

Fractured Affection 11

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For the first time ever, the two brothers fell into silence. The recorder continued to play, Charlotte's hateful, disdainful voice echoing through the living room.

Adam and Noah couldn't accept the reality: Charlotte had been calling them idiots behind their backs. They had hurt Sylvia repeatedly to balance the affection points, to keep Charlotte alive.

But the truth was, Charlotte wasn't worth it.

Adam couldn't bear to think about it. He grabbed his car keys and rushed out of the villa, Noah quickly following.

They drove to the agency and reached Charlotte's office, hearing her boasting to her agent.

"What's to be afraid of? Sylvia is dead. Let them wallow in grief. Noah's already groveling for forgiveness. They'll crawl back to me soon enough."

"That's good. But the fans they captured—should we intervene? You know they..."

"Intervene? Why should I? Those morons botched a simple kidnapping! I told them to take Sylvia to the docks, not attack her under the two brothers' noses. Thank God they didn't snitch. With brains that rotten, they'll end up sewing prison uniforms for life. I'm not gonna save them. It's not necessary."

Hearing the truth, Adam and Noah's hearts sank. Noah kicked open the door, his voice filled with rage. "Bitch! You played us?!"

Seeing them, a flicker of panic crossed Charlotte's eyes. She rushed over to explain. "No, it's not like that. We were rehearsing a new script..."

She gestured to her agent, who immediately understood and explained, "Yes, Charlotte has a new script, and The plot involves corporate sabotage. You might have misunderstood her."

Adam didn't buy it. He kicked the agent, who cried out as she crashed into a cabinet. "Save the act. Do you think we're that stupid?" Noah spat, thrusting the voice recorder forward. Sylvia's final gift played: "Those two idiots would feed Sylvia to wolves if I asked..." Charlotte's mask cracked. Her immediate priority was to appease Adam and Noah, so she feigned tears. "That's...that's edited! I'd never said something like that. Please believe me."

“Just because we believed you, we hurt Sylvia repeatedly. Turns out you’re the real monster. We’re not idiots. We won’t make the same mistake again.” Noah pressed.

“Charlotte, did you kill her?” Adam asked calmly, his dark eyes fixed on her.

Having nothing left to lose, Charlotte pointed at them, cursing. “So what if I did it? You chose to bleed her dry! You froze her affection points at 99%! You let your precious sister get skinned alive!” Her voice rose to a shriek. “She gave up because you broke her, not me!”

Charlotte dared to be so blatant because she had the system. Having completed her quest, the system would grant her one wish.

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Her words were like daggers, reminding Adam and Noah of what they had done. Noah couldn’t retort, venting his rage on Charlotte. Her screams echoed through the entire company.

Noah targeted her face, two punches knocking out two of her teeth, leaving her face bruised and

swollen.

Charlotte’s agent didn’t dare intervene. She cowered in a corner, afraid of becoming a target.

Charlotte, whose mouth was bleeding, smiled. “Even if you beat me to death, it won’t change the fact that you hurt Sylvia. She’s dead; I’m the ultimate winner.”

In her mind, she called out to the system. “System, I want my reward for completing the quest. I want to be the top star in this world, someone Adam and Noah can never hurt.”

She waited happily for the confirmation, but the next second, a cold, mechanical voice responded. “Sorry, Host. I cannot fulfill this request.”

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Charlotte jumped up frantically, pulling at her hair, demanding, “Why? I completed the quest. Why won’t you give me my reward?”

She couldn't imagine facing Adam and Noah's wrath without the system's help. She would be torn to shreds.

The system's voice was cold and detached. "Host, I have reminded you that that substantial rewards require completing the mission through personal effort. Since Sylvia Lawrence voluntarily transferred her 99% Affection Points to you, this does not qualify as your mission success."

Charlotte was stunned. After a moment, her eyes lit up. She said excitedly, "Then send me back to the real world! I don't want to stay here! Yes, I want to go back!"

The system doused her hope. "Apologies. Once the Host chooses to remain in this world, return is impossible. If you die here, your physical body in the real world will perish in an accident. Good luck."

With that, the system vanished. No matter how desperately Charlotte screamed, there was no response. She stared in terror at Adam and Noah blocking the office door.

Regret flooded her. She dropped to her knees, trembling. "I'm sorry, Adam, Noah! I shouldn't have hurt Sylvia. I was just scared of losing you!"

Seeing Charlotte's tears and snot, Adam felt nauseated. How could I have betrayed Sylvia for this creature?

He first met Charlotte at his entertainment company, where she was a trainee. Once, he and Noah overheard her speaking to the System: "I don't want them to hurt Sylvia for my sake. Even if my affection points never reach 100%, I'll accept erasure."

Hearing this, he and Noah looked at each other and said simultaneously, "Let's help her."

Thus, they sacrificed Sylvia. Now, regret gnawed his bones.

He decided not to show mercy. He looked down at Charlotte as if she were roadkill. "Investigate Sylvia's death. If Charlotte orchestrated it, destroy her publicly."

Charlotte's body slumped; her face turned ashen.

Adam dispatched professionals to investigate. The results came quickly.

Charlotte had staged her own kidnapping to crush Sylvia's spirit. She even manipulated her fans by falsely claiming Sylvia slandered her, inciting their violence.

crazy

Reading the report, Adam and Noah felt suffocated. They couldn't believe that they had hurt their beloved sister for this viper.

Seeing their grief, the bodyguard felt pity. "Sir, the surveillance footage from Miss Lawrence's final moments... perhaps spare yourself..."

"Play it. I can handle it," Adam said, taking a deep breath.

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The bodyguard hesitated before playing the footage.

The video showed Sylvia—bound, her white coat blooming crimson with stab wounds. Her face contorted in agony, tears mixing with blood.

From the familiar exterior walls and style, Adam and Noah recognized it was outside their villa.

Sylvia lifted her head, silently begging for rescue.

Upstairs, Noah laughed over whiskey, his back to the window. On screen, Sylvia's eyes dimmed.

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The surveillance footage ended abruptly.

Noah was the first to break down. He grabbed Adam's arm, sobbing uncontrollably. "You saw it, didn't you? Sylvia was pleading for help, and I ignored her! I killed her! I'm a sinner!"

Even the usually composed Adam wept. A heavy weight pressed on his chest. He remembered that day; he had even told Noah to deal with Charlotte's fans so they wouldn't affect her career.

How ironic!

He took a deep breath, fighting back his grief. "We're both sinners. I'm also at fault. If it weren't for me, Sylvia wouldn't have suffered so much."

"It's all that bitch's fault! I'll kill her!" Noah's eyes blazed with hatred; he wanted to tear Charlotte

apart.

As he stormed off, Adam stopped him. "Wait. We can still use her."

That night, Adam brought dinner to the basement. It was where the Fowlers handled their unsavory business; bloodstains still marred the walls. Charlotte, in rags, lay on the floor like a dog, a far

cry from her former glamour.

Seeing him, she rushed forward, begging humbly. "Adam, I know I was wrong. Please forgive me. You loved me so much before. Don't hurt me, okay?"

Adam glanced down; two bloody handprints stained the white fabric of her clothing. He suppressed his disgust, gently pushing back her hair from her face. He spoke softly, "I'm sorry, Charlotte. You know Sylvia and I grew up together. Noah and I treated her like a younger sister. Her death has broken us. Do you have a way to bring her back? If she can return, we'll forgive you, and we can live happily as we did before."

Since the system existed, bringing Sylvia back might be possible. They wouldn't let go of any chance.

His gentle tone sent shivers down Charlotte's spine. She knew Adam didn't mean it, but she dared not disobey him; she nodded fearfully.

"I... I'll

try, but I can't guarantee success, because... I can't contact the

Adam calmly replied, "Okay."

system either."

Charlotte tried to contact the system in her mind. She had always complained about the system's nagging, but now she desperately hoped for a response.

She tried many times, even causing Adam's face to darken, but she couldn't connect. Just as she was about to give up, the system appeared.

"Host, what can I do for you?"

Hearing the familiar voice, Charlotte almost cried. Her voice choked with emotion. "System, please save me! I'll never be arrogant again. Send me back to the real world. If not, can you if Sylvia Lawrence can be resurrected?"

tell me

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The system paused before answering. "The Host's choices are irreversible. As for Sylvia Lawrence, my colleague has given her a new body. I don't know who she will be. Host, don't contact me again. I need to greet the next Host."

Charlotte heard the sound of disconnection in her mind, and the familiar feeling disappeared. She felt like being abandoned.

Seeing her return to her senses, Adam grabbed her filthy sleeve. "What did he say? Can you bring her back?"

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Charlotte cowered, shrinking her head. "The system said that Sylvia's system gave her a new body. He didn't know who she became."

Finding one person among 7 billion was like searching for a needle in a haystack, especially with a different face. Even if Adam spent his entire fortune, it would be incredibly difficult.

Adam felt a headache coming on.

Seeing his silence, Charlotte frantically grabbed his sleeve, pleading. "Adam, that's all I know now. You... you'll let me go, right?"

Adam coldly threw her hand off, a cruel smile playing on his lips. "You don't even know where Sylvia is, and you still want me to let you go? Naive. Sylvia suffered so much; I'll make you pay for it all."

Before he could finish, Noah burst in with bodyguards and had them bind Charlotte.

Behind the Fowler mansion lay a frozen swimming pool. Noah ordered it chiseled open, then kicked Charlotte into the icy water. She remained submerged for three days and nights before being retrieved.

Charlotte developed a raging fever. Doctors forcibly stabilized her, then delivered another blow: her uterus had suffered frostbite damage, rendering her permanently infertile. She screamed like a deranged animal.

Her

me?”

eyes narrowed as she glared at Noah, defiant. “Do you know why you and Adam doted on

The smile on Noah’s face faltered; he seemed to realize something and a foreboding chill into his veins.

crept

Charlotte decided to tell them everything. She stared at him, speaking slowly and deliberately, “I traded System credits for an affection booster. Every encounter made you obsess over me—

convenient for my mission. You know what? You never loved me. Just the illusion. And you hurt the person you cared about most for me.”

yet,

She leaned closer, savoring his paling face. “Oh, right. Three meetings without your pity would’ve nullified affection booster, but you chose weakness. You killed Sylvia, not me.”

“Now she has a new face. You’ll never see her again in this lifetime. You’ll live in regret forever.

Hahaha!”

Charlotte laughed like a maniac, rocking back and forth in her bed. Noah slapped her twice in

anger.

Two days later, the Fowler family held a somber funeral. All the guests knew that Sylvia, the adopted daughter, was dead. Even Adam and Noah’s parents, who lived abroad, rushed back.

Seeing Sylvia’s mutilated face, they couldn’t help but weep. Adam’s father comforted his wife with a heavy heart.

Menu

The finest mortician's makeup couldn't conceal the bone-deep gashes. The deep wounds were still visible.

Adam

and Noah, however, weren't focused on the funeral. Their eyes scanned every guest.

They had bought trending topics to advertise this funeral, even spending a large sum in foreign countries. They believed Sylvia might return for her own funeral. If she appeared, no matter what she looked like, they would recognize her.

Hundreds of people came, but they found no one resembling Sylvia. Suddenly, Adam caught sight of a familiar white figure. He rushed towards the woman, grabbing her shoulder excitedly.

"Sylvia, is it you?"

The woman looked at him blankly. "Sorry, do I know you?"

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Seeing Adam's stunned expression, Noah quickly apologized to the woman in white. "Sorry, my brother mistook you for someone."

Adam awkwardly

retracted his hand, his eyes filled with disappointment. "Noah, do Sylvia hates us so deeply that she refuses to see us, even reborn?"

you think

This was a question Noah had once asked, but now it was Adam's turn.

Noah lit a cigarette, a wry smile on his face. "We gutted her soul. If she never forgives us, we deserve it. All we can do is... wait. Wait to see if we're worthy of redemption in this lifetime." Adam nodded silently.

Meanwhile, I, in my new body, lay in a cozy bed. The system was showing me a broadcast of funeral.

my

To avenge me, Adam and Noah had exposed Charlotte's crimes, cleared my name, and crushed her career. With the Fowler family's power, erasing someone was effortless.

But so what? No amount of penitence could resurrect the girl they'd let bleed out under their balcony.

I remained emotionless, like a detached observer watching the livestream.

"Host, it seems like they truly regret it. Shouldn't you consider going back? The Fowler mansion has heated marble floors! Why endure this peeling wallpaper while you could reclaim luxury...?" the system asked, confused.

I smiled calmly. Few people knew that luxury meant gilded cages.

I remembered my high school classmate, a girl from the countryside who'd shared her homemade pickles with me. Adam learned this and forced me to end this friendship.

"Sylvia, she's just a girl from a poor family. You don't need to befriend her. If you want to make new friends, I can introduce you to girls of wealthy families."

I never saw that girl again. Much later, I learned that Adam and Noah had threatened her into transferring.

After that, Noah and Adam closely monitored my friendships. Anyone I seemed to like would mysteriously disappear from my life.

I loved singing and planned to major in music in college. But on the day I filled out my application, Adam forced me to change it to finance.

The reason? The Fowler family didn't allow their adoptive daughter into the entertainment industry; they didn't allow me to sing for pennies because they thought it was vulgar.

Despite the Fowler family's kindness, if I ever had the chance to leave them, I wouldn't return.

The system didn't understand, but seeing my determination, it didn't say anything more. Then, a cheerful male voice came from downstairs.

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Menu

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"Sylvia, come down for dinner."

My new body's owner had the same name as me. Her parents were ordinary working-class people; she had an older brother. Their family wasn't wealthy, but it was warm and loving.

I was grateful to the system for this arrangement. My new parents and brother were kind to me, making up for the loss of my parents.

However, I never expected that this hard-won happiness would be so easily shattered.

My brother knew I loved singing and signed me up for Washington's largest singing competition, held by a company owned by the Fowler family. I didn't want to go, but seeing the bright light in his eyes, I swallowed my refusal.

I was worried about encountering Adam and Noah. But since I had a new body, they might not recognize me. Besides, they might not be there.

To my surprise, after singing a song, just as I was about to leave, I was stopped by Noah and Adam. The moment they saw me, their eyes turned red. Adam's usual elegance was gone. "You must be Sylvia. You're back, right?"