. She had been reclining her seat, planning to catch a quick nap, but after hearing that, she quickly grabbed a mask, put it on, and stepped out of the car, heading toward the press conference.

Uncle Olsen would have been discreet entering the building; no random reporter should have spotted him so easily. If someone claimed to have seen him, it meant something was seriously wrong.

Unless... that person wasn't just an ordinary reporter.

Keira's eyes narrowed. During her time on the Trident Strait border, she had determined from Erin's words and actions that Erin wasn't a traitor. So, who had sent this so-called reporter? Could it be one of the candidates from the South family, who had tried to capture Professor Brandt on the border?

Keira skillfully maneuvered through the crowd, making her way toward the source of the voice.

Just as she reached the spot, Ellis spoke again, "You saw him? I'm afraid not. My uncle isn't here yet."

Keira scanned the area, ready to confront the person who had spoken, hoping to trace them back to the source. But to her surprise, the voice shifted positions, now coming from ahead of her, "How could that be? Uncle Olsen drove a Rolls-Royce today, and I saw it parked in the lot! He's just backstage resting while we're left waiting here! What's going on with your family?"

The accusation sparked a wave of murmurs among the crowd. "Ellis, if someone saw Uncle Olsen, then he's here. Why not just bring him out and stop wasting our time?"

“Yeah, what’s this about making us wait for half an hour? If his time is so precious, then what about ours?”

“Is this a joke? We’re here on time, and now you’re stalling us? This is disrespectful!”

As more voices joined in, the original speaker slipped back into the crowd, vanishing from sight.

Keira frowned, stepping closer to the stage’s edge. Standing just outside the crowd, she listened intently to the conversations around her.

“What’s going on with the Olsen Group?”

“Didn’t Uncle Olsen kick that daughter out of the family? If that’s the case, then just give us the verdict already!”

“Maybe he’s having second thoughts about disowning her.”

“They say she’s his only daughter. Of course, he’d hesitate.”

“Delaying the press conference for thirty minutes—or even six months—won’t change a thing!”

Keira took a deep breath.

Whoever that person was, they were crafty—stirring up tension and then going silent, making it hard to pinpoint their identity. But did they really think they could stay hidden from her?

A sharp look flashed in Keira’s eyes as she pulled out her phone and sent a message to Ellis.

On stage, Ellis felt his phone buzz. A quick glance at the screen made him pause, but then he looked out over the crowd and quickly spotted Keira, wearing a baseball cap and mask.

Suppressing a smile, he cleared his throat and addressed the reporters, “Yes, my uncle has a valid reason for the delay, and we ask for your patience. In fact, Olsen Group is willing to compensate you for your time. But let me tell you, my uncle’s time… you couldn’t afford it.”

The room erupted in chaos!

Almost every reporter began shouting.

“What reason could he possibly have?”

“Mr. Ellis, what do you mean by this? Are you insulting us?”

“This is outrageous! So, Uncle Olsen’s time is valuable, but ours isn’t? Who talks like that?”

“Exactly! And buying our time? That’s just humiliating!”

“This is ridiculous! Forget the gift—I want the press conference to start on time!”

“I don’t care if your family is making billion-dollar deals! Why should that make us wait?”

The more vocal the crowd became, the easier it would be for Keira to identify the one who wasn’t speaking—the one she was after.

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The room was buzzing with activity, and though it was impossible to pinpoint who had spoken, Keira Olsen’s sharp eyes quickly spotted someone in the crowd who wasn’t saying a word.

Her gaze darkened as she signaled to Lewis, who had followed her in.

Lewis immediately moved to circle behind the suspect while Keira advanced from the front. Within moments, they had the instigator—the reporter who had first stirred up trouble—cornered and apprehended.

The man’s eyes filled with panic as he was caught, but he quickly shouted, “Miss Olsen is here!”

That single shout turned every reporter’s attention toward Keira, their eyes locking onto her like heat-seeking missiles.

The crowd surged forward, shouting questions.

“Miss Olsen, why are you defending a traitor?”

“Miss Olsen, you were raised abroad, right? Did someone get to you? Otherwise, why are you protecting him?”

“What’s your stance on this? Olsen Group’s shares have taken a nosedive because of you. Any comments?”

The more restrained journalists were the ones asking these questions, but the situation quickly deteriorated as a few enraged individuals began hurling insults:

“Traitor! You should just drop dead!”

“It’s disgrace to Crera with people like you running businesses here!”

“Defending a traitor—is this a family tradition of yours? And why isn’t Uncle Olsen coming out? Is he trying to protect you?”

Each accusation stoked the fire of the crowd’s anger.

Keira knew they were all being misled, but she couldn't explain much at the moment. All she could do was keep a tight rein on her temper. "I'm sorry, but I'm not Miss Olsen. I have something urgent to—"

Her attempt to deflect was futile.

Those striking, almond-shaped eyes of hers were too distinct, too memorable.

Even before the captured reporter could respond, another journalist pointed at her and shouted, "You are Miss Olsen! Stop pretending—I'd recognize those eyes anywhere!"

"Such a pretty girl, and yet so heartless?"

Insults rained down, but Keira's focus was on the man who tried to slip away. She tightened her grip on him and handed him over to Lewis, murmuring, "Take him outside and interrogate him."

Lewis nodded without hesitation.

He knew where the priorities lay.

Keira might be facing an angry mob, but she wasn't in any real danger. The crucial thing was to extract information from this guy.

With the suspect now in Lewis's custody, Keira headed toward the stage. "Alright, since you're all eager for answers, let me tell you..."

The reporters, predictably, followed her lead, crowding around the stage.

With the commotion shifting in her direction, Lewis seized the opportunity to drag the suspect outside.

As Keira took her place on stage, she noticed Lewis successfully making his exit and finally allowed herself to exhale in relief.

But that brief moment of relaxation was quickly misinterpreted by the reporters.

"Miss Olsen, what's with the smirk? Are you planning to double down on your lies?"

"Miss Olsen, the Olsen Group has always operated under a banner of patriotism. Don't you think you owe us an explanation?"

"Miss Olsen, you need to apologize!"

Keira narrowed her eyes at their demands.

She was just about to respond when a powerful voice cut through the clamor, “This press conference was called by me. So why are you harassing my daughter?”

Keira froze and turned to see Uncle Olsen striding forward, his steps full of purpose. He immediately positioned himself in front of Keira, shielding her from the crowd.

He swept a stern gaze over the gathered reporters.

His presence was so commanding that, for a moment, the room fell silent, the tension thick in the air.

But someone quickly found their voice.

“Uncle Olsen, if you’ve been here all along, why did you delay the conference?”

“Was it just to mess with us? What’s the real reason?”

“And what’s this about not harassing your daughter? Didn’t you disown her? So, why is she still your daughter?”

“You claimed to kick her out, but was that just a PR move to stabilize your stock prices? Now you’re showing your true colors, aren’t you?”

“Uncle Olsen, where have you been? Why did you make us wait for half an hour? We demand answers!”

Keira quickly stepped forward. “Anything you need to know will be addressed in half an hour... No, make that twenty-five minutes. For now, there are things we can’t reveal.”

The reporters pounced immediately: “Why can’t you reveal it?”

“What shady business are you hiding that you can’t tell us?”

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Amidst the chaotic press conference, a few reporters still maintained a sense of fairness, trying to calm the situation.

“If it’s twenty-five minutes, then let’s just wait.”

“They must have something important to share if they’re asking for more time. I don’t think Mr. Olsen is being unreasonable...”

But as soon as these voices of reason were heard, others scoffed.

“If you want to wait, that’s your choice, but don’t waste our time! No wonder the Olsen Group sees you as insignificant.”

“Mr. Olsen, you owe us an explanation today.”

The collective frustration of the reporters seemed enough to blow the roof off.

Keira frowned, glancing at Uncle Olsen for support.

While Uncle Olsen could brush off most questions, one reporter boldly pushed forward, locking eyes with him. “Mr. Olsen, do you regret bringing your daughter back into the family? If she wasn’t here, none of this would have happened!”

That question caused Uncle Olsen’s expression to harden instantly. His gaze swept across the room before he decisively grabbed the microphone from the reporter.

With a voice that was steady and resolute, he declared, “The best thing that’s ever happened to me was finding my daughter!”

He looked at Keira, his eyes filled with unwavering conviction, radiating a powerful determination. “No matter what my daughter has done, I will stand by her. And let me make one thing clear—my daughter is extraordinary!”

His words sent the room into an uproar.

The reporters immediately started shouting.

“Mr. Olsen, what are you saying?”

“Are you condoning your daughter’s betrayal?”

“Mr. Olsen, this is outrageous! Were you just toying with us? Now that your stock prices have stabilized, you think you can just do as you please? Well, let me tell you, the public has a long memory!”

“Your daughter is extraordinary? Betrayal is extraordinary? What kind of values are these?”

“If she’s done something wrong, she should own up to it. Is an apology so hard to give?”

“Exactly...”

As the reporters hurled accusations, Ellis rushed over, standing behind Uncle Olsen and whispered urgently, “Uncle, someone’s live-streaming this. Your words just went out, and now Olsen Group’s stock price is plummeting!”

Uncle Olsen let out a cold laugh. “Let it drop! I won’t be bullied into submission by anyone—not even by the moral judgments of the entire world!”

With that, he turned to Keira, his voice firm, “You will always be my proudest daughter.”

Keira felt her eyes sting, warmth spreading through her chest.

She stared at Uncle Olsen, taken aback, and after a moment, she wiped her slightly teary eyes. “Dad, I understand.”

She paused, then smiled softly. “Having you as my father is the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

Uncle Olsen had spent his entire life navigating the ruthless world of business and was as unyielding as steel. Now, he found his eyes misting up at her words.

He cleared his throat, “I’m sorry I missed out on your youth.”

Keira shook her head. “It’s okay.”

Their eyes met, a deep sense of understanding passing between them.

But the reporters below weren’t about to let the tender moment pass without a fight. They continued their relentless attacks.

“What’s going on here? Did you invite us just to have a father-daughter reunion?”

“Mr. Olsen, didn’t you say you’d give us answers? Is this your idea of an explanation?”

“We’ll never trust the Olsen Group again! This is a complete scam! You’ll turn into a company of traitors!”

“We’re boycotting all Olsen Group products!”

The crowd was practically foaming at the mouth, and if it weren’t for the strict security checks at the entrance, they might have been throwing rotten vegetables by now.

Keira watched the enraged reporters, feeling a mix of emotions.

Beside her, Uncle Olsen straightened his posture, hands clasped behind his back, and asked, “Are you scared?”

“Not at all!”

Keira answered without hesitation.

“Good. Keira, the challenges ahead will be much tougher than this.”

Uncle Olsen reassured her.

“I’m aware.”

She knew that in order to save her mother, she’d have to endure the brutal battle for the South family’s inheritance, which would expose her to much more than this.

Uncle Olsen nodded. “But remember, I will always support you, no matter what decisions you make.”

“Understood.”

Just then, Ellis suddenly picked up his phone, exclaiming, “Uncle, look! Professor Barry Brandt is back in the country!”

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As soon as Ellis made the announcement, the entire room of reporters fell silent, staring at him in disbelief.

One of them couldn’t help but ask, “Mr. Ellis, what did you just say?”

Without wasting a second, Ellis gestured to someone, who quickly stepped onto the stage, picked up a remote, and turned on the large screen behind them.

Ellis connected his phone to the screen, projecting the breaking news he had just come across.

A live broadcast appeared, showing a reporter on the scene. The reporter’s voice was charged with emotion as they exclaimed, “Professor Barry Brandt has returned to Crera! He once publicly declared he would never return and insisted that his students must never return either. But now, not only has Professor Brandt come back, he’s brought with him his ten most talented students... I’m going to try to get a word with him!”

As soon as Barry Brandt stepped off the plane, several officials from the research institutes rushed forward to greet him, shaking his hand and welcoming him back.

The reporter managed to squeeze through the crowd, thrusting a microphone toward Professor Brandt. “Professor Brandt, have you had a change of heart? Why did you decide to come back?”

Taking the microphone, Barry Brandt looked directly into the camera, speaking with sincerity and a slight tremble in his voice. “Years ago, when I went abroad to study, I realized that students from Crera were often discriminated against. Some professors were reluctant to share their knowledge with us, perhaps because they knew that our country was strong and our people

were strong. They feared that if we acquired the same knowledge, we would return home and use it to our country's advantage. So, they suppressed us."

His voice thickened with emotion as he continued, "The environment for students from Crera during my time was harsh. We wanted to serve our country, but the path wasn't clear. Then, one day, Mr. Sims approached me..."

He paused, a wry smile crossing his face. "Mr. Sims asked me, 'Are you willing to dedicate twenty years to your country?'"

"I didn't hesitate. I told him I was ready to dedicate my entire life. He then shared his plan with me... He wanted me to publicly express dissatisfaction with Crera and declare that I would never return. Only then did the professors abroad start to take me seriously and share their knowledge with me."

Barry Brandt shook his head with a rueful smile. "We set up an elaborate ruse, fooling everyone for years. Mr. Sims sacrificed a lot to help me maintain my cover. Now, there are rumors that he's a spy because he supported me financially..."

"The truth is, that money came from me. I wanted to transfer my earnings back to Crera, so I sent the funds to him under the pretense of buying advanced technology, fooling everyone."

His eyes glistened with tears. "I've returned not only to clear my name but also to clear Mr. Sims's name."

He wiped at his reddening eyes and managed a smile. "Crera is my home, and I've finally... come home."

His words "come home" brought tears to the eyes of his students standing behind him.

The reporter's voice was choked with emotion. "Professor Brandt, you've endured so much all these years."

"It was worth it..."

Barry Brandt replied with a bittersweet smile.

The reporter asked, "What's the first thing you want to do now?"

Professor Brandt's response was immediate, "I want to visit my old friend, Mr. Sims..."

"We'll get a car ready right away," the reporter offered.

After the brief interview, Professor Brandt got into a car, accompanied by government officials, heading from the coast to Clance.

The reporter turned back to the camera, “Professor Barry Brandt has endured unimaginable hardships for twenty years. His family and friends have suffered alongside him, bearing the brunt of public scorn. But now, he’s finally come home, and he returns with honor. This is your live update.”

Back at the press conference, every reporter turned their gaze toward Keira as if they wanted to speak but couldn’t find the words.

Uncle Olsen was just as stunned. He stared at Keira for a long moment before bursting into hearty laughter. “I knew it! My daughter would never let me down! She always has her reasons for everything she does!”

Keira stepped forward, addressing the crowd, “This is why I asked for half an hour before revealing the truth. Half an hour ago, Professor Brandt was still at sea. I had to ensure his safe return before making any public statements.”

The room fell silent, and the reporters slowly began to murmur.

“Miss Olsen, we owe you an apology. We were wrong to judge you.”

“Yes, we publicly apologize!”

One reporter even asked, “Miss Olsen, couldn’t you have given us a hint earlier?”

Before Keira could respond, another reporter interjected, “Are you crazy? If she’d given any hint, do you think Professor Brandt could have returned so smoothly?”

“Exactly! The government of Country A is notorious for its aggressive tactics. They’d have found any excuse to detain the professor. Keeping quiet was the best way to protect him!”

“Yeah, if you don’t know anything, don’t talk nonsense...”

“Miss Olsen, when did you find out about this?”

“Miss Olsen, did you take action to protect Mr. Sims after learning about this? You’re truly a remarkable woman!”

“We really misunderstood you!”

The press conference turned into a flurry of questions and apologies.

Meanwhile, at the Freeman Sect.

Trevor was listening to the grumbling of his disciples, feeling a mix of frustration and helplessness. He wanted to scold them, but he wasn’t even sure what was going on.

He hadn't yet received any firsthand information.

The disciples continued to complain about their senior sister.

"Sect Leader, you can't go easy on her! The Freeman Sect's reputation is at stake!"

"Right! We have to punish Senior Sister, or we'll lose face!"

Even James cleared his throat, speaking up, "My cousin might have been a bit impulsive. She just wanted to protect Mr. Sims. After all, she's good friends with Holly Sims, and loyalty is important in our line of work, isn't it?"

The other disciples were stunned into silence, unsure how to respond.

Just then, Erin rushed in, holding her phone. "Look at this!"

James sighed, "No need to look, I'm sure the internet is already tearing her apart..."

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James was stunned for a moment, then Kate quickly chimed in, "No, no! It's not an insult! Things have completely flipped!"

James blinked in confusion. "Flipped? How is that even possible? My sister's mistake was so bad that if I weren't her brother, I'd want to smack her myself! There's no way public opinion could turn around that fast!"

Kate rolled her eyes at him. "Could you even take on Keera? Are you sure you wouldn't just end up getting completely wiped by her?"

James was speechless.

Realizing she might've pushed it a little too far, Kate coughed, then handed her phone to him. "Here, check for yourself! Stop guessing randomly!"

James glanced at her phone and immediately saw the headline about Professor Barry Brandt returning to the country. He practically jumped out of his seat.

"So, that's the twist!"

His eyes widened in disbelief as he stared at the news on the screen, then turned to the other Freeman Sect members nearby. "Holy crap! If any of you even think about badmouthing Keera's patriotism again, I swear we're going to have a problem!"

...

After the Olsen family's press conference, Uncle Olsen chatted briefly with Keira before she and Lewis made their way outside. She turned to him and asked, "That reporter you caught earlier, has he been interrogated?"

Lewis's face darkened. "Yes."

"Who's behind it?"

"The reporter was just a pawn, paid to do a job. My people traced the transaction back to a source from Country A."

Keira frowned. "Could it be the same group that tried to capture Professor Barry Brandt?"

Just as she finished her question, a voice suddenly came from behind her. "Country A, huh? I know who it is."

Keira stiffened and turned to see Erin casually munching on pistachios, showing no sign of guilt for eavesdropping.

Keira sighed. "Who is it?"

"The Lioness," Erin said matter-of-factly. "I've crossed paths with her countless times over the years, though we've never known each other's true identities. She's exactly like a lion hunting its prey—patient and calculating, waiting in the tall grass until the perfect moment."

Keira furrowed her brows. "You don't know her identity either?"

Erin was genuinely surprised. "Of course not! Why would I? I only found out about Vera and your sister's true identities because they came to me willingly. Everyone's identity is kept secret. Not like you, barging in without a clue, pulling off stunts that have now gotten you on the Lioness's radar! I bet she's already suspicious about who you really are."

Keira didn't know what to say.

So, all this time, her sister had endured all that humiliation from her vile husband and mother-in-law just to keep her true identity hidden?

And now that Keira had taken her place, she had unknowingly exposed her, making everything worse.

Keira lowered her eyes in regret.

Erin, clearly enjoying herself, added, "You see? You don't know the first thing about this world. You'd be better off sticking by my side as my little sidekick. I'm good to you, right? We could totally team up for the final victory!"

Keira didn't take the bait; her mind was clearly elsewhere.

She'd figured Erin out by now—despite her words, she never really expected Keira to give in.

Turning back to Lewis, Keira said, "If the reporter doesn't know anything more, let him go."

Lewis nodded. "Where to now?"

"We're heading to the Special Division to take old Mr. Sims home."

—

At the Special Division.

Since the day Keira had stood up for old Mr. Sims, Holly had been quietly returning there every day.

She didn't do much. Just stayed in the background, helping wherever she could—cleaning, sweeping, trying to make herself useful.

The people there weren't kind to her, but this was the only way she could feel some semblance of atonement for her and her grandfather's sins.

She cleaned tables, trying to punish her grandfather and herself through hard labor.

At first, everyone sneered and cursed at her, but as the days passed, seeing her come back despite being pushed, hit, or insulted without ever fighting back, their attitudes slowly started to soften.

Holly had made peace with it. If spending the rest of her life as a cleaning lady here could somehow make up for what her grandfather had done, then so be it.

She grabbed a mop and headed toward the operations room when she overheard two people talking.

"Why hasn't anyone been bothering Holly lately? Everyone was still furious about it not too long ago."

The other person replied, "You didn't hear? Luke gave a warning."

"What?"

"I guess he figured enough was enough. And honestly, he's right. Beating up a girl doesn't fix anything, and Holly's clearly been suffering. I feel kinda bad for her..."

"Yeah, who would have thought Mr. Sims could have done something like that?"

“Still, if he was a traitor, what about Holly? Luke’s already told us not to let her near any confidential documents.”

Holly’s heart sank as she listened.

She never imagined that one day, her former friends would be suspicious of her like this. Her so-called redemption was nothing more than a delusion.

Her presence here was just an added burden to the Special Division.

Clenching her fists, she placed the mop in the storage room, ready to leave. But as she turned, she found herself face-to-face with Luke.

Holly froze. “Thank you... for standing up for me.”

Luke shrugged. “I just didn’t want to see anyone picking on you. No big deal.”

Tears welled up in Holly’s eyes as she bit her lip. Her vision blurred as she tried to hold back her emotions.

Luke, clearly panicking, reached out awkwardly. “Hey, don’t cry, okay? I...”

He hesitated, realizing that wiping away a girl’s tears with his hands might not be the best move, and awkwardly stopped mid-reach.

Holly couldn’t help but laugh through her tears, finding the whole situation absurd. Here was Luke, still bandaged from his own injuries, stuck in a ridiculous pose, trying to comfort her.

Seeing her laugh, Luke relaxed and let out a sigh. “Phew, that’s better. I’m terrible at dealing with crying.”

Holly paused, surprised.

Brian found his tone a little too intimate, so he fell silent and scratched his head.

None of them spoke.

There was something unspoken between them now, an unspoken warmth filling the air.

His direct gaze made her cheeks flush.

She even lowered her head.

Suddenly, a cough interrupted them.

Both turned in unison to find Brian standing a short distance away, watching them.

They jumped back as if caught red-handed.

Brian walked over, eyes narrowing between them before addressing Holly. “You don’t need to come back here tomorrow. There’s no point in you staying.”

Holly’s chest tightened. She bowed her head, guilt heavy in her heart. “I’m sorry for causing so much trouble. I didn’t mean to be a burden.”

Brian’s tone softened slightly. “I’ve watched you grow up, Holly. I know you’re a good kid. But the rules are the rules. We can’t just have the family of a suspected traitor roaming around the Special Division.”

Holly clenched her fists tighter, her throat constricting.

Of course.

Her grandfather’s betrayal was no small thing. She would never be trusted again.

With a bitter smile, she nodded. “I understand.”

She turned to leave.

Luke couldn’t stay silent any longer. “Dad, Holly’s not like that! You don’t have to be so harsh!”

Brian stared coldly at his son. “How do you know? Can you guarantee it?”

“Yes, I can.”

Luke said.

Holly froze.

Brian scoffed. “You can’t guarantee anything, Luke. No one can. You can’t protect her from ending up just like her grandfather. I’ll say it straight—don’t even think about getting involved with her.”

Luke’s face reddened in frustration. “Dad, stop making things up!”

“I’m not making anything up. You know exactly what I’m talking about,” Brian said sharply, turning to Holly with a sneer. “Your grandfather held onto his position for years. I always thought it was because I wasn’t good enough to take his place. But no, it was all about money. Can you imagine how pathetic that is?”

He looked her squarely in the eyes. “Because of that, Holly, I’ll never approve of you and my son.”

Luke turned red with anger. “Dad, don’t say that! Holly’s innocent!”

“Innocent? Tell that to the families of those who died because of traitors. Do you think they were innocent? You’ve lost your mind, Luke.”

Brian’s words hit hard, and Luke couldn’t find a comeback.

Holly said, “Mr. Dawson, I understand. I’ll leave and make sure Luke never has to deal with me again.”

She turned to go, leaving Luke staring after her, unsure of what to say.

Just then, someone rushed over, shouting, “Mr. Dawson! You have to check your phone! The news just broke—Mr. Sims is innocent!”

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Brian was stunned, and he stared at the man in disbelief. “What did you just say?”

Even Holly was at a loss for words.

Luke frowned.

The man immediately rushed forward, handing them his phone.

On the screen was a video of Professor Barry Brandt being interviewed, specifically the part where he mentioned old Mr. Sims.

“Mr. Sims came to me and asked, ‘Are you willing to dedicate twenty years of your life for your country?’ We set up a massive operation, a plan so intricate it fooled everyone! Now people are calling him a spy because he funded me, and I gave him money... Yes, I did send him money, but it was because I wanted to transfer my earnings from overseas back home. Under the guise of purchasing domestic advanced technology, I wired the money to him and tricked everyone. I’m back now—not only to clear my name but to clear Mr. Sims’ as well!”

The weight of the interview hit everyone like a tidal wave.

In the Special Division, every door opened, and people flooded into the hallway, gathering around Brian.

He stood there, frozen, staring in shock toward the room where old Mr. Sims was being held.

The rest of the Special Division members followed his gaze...

Holly’s eyes turned red. She was so overwhelmed she could barely hold herself back from screaming.

Her grandfather was innocent!

Tears streamed down Holly's face as she bolted toward old Mr. Sims' room. The Special Division had posted guards outside his room to prevent any attempt at escape, but now, no one moved to stop Holly. The guards, too, were overcome with emotion, their eyes red as they looked in the direction of old Mr. Sims' room.

Brian's lips trembled as he slowly moved forward, intending to head to Mr. Sims' room himself, but suddenly someone ran up to him from outside. "Mr. Dawson, an important figure is here with Professor Brandt!"

Brian blinked in surprise, then quickly stepped outside.

There, standing beside Professor Barry Brandt, was a high-ranking official usually only seen on television. The two had just gotten out of a car.

Without waiting for his security team, Professor Brandt rushed into the Special Division building, grabbing Brian by the arm as soon as he saw him. "Where's Mr. Sims?"

Brian was still in shock, barely able to process what was happening.

He quickly turned and pointed toward Mr. Sims' room, but before he could say anything, Professor Brandt was already moving quickly in that direction.

Everyone, including the members of the Special Division, followed as they headed in that direction.

Inside, Holly was crying.

Professor Brandt paused for a moment, straightened his jacket, then pushed open the door.

Old Mr. Sims had been held there for some time now, and the Special Division had made sure to block out all the windows to make his stay as uncomfortable as possible.

The room was dark. When the door swung open, the sudden flood of light was overwhelming, and old Mr. Sims raised a trembling hand to shield his eyes.

The light from the doorway was blinding, like a path leading out of the darkness.

Old Mr. Sims hesitated, then gently patted Holly, who was still sobbing into his lap. "Holly, help me up. We have guests."

Holly quickly wiped away her tears and helped him to his feet.

Slowly, with shaky steps, he made his way to the doorway, where he finally laid eyes on Professor Brandt.

At fifty, the professor was still in the prime of his life, while eighty-year-old Mr. Sims represented a bygone era.

Yet in that moment, these two, separated by decades, gazed at each other as if reuniting after a long-lost friendship. There was nothing but deep, unspoken emotion in their eyes.

For a few seconds, no one spoke.

Somehow, at that moment, everyone's eyes filled with tears.

One had endured public shame abroad for more than twenty years to protect his work.

The other had borne the weight of countless misunderstandings at home, never once offering an explanation, all to support the other one.

When Keira and Lewis arrived, they were greeted by the sight of this powerful, moving scene.

Keira looked from Barry Brandt to old Mr. Sims, and a sudden thought flashed through her mind: "The peace we enjoy today is thanks to the sacrifices of those who carry the burden for us."

Suddenly, someone choked up, and that was all it took. The floodgates opened, and everyone broke down, one after another.

"Mr. Sims, I'm so sorry!"

With that, someone stepped forward and bowed deeply. "When I delivered your packages, I spat in one of them. I'm so sorry!"

"Mr. Sims, I wronged you!"