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Julian's Stand-In Wife chapter 531

This man was undoubtedly dangerous.

Diana couldn't help but shift further away from him.

"Feigning weakness to lure the enemy," Simon muttered in a righteous yet wicked manner. "Many women love using this tactic, but it doesn't work on me."

Diana was speechless. Her previous judgment about this man had been completely wrong.

He wasn't just a crazed man. He was an extremely narcissistic maniac!

She was stunned by his behavior, and the only thing she could say was his name. "Mr. Channing."

Even though Oliver and Simon had the same surname, the difference between them was vast.

A playful look flashed in Simon's eyes. "We've only met once, but you've already memorized my name."

All in all, he concluded that Diana was interested in him.

"It seems I have far greater charm than Oliver, no?"

He looked at her as if she were a doll, with a disrespectful leer that made Diana very uncomfortable.

She almost shifted to the edge of the seat, but she couldn't escape the dangerous aura emanating from this man.

However, she also noticed something.

The more she tried to escape and showed signs of retreat, the more evident the teasing look in this man's eyes became.

She had no choice but to straighten her back, pretend she wasn't afraid of anything, and avoid thinking about the trauma left by that scumbag Luke." What charm?"

Simon chuckled, using the folding fan to lift her chin, his face inching closer to Diana's.

This move was too much!

She took on a defensive stance out of fear, and slammed her handbag right into him.

"Don't come any closer!"

Simon felt the blow thoroughly, and saw stars for a moment. He pressed his tongue to his cheeks inside his mouth, and the sinister feeling from him grew even stronger.

"You're the first woman who has the guts to strike me like this."

His gaze was icy. It differed from Julian's chilling gaze, as his eyes leaned towards a more cunning and sinister coldness.

It was an intense gaze that sent shivers down the spine of any unfortunate recipient. It was so severe that no matter how good-looking his face was, people would overlook his handsomeness and instead focus on self-preservation.

And right now, Diana was now desperately trying to protect herself by any means necessary.

She forced herself to stay calm, gripping her handbag tightly until her fingernails turned blue.

Then, she gathered the courage to speak up.

"I want to get out of the car."

"Get out?" Simon quickly stretched his leg to block the space between Diana and the car door.

He glanced at her and sneered, "Do you think I'm an amusement park where you can come and go as you please?"

Diana wasn't stupid. She no longer had naive thoughts, and immediately understood what was going on.

Simon was up to no good.

Even if she hadn't gotten in the wrong car, she was certain she would still be forced into his car today.

She simply couldn't fathom exactly what this man was up to.

After thinking for a bit, she said, "I'll tell your brother."

Simon reacted to her words as if he had heard an amusing joke.

His tense face suddenly broke into a smile. With that smile, the coldness dissipated, and he finally exuded a bit of charm.

Diana couldn't help but relax a little.

It was only then, belatedly, that she realized her tone just now sounded exactly like students who used to snitch to their teachers...

Feeling a little embarrassed, her eyes glistened as if they were moist, giving off a sparkling and captivating allure.

"What a fascinating woman," Simon commented.

Diana frowned. "I really will tell your brother."

Oliver did say that if Simon caused her any trouble, she should let him know.

This shouldn't be considered tattling.

It was more like taking precautions.

However, she didn't expect the man before her to become even more excited when she repeated her threats.

"What will you tell him?" Simon asked eagerly, leaning closer to her again, his tone taking on an ambiguous quality.

If it weren't for those sinister eyes...

If it weren't for Diana having already encountered someone like Julian, she couldn't guarantee she wouldn't lose her composure under the man's extreme audacity.

He leaned closer and closer to Diana, his playful intentions evident in his eyes.

Then, he chuckled. "Are you going to tell him I've taken a liking to you?"

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In Diana's mind, alarm bells were going off like crazy.

She once again raised the paper bag in her hand and threw it wildly at Simon.

However, her blows were like raindrops. They were consistent, but not painful.

Simon rubbed his chin, tilting his head slightly to the side as he stared at her. A faint smile still tugged on his lips, and there was a touch of an indecipherable emotion in it.

His eyes were swirling with a mix of emotions as he said, 'You're the first woman who dares to hit me a second time.'

Instantly, he firmly gripped her chin. "So, tell me. Will you tell my brother that I've taken a liking to you? That I'm out to steal you from him?"

"Get off me!"

There was a distinct pain in Diana's chin, and her face was red from anger.

Despite how tightly Simon restrained her, she shoved hard at him.

"Let me go...!"

However, that did nothing but make Simon tighten his grip even more.

For a moment, Diana thought she was going to suffocate.

She was certain this man was only joking about being interested in her. He was definitely not a good person. And the more she mentioned Oliver, the more riled up he got.

With a sudden realization, she quickly said, 'Julian! I want to see Julian! Let go of me!'

"Julian..." Diana heard Simon mutter, and then he chuckled softly. "You want to see Julian instead of Oliver?"

Diana shook her head. "I won't see Oliver. And I won't tell him about this, either."

She didn't want to trigger this crazy man's rebellious mindset again.

"Alright. I'll take you there," Simon said with a smile, as if satisfied with her answer.

Yet, there was a sinister darkness in his eyes that Diana couldn't see.

Right now, all she wanted was to escape this dangerous man. She was desperate to the point that compared to this man, Julian no longer seemed annoying to her.

The car sped away.

Both in his driving and personality, Simon exuded an indescribable sinister aura, as if he had abandoned all regard for life.

The speed at which he drove was terrifying.

Diana gripped the handle inside the car tightly. When she got out, her legs were weak.

"We're here," Simon said bluntly as he pushed her out, his gaze already shifting towards the villa. "Julian's home. You wanted to see him, right? And this is the right place?"

They were both part of the same circle, so it didn't seem strange that he knew Julian's address.

Diana didn't think too much about it and replied, "Yes. This is the right place."

However, she had no intention of going inside. She simply wanted to use Julian's name to get Simon to back off.

Unexpectedly, Simon stared at her intently and asked, "Why aren't you heading in?"

He suddenly snapped open the folding fan in his hand, making a sharp sound that was particularly piercing in the dark of the night.

The lights in the villa were still on. Judging by the room it came from, it was probably the master bedroom that she and Julian used to occupy.

If she went in now, she probably wouldn't be kicked out.

But... What would be her reason for going in?

Even if she wanted to become a substitute for Kayla, she didn't expect to assume that role so quickly.

Diana needed some time to find a balance in her interactions with Julian, instead of being forced by Simon to hurry and act as if she were on stage.

Displeasure bloomed in Simon's eyes when he saw her still standing at the entrance. "Did you lie to me?"

When he snapped the fan in his hand open and close agitatedly, it felt like he was trying to pull someone's heart out according to the rhythm. Each time it opened and closed, it made one's heart ache.

This man was truly more dangerous than Luke.

At least with Luke, his motives were clear. However, Simon's actions and words were unpredictable.

Diana considered her situation. Confronting Simon like this wasn't a solution, and it was best if she could put more distance between them for now.

"I hate being lied to," Simon said as he closed his folding fan.

His slender fingers twitched slightly, as if he would grab her chin again and cut off her breathing mercilessly.

That feeling of suffocation returned.

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The chill running up Diana's spine when Simon approached her also crept back up on her.

"I didn't lie to you," Diana said, then turned around and walked towards the villa.

It seemed all the security guards here had been replaced. When she looked up, she saw unfamiliar faces. She thought she might not be able to get in, but to her surprise, they immediately opened the iron gate as soon as they saw her face.

"You're back, ma'am."

The title they addressed her with made her feel like she had traveled into another world.

"I'm not..."

"The master made special mention of it tonight," the security guard cut in, seemingly guessing what she would say as he glanced at her white dress.

He smiled and said, 'If a beautiful woman wearing a white dress comes, she must be the mistress of the Fulcher family.'

The security guard hadn't addressed her mistakenly.

But... Diana wasn't the one who was supposed to be wearing a white dress and waltzing in like this.

It should be Kayla.

Diana forced down the bitterness in her heart, and reminded herself not to care about such insignificant details.

Since she had decided to start seeing Julian again and he hadn't pursued the matter of her disfiguring Kayla, she should prepare herself and be aware of what it meant to be a substitute.

She should learn to accept that heart-wrenching feeling at all times.

Facing the security guard, however, she couldn't force a smile no matter what.

It wasn't until she heard the sound of the car door opening behind her and the suffocating sensation of being chased by a hungry wolf that her nervousness returned.

"Let me in," she said to the security guard, 'I want to see Julian."

Of course, the security guard didn't delay any longer and quickly made way for her. He also turned on the lights along the path for Diana.

"Ma'am, would you like us to arrange a car to take you in?"

If she walked in, it would probably take about three to four minutes.

"That won't be necessary."

Actually, she didn't really want to see Julian. The situation today had forced her into the predicament she was in right now.

Simon was still watching her from behind, his eyes filled with unwillingness, jealousy, and hatred. He held the folding fan; if one ignored his sinister aura, his appearance was on par with Oliver's or even Julian's.

It was a pity that his sinister aura was too overwhelming, making it difficult for anyone to focus on his physical appearance.

Diana walked and pondered when exactly she had offended Simon. She also wondered whether she should tell Oliver about tonight's events.

As for Julian...

The moment she entered the gates, someone would have inevitably informed him of her arrival.

What should she say when they meet?

It was late now, and others would easily misunderstand her purpose for coming here.

Simon didn't care about what she was thinking. He was someone who followed his own whims and never held himself back.

His mood suddenly improved when he saw her walking cautiously like a deer afraid of a predator and deliberately avoiding his eyes.

“Diana,” he called out. ‘Don’t forget to tell Julian I brought you back.’”

This lunatic...

Was it possible that he wanted something from Julian? In Richburgh, using Julian’s name to get something seemed like the most logical thing to do.

When Diana realized this fact, she was frustrated. On the surface, she refused to show such emotion and simply replied, “Sure.”

“Good girl.”

When Simon said those words, a shiver went down Diana’s spine.

The tone...sounded so much like Julian.

However, he was clearly Simon, Oliver’s brother.

It was likely because Diana had been frightened out of her wits by him and was overthinking it. She continued to walk forward without looking back, resolutely heading toward the grand hall of the villa.

Simon kept his eyes on her until her figure disappeared completely into the villa.

Only then did he return to the car, collapsed in the backseat, and burst out laughing like a maniac.

He laughed and laughed, and only managed to stop until tears streamed down his face.

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The night was silent.

The only light in the villa that was still on was the bedroom light.

Diana turned around and saw that Simon had already driven away, so she planned to return the same way she came from.

However, a servant noticed her and quickly greeted her. “Ma’am.’

It was truly strange.

Everyone she encountered was a stranger; yet without exception, they all referred to her as “ma’am” as if she had never divorced Julian.

But with just a little more reasoning in her mind, it became clear that she wasn’t the one they were actually referring to. However, Diana couldn’t be bothered to explain to them that she wasn’t Kayla or Julian’s fiancée.

She simply responded calmly, ‘Yes.’

Upon hearing this, the servant’s eyes instantly lit up. He hurriedly bowed and gestured to Diana, saying, “Please head upstairs, ma’am. The master has been waiting for you.”

Did Julian know she would come?

Had he tacitly accepted her as Kayla’s replacement, allowing her to reappear by his side?

Perhaps this was why she wasn’t held accountable for ruining Kayla’s appearance.

Julian... Perhaps he saw not pursuing the matter of Kayla’s disfigurement as a deal between him and Diana.

After all, he loved Kayla so much. He probably couldn’t accept that she had been disfigured, and might be using Diana as a way to see Kayla in her perfect appearance once more.

The thought brought forth a great sense of humiliation over Diana, and her breathing grew ragged. Even the smile on her face turned bitter instantly.

A substitute...

She silently repeated the word several times, feeling like her mouth and heart were being squeezed tightly. The suffocating sensation from before returned with great vengeance.

But this time, being Kayla’s substitute was a path she had chosen herself. She slowly turned around and headed upstairs as the servant led the way.

Being a substitute was something she had once despised, yet here she was now, actively trying to be one.

She was like a guest, walking through this villa that Julian had designed with his own hands. It was both unfamiliar and familiar at the same time.

She was just a few steps away from the bedroom when she pressed her lips tightly into a straight line and turned to the servant, 'Thank you. You may leave now.'

In the blink of an eye, the hallway was empty, leaving only Diana standing there. The bedroom door remained closed, as if waiting for her to enter.

This used to be a place where she slept peacefully every night, but somehow...

Tonight, it felt unfamiliar.

Finally, she pushed open the door. Strangely, there was no one in the room.

The servant told her Julian was waiting for her, but where was he?

Diana sat on the edge of the bed, feeling uneasy.

"Julian?" she called out.

But there was no response.

Diana hadn't completed her revenge for her babies. The punishment Kayla received now was far from enough. In order to punish Kayla, Diana had to start with the man she cared about most-Julian.

Kayla had drugged her and desecrated the graves of her babies on purpose, even going as far as to scatter their ashes. Returning this hatred a hundredfold had become Diana's only goal to keep living.

Disfigurement was only the beginning.

She walked around the room, but there was no sign of Julian.

What would Kayla do in this situation?

Diana thought for a moment, and decided to head downstairs to find him. Before leaving, she opened the wardrobe and changed her clothes.

Julian was downstairs; he had come down while Diana was going upstairs. Her attitude towards him had just begun to improve, so he didn't know why she suddenly came to the villa.

Although Julian was excited, he thought about it and decided that a gradual approach would be better.

Thus, he intentionally avoided Diana and let her go to the room on her own with the hopes of giving each other some buffer space.

However, he didn't expect that she not only went downstairs, but also appeared right in front of him.

She even...

Julian looked up, and carefully examined Diana from head to toe. The curiosity in his eyes gradually turned into burning desire; under the lights, his dark, inky eyes were utterly captivating.

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As their eyes met, neither of them said a word. However, they gradually closed the distance between them.

"Do you know what you're doing?" Julian asked hoarsely as he stared at the woman in front of him.

Diana was dressed in a nightgown, and he felt an intense dryness in his throat as he continued to study her alluring appearance.

She lowered her gaze, hiding all her emotions beneath her eyes.

"Why don't you take a guess?" Diana replied.

In an instant, everything went dark.

By the time Diana reacted, Julian had already trapped her in his embrace. His inky eyes seemed to have a fire in them, and even his breath was scorching hot.

Diana turned her head awkwardly.

Seeing her reaction, Julian instantly acted like a child who had done something wrong, releasing her in a panic.

He even took off his suit and covered her with it.

“I can’t guess,” he admitted.

The once arrogant Julian now voluntarily admitted something he couldn’t do before her.

He had always guessed her thoughts wrong.

And now, he didn’t want to guess anymore.

“Tell me in your own words,” he said as he struggled to control himself, refusing to look at her. ‘What are you thinking right now?’

Diana suddenly wanted to meet him. Then there was her sudden appearance in the villa, and how she was dressed in such a thin nightgown...

Julian was sure this was definitely not a coincidence.

“The lampposts,” Diana suddenly said.

Julian’s Adam’s apple moved slightly, and a hint of surprise flickered in his eyes.

He knew it. He knew she would understand!

“Did you guess that it was me?” he asked.

“I’ve walked on that road near the studio at least ten times. The lampposts are there for aesthetic reasons, and they never were as bright. Besides... That area is upscale. It was two in the morning. It was impossible to hail a cab so quickly.’

Yet, she managed to call a cab within a minute.

She would be an idiot not to realize that someone was pulling the strings behind the scenes.

“And so?” Every cell in his body seemed to be screaming, and delight appeared in his eyes as he looked at Diana standing before him. “Is this the reason you came here tonight?”

Was he saying that he thought she was here to repay him with her body?

Hah.

Julian’s words were as poisonous as ever.

She took a deep breath, and suddenly felt grateful for Simon’s presence.

“No,” she replied.

Her fingertips dug harshly into her palm. “You’re overthinking. Simon forced me to come here.”

Simon wasn’t a good person. She didn’t need to portray him positively in front of Julian, or say he brought her here according to Simon’s wishes.

“Simon?” Julian repeated the name, and he seemed unfamiliar with it.” From the Channing family?”

He only had an impression of Oliver, as the latter was the man whom Julian once considered a rival and who almost stole his woman. He didn’t pay much attention to anyone else.

Diana nodded. “Oliver’s younger brother.”

In an instant, there was an overwhelming air around Julian, as if a thundering army was gathering momentum.

“He forced you?” Julian asked, with a hint of steel underneath his tone.

Diana nodded without hesitation. “Yes.”

It would be best if Julian could teach Simon a lesson. She really didn’t want to see that psycho again.

The next moment, Julian sharply stood up and once again examined Diana carefully. Finally, his gaze focused on her jaw.

There were two finger marks still visible there.

He hadn't dared look closely at her before, but now that he stared, he could see it clearly.

Diana could feel Julian's anger. In fact, it wasn't an exaggeration to say that Simon's life might be in danger if she didn't do something.

After all, he was Oliver's younger brother, and Diana didn't want to cause too much trouble.

However, Julian was already furious.

Diana considered her options, then gently pushed his suit, causing it to slide down her smooth skin and fall completely to the ground.

"Don't be angry," she said softly, just like she used to when she coquettishly teased him in the past. She even placed her pinky finger on his chest.

Then, she tugged slightly.

Her fingers grazed his clothes as if they were transmitting the touch of her hands to his heart, gently reaching the depths of his soul.

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Julian's eyes darkened further until it was terrifying to look at, and even his breathing grew heavy.

Like punishment and revenge at the same time, he placed his fingers on the marks on her chin, covering the traces of another man with great jealousy.

Displeasure flashed in his eyes.

"Diana, you shouldn't provoke me."

Initially, he planned to handle their interaction with caution and slow, gradual progression. Yet every single one of her actions carried a deadly allure, almost causing the blood in his body to flow backward instead.

Despite that, he still had to make an effort to restrain himself.

He gripped her jaw as he gently bit her earlobe, his voice restrained. It sounded like a warning and a reminder, resonating like the danger of a deep well.

“Oliver said you don’t like him, and you’re not together with him.”

“That’s the truth.”

“So now, you want to be with his brother?”

Diana almost burst out laughing. “You have quite an imagination.”

She didn’t want anything to do with that psycho, so how could she possibly have such thoughts?

Julian’s heart finally settled at her answer. ‘That’s good.’

At first, only his fingers were on her face. They gradually turned into his entire hand as he cradled her face greedily.

“Good girl.”

It was that tone again.

Simon had used the same tone and words when he watched Diana entering the villa.

“Do you really...” she paused, “not know Simon?”

“I don’t know him.”

Julian seemed extremely displeased whenever she kept mentioning another man.

His palm soon covered her face completely. As if seeking revenge, he leaned down and kissed her passionately.

There were several moments when Diana wanted to push him away. Thinking about it, however, coming here and becoming Kayla’s substitute was her own choice. Thus, her resistance soon turned into acceptance.

Julian seemed to have tasted sweetness.

He kept advancing, and the warmth of his hand on her face grew hotter.

“Diana.”

A whisper.

Diana's heart trembled at the sound.

There was a time when he loved calling her in such a way. She used to think it was similar to Nina's affection for her, but in reality... It was simply evidence of his longing for Kayla within her.

Her heart twitched in pain. She appeared to be taking everything in stride as if nothing was amiss, but deep down... Only she knew that another scar had been added to her heart.

Even till this day, he refused to call her name out loud and with clarity. It weighed heavily on her mood, and she closed her eyes sorrowfully.

Clenching her teeth, she called out, "Julian."

With just those words, Julian sensed that something was off in her. He felt as if someone had poured a bucket of cold water over his head. He quickly regained his composure, and looked at her with a clear gaze.

"I'm sorry."

It was his fault for losing his composure.

He had already decided not to rush things, and couldn't afford to scare her away. But just now... He couldn't help feeling uneasy when she kept mentioning Oliver and Simon.

Was this possessiveness?

He had never felt a single ounce of possessiveness towards Kayla.

Julian chuckled softly once again, mocking his own foolishness when it came to matters of the heart.

"You should return to the room," Julian said as he avoided looking at her expression, ignoring the slightly swollen color of her lips on purpose.

Diana nodded. "What about you?"

"I won't go up. I'm still staying in the guest room," he replied, gesturing towards it.

This caught Diana by surprise. “You haven’t shared a room with Kayla yet?”

How did the topic suddenly turn to Kayla?

Julian’s expression turned cold and his sharp gaze was akin to a hawk’s, as if he wanted to see through every pore of Diana’s being.

Uneasy, Diana turned her head and avoided eye contact with him.

Yet, Julian didn’t plan on letting this topic slide. “Why did you suddenly mention Kayla?”

He cared a lot about their relationship and wanted to handle it well, but he also didn’t want Diana to feel uncomfortable because of Kayla.

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Diana chuckled.

She laughed because she knew Julian already knew the answer, yet he still asked the question on purpose and feigned ignorance.

“It’s nothing.’

Since he wanted to keep up the act, she would play along.

“I suddenly thought about it, and wanted to see if you were still clean.”

Julian was instantly pleased. His exquisitely sculpted features looked as though they had been bathed in the spring rain, emanating a refreshing and pleasant aura.

“You care about that.’

“I do.”

And yet, what difference did it make if she cared? Julian would eventually be with his fiancée.

Diana had a smile on her face, but she was fully aware of the deep pain that continued to sting her heart.

“Do you care?” she suddenly retorted.

Julian seemed taken aback. "About what?"

"Do you care if I'm clean or not?"

"I don't," Julian said quickly, shaking his head.

If she wasn't, he might just kill that man outright. After all, Diana would be his as long as the man was dead...right?

In the midst of this ordinary questioning, he suddenly realized that love had already taken root within him.

He was far from as generous as he had thought.

Should he be grateful that nothing had happened after he handed Oliver to Diana?

Otherwise, there might have been bloodshed by now.

He had severely overestimated his own benevolence.

His response wasn't much different from what she had expected.

Julian didn't care much about her. All he cared about was the resemblance between her and Kayla's face.

Now that Kayla was disfigured, Julian sought to remember the perfect appearance Kayla had through Diana.

Despair washed over her, and Diana didn't want to stay in front of him any longer. She turned and went upstairs without another word.

To Julian, however, the situation they were in felt just like before when they hadn't separated.

He desperately yearned to return to that state.

As for their marriage...

Naturally, Julian had to make an effort to marry Diana once again if she was willing.

He watched her retreating figure, and almost asked her if she wanted to move back in.

This was also the first step he discussed with Noel.

After all, it was better to be close to the water's edge to catch the moon.

Now, not only did Oliver have his eyes on Diana, but there was also the legendary illegitimate son, Simon.

Julian didn't feel comfortable leaving Diana to fend for herself outside.

That said, he continued to watch her figure as it slowly disappeared. Even until she disappeared, he couldn't get the words out of his mouth to ask her to move back in.

The following day, Diana left the villa early.

When she arrived at the studio, an employee looked at her in surprise, pointing at her lips. "What happened to your lips? They're all torn."

Diana was momentarily stunned before replying, "I got a sore."

It was because she had cleaned her lips too many times after returning to her room last night, which resulted in the skin being torn.

Fortunately, even though her lips were in terrible shape, at least Julian's scent was gone.

"That looks like it really hurts." Diana's employee couldn't bear to see it, and brought her a bottle of watermelon ointment. "Here, spray some on."

Diana thanked the employee and took the medicine to her office.

When she sprayed the medicine on her lips, it tasted bitter.

Bitter, just like the sensation Julian had left her.

Bitter and lingering.

Wounds would heal eventually, but her babies would never come back.

At this thought, determination flashed in Diana's eyes.

Julian...

She would obtain him, even if it meant being with him as a substitute for Kayla.

She would make Kayla experience the pain of losing everything!

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It wasn't because Diana had saved Julian when he was a child that he spared her, but because her face was similar to Kayla's.

However, she didn't explain this to Oliver.

In a moment of recklessness the last time she had seen Oliver, she had suggested being together with her.

Fortunately, he had turned her down. If he hadn't, she would definitely be more at a loss on how to face him right now.

Diana twirled her fingers together and said, "About the incident this time... Thank you."

He had always silently stayed by her side, helping her with everything he could.

And yet, she couldn't give him anything in return.

Including her feelings...

Oliver sensed her unease. She had something on her mind in the past few days, so she had somewhat neglected their friendship.

Today, however, she looked so much calmer.

Oliver was relieved to see this, and said jokingly, "Is that how you show gratitude nowadays? Just by saying thanks?"

"What else?"

Diana suddenly became interested. It would be even better if Oliver wanted something.

"The usual rule," Oliver replied. 'Treat me to a meal.'

"...Aren't you tired of eating with me?"

Every time he helped her, she had to treat him to a meal.

It seemed Oliver would never learn how to trouble others.

She looked at his gentle expression, and shoved down her encounter with Simon last night deep to the bottom of her heart.

Julian could deal with that troublesome and weird guy. She shouldn't make Oliver feel uncomfortable.

"I might be a little tired of it," Oliver admitted sheepishly, smiling.

His smile was gentle like a sunflower in spring, radiating gentle sunshine upon the entire world.

It was a stark contrast to Simon's unsettling maliciousness.

They didn't seem like biological brothers at all.

Oddly enough...

Sometimes, the feeling Simon gave Diana reminded her more of Julian.

But how was that possible?

Julian was the only child in his family. He couldn't possibly have such a younger brother.

Oliver thought for a moment before suggesting, "How about this? It's been raining a lot this autumn, and I often forget to bring an umbrella while working at the hospital. Can you bring me an umbrella the next time it rains?"

This was the first time Oliver requested something from Diana so earnestly.

"As long as you bring me that umbrella, it'll be your sincere thank you," he said.

"Okay!" Diana readily agreed. "But if you have any other requests, I can fulfill them too."

She wanted to do more for Oliver.

“Let’s not go overboard,’ Oliver gently chastised her.

Deep down, he didn’t want Diana to distance herself too much from him.

Diana paused and quickly realized what she had implied.

“I’m sorry.”

It was another habitual apology.

It seemed like “Thank you” and “I’m sorry” were the only things she had for Oliver.

Oliver smiled wryly. “You haven’t done anything wrong.”

What was wrong was his own late appearance in her life compared to Julian.

After exchanging pleasantries for a while, Oliver left her studio. Diana didn’t stay there either, but went to Winnington Inc. instead.

She had already figured out the ins and outs of the Winnington family’s clothing industry. Now, it was time to visit in person and plan the next steps.

James valued the fashion sector because it was a project he independently handled within the family. It was also the opportunity that impressed the family’s head, as suggested by Kayla.

As such, James couldn’t afford to miss this chance.

It was why James hadn’t gone home after his visit to Kayla’s. Instead, he went straight to the company to oversee the designs and production.

“Mr. Winnington, there’s someone here to see you,” his secretary informed him.

James didn’t think much of it. “Who is it?”

The secretary hesitated for a moment. “It seems to be...Miss Kayla.”

Kayla?

James was shocked. When he saw her at the hospital yesterday, she was in poor condition.

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Why was Kayla suddenly discharged today?

Distress struck James's heart, and he said hurriedly, "Quick! Let her in right away! She's in her own family's company! Why the need for such formalities?"

The more James thought about it, the more distressed he grew. With that, he turned around and personally went out to welcome her.

However, it wasn't Kayla who was waiting outside for him.

Rather, it was Diana.

His expression turned cold immediately, and the distress he felt melted away.

Seeing the injury on his forehead, Diana couldn't help but smile. "Hello, Mr. Winnington."

She didn't even address him as "Father" anymore.

What an unruly daughter!

Fortunately, he had cut his losses in time and put himself back on Kayla's side. Otherwise, he didn't know how miserable his life or death would be at the hands of this rebellious girl standing before him!

Diana could tell from his expression that she wasn't at all welcome. She didn't expect to be welcomed and her visit today was not for catching up, so it didn't bother her.

Before James could speak, Diana handed him a promotional flier. "Do you know about the recent events in the fashion industry?"

It was clear that Diana had ulterior motives for being here, but she was trying to appear innocent while hiding her true intentions.

James snatched the flier roughly and threw it into the trash bin without even sparing it a single glance.

“Get lost!”

There was no more room for mercy. Not for this girl before him!

Diana couldn't help but laugh at his ludicrous behavior.

“Weren't you just begging for my forgiveness yesterday? Hmm... Turns out your begging is as cheap as how you are as a person, right?”

Employees were coming and going nearby, and Diana didn't bother mincing her words. She didn't care how it would make James look in their eyes.

Furious, James pushed Diana away forcefully.

“Get out of here! Didn't you hear me?!”

This man... He had features so similar to hers.

So, her resemblance to Kayla actually came from him.

The same blood flowed in Diana's veins as James, but he was always so impatient with her; not to mention, completely heartless.

Diana grabbed the doorknob to prevent herself from falling and sneered, “Back then, when I was three years old and you intentionally lost me, were you also thinking about how far I should get lost?”

James was practically driven to the wall from how much she was annoying him.

“What's the point of bringing up old grudges?”

He dismissed the surrounding employees and glared daggers at Diana. His eyes were wide, and his eyeballs looked like they were about to pop out of their sockets at any moment.

In a tone of deep-seated disgust, he spat, “I shouldn't have called you after digging up the grave! You're a heartless creature!”

If it were Kayla, she would surely forgive him.

No matter what he did, Kayla would never turn against him in such a way.

Thinking about it, regret struck James.

“You’re just like those little b*stards! You deserve to die! Losing you back then was simply my kindness to you!”

Hearing these words from her biological father was indeed an extraordinary feeling. It was akin to tasting a spicy fruit that was bitter upon entry, only to burn mercilessly upon reaching the throat.

Diana was filled with discomfort, so much that she was at a loss for words.

It hurt, but she came here today precisely to experience this pain.

This was the only way she could firmly continue down the path of dealing with the Winningtons; it was the only way she could keep herself alert and spare no mercy towards any of them.

Most importantly, so that she wouldn’t stop seeking revenge against Kayla just because of their blood ties.

Alas, the Winningtons were even more shameless than she could have imagined!

She stood at the doorway, allowing James to unleash his insulting remarks as if he could never finish expressing his dissatisfaction whenever he encountered Diana.

“You will never compare to Kayla!”

In the end, he concluded his rant with this despicable statement.

“Not being able to compare to her is a good thing,” Diana retorted disdainfully.

She refused to compare herself to that kind of person.

James listened to her calm tone and looked up at his daughter, who had grown up in the countryside.

Her indifferent eyes seemed to be hiding something, emitting a dizzyingly bright light. Whenever she looked at him, guilt would surge in him.

Still, what on earth did he have to feel guilty about?

He and Kate were her parents, and they had given Diana life.

From this alone, Diana should shower him with unconditional respect and be forever grateful to him for the rest of her life!

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And yet, what had Diana done in turn?

She actually demanded him to crawl back to the Winnington residence all the way from the hospital!

Did she even consider what that would do to his reputation and image?!

She didn't think of him at all!

However, Kayla was different.

Even if Kayla's appearance was ruined and she saw through his intentions to reconcile with Diana, she still didn't speak ill of him. She still treated him as family, and looked up to him as her most respected father.

When they left the hospital yesterday, Kayla even added that if she married Julian, she would make him the proudest father-in-law in the world!

Listening to those words made Kayla so much better than Diana in comparison.

Diana had been married to Julian for three years, and he hadn't taken a single penny from her.

In fact, Julian's offerings were all done for Kayla's sake.

The more James thought about it, the more he felt it was the right decision to abandon Diana back then.

With that in mind, he pretended to slap himself.

"I was wrong! What comparison? How dare a wretched creature like you compare yourself to Kayla!"

Saying that, he grabbed a pair of scissors and aimed it at Diana's cheek.

“You ruined Kayla’s face! How can you still shamelessly parade around with her face?”

Opening and closing the scissors in his hand, he continued, “One day, your mother and I will personally make you pay back everything you owe Kayla!”

If they weren’t in such a public place as his company...

Diana had many reasons to believe James would really lay hands on her face.

He might even involve Kate.

Just imagining that scene...

It would truly be a joke.

“What makes you think you can hurt me?” Diana smiled, as if nothing James did could affect her.

In truth, only she knew how devastating the pain inflicted by a loved one could be.

“Let me tell you right now,” Diana said with a changed tone. She raised her head, and when she spoke, it was with a voice carrying unprecedented arrogance. “Right now, I am Kayla’s substitute.”

James was stunned. “What do you mean by that?”

“Literally what I just said,” Diana said, turning to leave after dropping this. “You might as well tell Kayla. I’m sure she’ll understand.”

When it came to matters concerning Kayla, James didn’t waste a single moment. As soon as Diana left, he immediately went to Kayla’s side.

When he pushed the door open, Kayla was waiting to change her dressing. The wounds on her face were even more shocking than yesterday’s. Even James couldn’t help but swallow harshly out of fright.

However, he dared not show the slightest displeasure in front of Kayla. Rather, his resentment towards Diana intensified when he thought of how things had come to this.

Forgetting the reason Diana had gone from being a wealthy girl to a country bumpkin, he snarled angrily, "It's all that country bumpkin's fault!"

Kayla raised her gaze and asked in a hoarse voice, "What's wrong?"

James felt increasingly uncomfortable listening to it, and quickly conveyed the words Diana had him relay to Kayla.

"Dad, don't be angry," Kayla comforted James, though a hint of resentment appeared at the corners of her mouth. "The more she says things like that, the more it proves that she doesn't know how much Julian loves her."

Perhaps her poor sister was still trapped in the pain of being a substitute, which made Kayla smile triumphantly.

"The less she knows, the more painful and embarrassing it is for her, and the more time we have."

When James heard these words, the heavy feeling in his heart dissipated. He exclaimed in earnest, "Kayla, you're amazing!"

"It's not that I'm amazing. It's that she and Julian are fated to be apart," Kayla said as she pondered. "Don't you think they've always missed each other despite their mutual affection?"

Even back when they were children, Diana's act of saving Julian became Kayla's credit and the golden ticket she currently held.

"That's right!" James seemed to have regained his confidence. "You're right as always."