

Chapter 311

Su Zhan walked all the way to the park outside of the building before slowing down to a halt. "What do you want to talk about?" Liu Feifei asked from behind him.

"I want to make things clear between us," Su Zhan affirmed, turning around to face her. He stared at her familiar, yet estranged face as he spoke.

He thought that he had known her inside-out, but he was mistaken.

He could never figure out what she was truly thinking of.

"You should know that things were over between us once you'd chosen to leave me. The reason doesn't matter to me, but you've already chosen to give up on our relationship. If you insist on hanging around, it'll only annoy me. I hope that you can honor your promise and stop meddling in my life," he chided her.

Liu Feifei stared at him in disbelief.

The man before her had since changed, and he no longer had any love left for her. Gone were the days where he bent over backward to make her happy, and all that was left were bitterness and disdain.

She balled her fists and scoffed. "You're not going to honor our relationship in the past?"

"That's in the past," he admitted coolly. "Let's move on from that."

He was serious about it.

He thought that he would struggle to get over her, but he suddenly found the courage to do so once he saw her.

He did not hate her, and neither did he blame her for anything.

Liu Feifei bit her lip. She had wanted to coax him into restarting their relationship, but Qin Ya's appearance had messed up her plans.

She had put all her hope on Su Zhan. As she was getting on with her years and running out of time, and she knew that it would be hard for her to find another rich man to marry.

Besides, her infertility would be a massive put-off to most men, let alone the desirable ones out there.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have returned,” she apologized, turning around to leave. She stopped after a few steps and turned back to face him. “I wish you all the best for your future. I’ll...make sure to stay away from you.”

She knew then and there that she did not stand a chance unless Qin Ya left on her own accord or if Su Zhan dumped her.

She figured that leaving him with a good impression would be a good start.

After spending years of being a mistress, she had her fair share of tricks up her sleeve.

An evil grin appeared on her lips as a plan formed in her head.

On the other hand, Su Zhan found her decisiveness a little hard to swallow, but he accepted it anyway.

After she left, Su Zhan turned around and walked out of the hospital premises to buy breakfast for Qin Ya and his grandmother.

When he returned with the food, Qin Ya was still asleep, while his grandmother was wide awake. He rushed over to her bedside and asked, “Are you awake, Grandma?”

His grandmother opened her mouth to say something, but her words came out as throaty croaks. She started to panic, which only made it worse.

Su Zhan put down the food in his hands and held her hand gently. “Don’t panic, Grandma. The doctor has said that you’ll need some time to recover, so just relax and rest.”

His grandmother tried to speak, but she could not make a sound.

Su Zhan patted her hand. “Are you trying to ask where Qin Ya is?”

His grandmother nodded.

Su Zhan pointed to the sofa, and his grandmother was relieved to see Qin Ya sleeping peacefully on it.

The last thing she wanted was for Su Zhan to lose Qin Ya because of Liu Feifei.

She wanted to tell Su Zhan that Liu Feifei was not as innocent as he had thought, but she could not make a sound.

Her face began to turn red from exertion as she tried her best to speak. Unfortunately, it was to no avail.

“Calm down, Grandma!” Su Zhan urged, patting her back. “Don’t worry. I won’t let Qin Ya leave.”

His grandmother held on tight to his hand, hoping that he would keep his promise.

The doctor who came around to check on Su Zhan's grandmother informed them that long-term treatment was needed and that everything seemed normal post-operation.

He reminded Su Zhan to take good care of his grandmother.

After the doctor had left, Su Zhan took out a few boxes of food he bought earlier. "Are you hungry, Grandma?"

She nodded.

Su Zhan raised the head of the bed and placed a cushion behind his grandmother's back so that she could sit up. He picked up a bowl of congee and proceeded to feed her with a spoon.

After breakfast, his grandmother began to feel sleepy again, so he lowered the bed for her. "I'll be here. Go to sleep, Grandma."

His grandmother fell into a deep sleep within minutes.

Qin Ya, on the other hand, did not even stir.

Su Zhan got a nurse to take over for a moment as he went to get a change of clothes.

He reeked of alcohol and his clothes were a crumpled mess, and he figured that Qin Ya would not be waking up anytime soon anyway.

Meanwhile, Zong Jinghao skipped breakfast that morning, still full from the huge bowl of 'dumplings' that he had consumed the previous night.

Lin Xinyan leaned against the door and watched him as he put on a suit. "Are you going out?"

He was technically on vacation, so Lin Xinyan had thought that he would dress down and stay at home and rest.

After all, a break was hard to come by for him.

Zong Jinghao stood before the mirror, his handsome features fully visible in his reflection. His fingers paused over his buttons as he looked up at her reflection slowly. "Get ready. I'm bringing you along to meet someone."

Lin Xinyan stood up straight. "Who?"

She could vaguely guess who the person was.

The person whom she thought that Zong Jinghao wanted her to meet was a relative of his on Wen Xian's side. Even though many years had passed since Wen Xian's death and Zong Qifeng's remarriage, New Year's meant visiting relatives, and it made sense for Zong Jinghao to pay that particular person a visit.

"You'll know once we get there," Zong Jinghao uttered, smiling. He turned around to face her. "Why do you look so scared?"

Lin Xinyan forced a smile onto a face. "I'm not scared!"

Zong Jinghao walked over and grabbed her chin, rubbing his fingers against it. "Don't you know how disappointed I was last night?"

Lin Xinyan froze as she recalled the events of the previous night. Oh...he's mad because I tried to take revenge for Cheng Yuxiu...

He had forced himself to finish the entire bowl of dumplings for the sake of his kids.

Lin Xinyan bit her lips. "I wouldn't have done that if you'd just..."

"Stop meddling in my matters from now on," Zong Jinghao warned, pecking her on the lips. "If you do it again..."

He grinned. "I'll punish you."

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Lin Xinyan blushed at the sound of that. "Are we bringing the kids along?" she asked, changing the subject.

"Yeah."

"Alright then. I'll go get them ready," Lin Xinyan announced, turning around and heading downstairs in a hurry, as though she was running away from him.

Lin Xinyan helped her kids into their new clothes before sitting down to tie Lin Ruixi's hair. Her hair was of the curly type and it had a tendency of turning into a huge mess if it was not tied up. Lin Xinyan decided to give her a little ponytail to bring out the beautiful shape of her forehead.

In fact, she had noticed how Lin Ruixi was starting to take after her father, with her clearly-defined jawlines and pretty features.

Upon tying her hair up, Lin Xinyan proceeded to dress her in a red coat that Cheng Yuxiu had prepared. It had a mix of oriental and western styles with a pearly white, round jade pendant hanging off one of the buttons. There was a Chinese knot in the middle of the pendant that further enhanced its beauty.

Lin Ruixi looked like an adorable doll with her big, sparkly eyes and porcelain skin.

Cheng Yuxiu had also prepared an outfit for Lin Xichen, but it had more of a gentlemanly vibe to it.

His outfit consisted of a pale yellow cardigan on top of a white shirt, along with a vest and a pair of dress pants. He wore a large, dark coat to top it all off, and it made him look like a businessman.

“Where are we going, Mommy?” Lin Xichen asked as he admired himself in front of the mirror.

“We’re going to visit someone,” Lin Xinyan answered vaguely. After all, she could not confirm that the person Zong Jinghao wanted to meet was Wen Qing.

Lin Xichen blinked. “Mommy...”

“Yeah?”

Lin Xinyan lifted her daughter off the bed and set her on the floor so that she could wear her shoes.

“Is Grandma coming to visit us?” Lin Xichen asked.

Having grown up with Zhuang Zijin and Lin Xinyan, Lin Xichen could not help but miss Zhuang Zijin after such an extended period of time spent away from her.

“Yeah, Mommy! Is Grandma coming?” Lin Ruixi asked, tugging at the hem of her dress.

Lin Xinyan felt bitter whenever she thought of Zhuang Zijin, as she could not understand why she had acted the way she did.

“I don’t think so, darlings,” Lin Xinyan murmured, holding her kids’ hands. “Let’s go and put on our shoes, shall we?”

She decided to avoid the topic of Zhuang Zijin while talking to her kids.

As they headed out, Zong Jinghao walked out of the study wearing a suit. He had his coat slung around his arm, which was a hint that he had been talking to Zong Qifeng.

“Ready to go?” Lin Xinyan asked.

Zong Jinghao lowered his head. "Yeah."

"I'll help the kids with their shoes," she announced before heading to the doorway with the kids.

Zong Jinghao put on his coat and took Lin Xinyan's down jacket off its hanger as she helped the kids put on their shoes.

Afterward, he gestured for Lin Xinyan to slip her arms into the sleeves before he zipped up the jacket for her. Glancing at the jade bangle on her wrist, he whispered to her, "Don't reveal it when you're taking your coat off."

He knew that Wen Qing was not particularly fond of Cheng Yuxiu and that she would have suffered, if not for Zong Qifeng.

Although he was not sure if Wen Qing knew about the jade bangle, he told Lin Xinyan to hide it just in case.

The two families rarely talked to each other after Wen Xian's death, but the Wens still treated Zong Jinghao well.

He did not want Lin Xinyan to get into trouble with the Wens because of Cheng Yuxiu.

Lin Xinyan pulled on her sleeves absentmindedly. "Does he have an issue with us?"

Zong Jinghao fell silent, and that was the answer that Lin Xinyan had needed.

She could tell from his reminder that they were not on good terms at all.

She took a deep breath sorrowfully.

It was windy outside, and Zong Jinghao pressed his daughter's head against his chest so that the wind would not blow into her face.

The chauffeur hurried over to help them open the car door, and Zong Jinghao gently placed Lin Ruixi onto one of the back seats. Lin Xichen, however, refused to be helped by anyone and clambered into the back seat on his own. To their relief, there was enough space for everyone.

The chauffeur backed out of the garage and onto the main road as the chilly wind blew past them, the sunlight doing nothing to warm the air up.

After approximately forty minutes, the car came to a stop beside an archaic mansion.

The chauffeur alighted first to open the doors. Zong Jinghao picked up his daughter upon alighting, while Lin Xinyan and Lin Xichen got out of the car on their own.

They could see the entirety of the mansion from where they stood. Although it was obvious that it had been recently renovated, the cracks in the walls and the flaking paint proved that it had been there for a long, long time. As they walked into the mansion, Lin Xinyan noticed that there were soldiers guarding the door.

The mansion was old, and only people of the highest echelons had the right to stay there.

Although Wen Qing did not quite qualify as someone who could stay in the mansion, it had been passed down to him by his father, Wen Jin, after the latter's death. The higher-ups decided to turn a blind eye to Wen Qing's position after seeing how extraordinary of a person Wen Jin had been.

The mansion was not as lavishly decorated as the skyscrapers in the city, but anyone who stayed there had earned their right to.

The chauffeur stepped forward to press on the doorbell, and the door was answered in just seconds.

A middle-aged woman whose hair was pulled back into a bun welcomed the family into the house. "It's cold outside. Come in and take a seat!"

Zong Jinghao bowed his head slightly. He stretched out his free hand to hold Lin Xinyan's hand, in the fear that she could not get accustomed to the unfamiliar surroundings.

Lin Xinyan glanced at him before looking away.

The woman laughed. "Your uncle told me to go grocery shopping early this morning because you're coming over. He's waiting in the living room!"

"No need for the trouble," Zong Jinghao uttered politely.

He was not on bad terms with the Wens at all, but neither was he particularly close to them.

The woman was used to it. "Are these two your kids?"

"Yeah," Zong Jinghao replied.

The woman looked back and forth between Lin Xichen and Zong Jinghao, amazed at how similar they looked.

Even Lin Ruixi was starting to look like her father as the years went by.

"He's so handsome!" the woman laughed. "All Ji does is mess around all day and annoy your uncle!"

"He's not coming back for New Year's?" Zong Jinghao asked.

Wen Xiaoji was the only son of Wen Qing, and he was the most rebellious child that one could ever meet.

Wen Qing had wanted to send Wen Xiaoji to the military, only for Wen Xiaoji to leave the country to pursue his studies overseas. When he realized that his major was useless, he went straight to an entertainment agency and signed on as an artist.

Wen Qing hated it, but there was nothing he could do to convince his son to pursue something else. In fact, Wen Xiaoji would do the exact opposite of whatever his father had wanted.

Even so, Wen Xiaoji was doing well in the entertainment industry. However, Wen Qing forbade anyone that knew about their relationship to talk about it, and Wen Xiaoji picked a unique stage name to prevent other people from getting suspicious.

After Zong Jinghao and his family entered the house, the woman closed the door behind them to keep the cold winds out.

Lin Xinyan looked towards the living room and noticed a man sitting on the sofa, the newspaper in his hands covering his face entirely.

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“He’s not coming back. He says that there’s an activity that he needs to attend. I don’t know what it is, other than the fact that he’s really busy. Well, I’m not even certain if he really doesn’t have time, or if he’s merely pretending.

Anyway, he’s not coming back,” lamented the lady as she took Lin Ruixi’s shoes off. Instead of being lavishly decorated, the house had a plain style. The family did not hire a maid, with the lady taking care of the house herself. Fortunately, it was not too big.

The lady was Li Jing, Wen Qing’s wife. Due to Wen Qing’s identity, in addition to the strict investigations from the superiors, she maintained a low profile, worried that she would bring more trouble to Wen Qing.

The person sitting on the sofa, having heard some noises, cast the newspapers aside and glanced over.

The lady walked towards him. “They’re here. The child is really likable. You guys can converse first! I have a few dishes that I haven’t finished cooking, so I’ll head into the kitchen first.”

Wen Qing waved his hand dismissively. "Go on with your work, then."

When Wen Qing placed his newspapers down, Lin Xinyan looked over. Perhaps it was because she had heard about him from Cheng Yuxiu, she was extremely curious.

The heater in the house was turned on, so Wen Qing only wore a sweater. His hair was white, making him look around the same age as Zong Qifeng. However, both men exuded a completely different aura. Seeing as Wen Qing had a military background, he appeared extremely stern when he was expressionless.

On the other hand, Zong Qifeng was much gentler and approachable.

Lin Xinyan thought to herself, Zong Qifeng definitely has feelings for Cheng Yuxiu. If he's not together with a woman whom he'd loved, how would he have been able to settle down?

Meanwhile, Wen Qing glanced at Lin Xinyan too. She did not deliberately dress up, nor did she decide to put on a shred of makeup. However, as her skin was clear, she still exuded a comfortable aura. Her dark hair was tied into a ponytail, revealing her well-defined facial features—her crystal-clear eyes, tall nose bridge, and rosy lips. Although there was nothing prominent about her facial features, they made her look exceptionally stunning.

Wen Qing's eyes glinted as he fell into a momentary trance.

He was only jolted back to his senses when Zong Jinghao greeted him. Beckoning to the two children, he uttered, "Come here quickly. Let me take a good look at you."

Lin Xichen bravely strode over, confident and unafraid of Wen Qing's stern aura.

As a soldier, even if his actions became gentler, he would likely have been not as approachable as the average man.

On the other hand, Lin Ruixi was slightly more timid, not daring to budge at all. Zong Jinghao stroked her head and coaxed, "Go on."

His deep voice gave the little girl a sense of security. She mustered up her courage and shuffled over.

Scrutinizing the two children carefully, Wen Qing nodded in satisfaction. "Good, good, good!"

The three consecutive praises made it evident that Wen Qing was in a great mood.

"It must have been really cold outside, right?" His voice became much gentler.

"It's okay. We were in the car, so it wasn't so cold," replied Lin Xichen.

Wen Qing burst out laughing. It was rare for a child not to be afraid of him. After all, he had a really stern look, especially when he was not smiling.

He placed a large hand on Lin Xichen's shoulder. Touching his shoulder blades, he nodded. "He's got a good body frame." Then, he gazed into Lin Xichen's eyes and asked, "Are you interested in joining me in the army?"

Li Jing had just come out at the moment, holding a mug of hot coffee. Glancing at Wen Qing, she chided him, "Don't drag everyone whom you meet off to the army. Isn't that how you had scared our son off?"

Wen Qing scoffed coldly at the mention of his son.

Li Jing placed the coffee mug on the table. "Everyone, please take a seat. You're not outsiders anyway. Don't be too courteous!"

Her words were mainly meant for Lin Xinyan, who merely smiled politely.

Grabbing her hand, Zong Jinghao sat down together with her. "She's younger than me."

Implicitly, he was telling them not to take it to heart if she were to do something wrong.

Li Jing was taken aback for a moment. Upon understanding what he had meant, she agreed with a smile, "She looks young."

In fact, Lin Xinyan looked as though she had just graduated from college.

"Don't mind your uncle. He's just like that. Back then, Jinghao was also dragged to become a soldier for a few days. However, as he was the only child of the Zongs, he had to inherit the family business. That's why he didn't stay in the army." Li Jing patted Lin Xinyan's hand, telling her not to take Wen Qing's words too seriously.

Wen Qing snorted. "What's so bad about being a soldier? Jinghao was so exceptional back then. If he didn't leave the army, he would've been much more accomplished than me. It's such a pity."

Zong Jinghao was the only child in the family, after all. Regardless of how much had Wen Qing insisted on it, Jinghao was still his younger sister's son. He was from the Zong family, not the Wen family.

Wen Qing always thought that it was a huge pity.

Hence, now that he saw Jinghao's children, a budding thought surfaced to his mind.

As his wife, Li Jing knew him much too well. She tried to stop him in time as she announced, "Jinghao only has one son. If he becomes a soldier, who'll take over such a massive family business?"

Li Jing still had an old-fashioned mindset. She did not treat Lin Ruixi as a potential inheritor of the family business, as she assumed that Lin Ruixi would need to marry in the future.

Zong Jinghao placed Lin Ruixi on his lap and rebuked, "My daughter can do that too."

He did not believe that only his son could inherit the family business. In fact, he was even more doting to his daughter.

If his daughter were interested, he would split the family business in half for them.

If Lin Xichen were really interested in becoming a soldier, he would pass the family business over to his daughter.

"Are you willing to go to the army with me? You can carry guns and shoot targets." Wen Qing asked Lin Xichen.

"A real gun?" exclaimed Lin Xichen.

Wen Qing patted his chest in affirmation. "Of course!"

"Then I'd like to do as such too. Isn't it so cool to point a gun at a bad guy?" As Lin Xichen spoke excitedly, he even made gun gestures with his fingers.

He was so serious about it that Wen Qing had started to burst out laughing. Wen Qing lifted his head and glanced at Zong Jinghao. "You guys are still young, so you can have another child. Give this boy to me."

Li Jing cut him off curtly, "What's the use of that? He's still so young."

"Then, I'll wait till he grows older." Wen Qing really wanted Lin Xichen to follow in his footsteps. He had taken a liking to the little boy the moment he had set his eyes upon him.

"That's enough. Let's go to the dining room. The food's ready!" Standing up, Li Jing headed to the kitchen to serve the dishes. Lin Xinyan stood up too. "Let me help you."

Zong Jinghao nodded.

"Let's go to the dining room." Wen Qing held Lin Xichen's hand.

There were six chairs surrounding the rectangular table; just enough for everyone.

Wen Qing sat at the master's seat, while Lin Xichen sat beside him.

In the kitchen, Li Jing looked at Lin Xinyan and murmured, "I don't need you here. Go back and take a seat. I'll be done serving the dishes soon!"

Lin Xinyan turned the tap on as she began to wash her hands. "Well, I have nothing to do either. It'll be faster if I'd helped you."

Since Lin Xinyan had explained it as such, Li Jing did not refuse her help anymore. As she had prepared a lot of food, the dishes soon filled the entire dining table.

Wen Qing was in a great mood. Hence, he asked Li Jing to bring some alcohol over so that he could drink with Zong Jinghao. "Take that Maotai in my collections."

Li Jing eyed him, not because he had wanted to drink, but because she had wanted to mock him. "Jinghao is a big boss. What kind of alcohol hasn't he drunk yet?"

Wen Qing protested, "That's my best alcohol! There's such a festive spirit today. I'm in a good mood, so I'd asked you to grab a drink for me. Why are you nagging so much? Bring it over quickly!"

As though he had suddenly remembered something, he glanced at Zong Jinghao and asked, "What are the two children called? I still don't know their names yet."

Before Zong Jinghao could reply, Lin Ruixi announced, "My name is Lin Ruixi. My brother is called Lin Xichen."

After some interactions, the little girl was no longer as afraid of Wen Qing as she had been before.

Wen Qing's expression immediately changed.

Lin?

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The two children had the Lin surname?

Whose surname did they take?

"What's going on?" Wen Qing's tone grew serious.

It was a long-lasting tradition for children to take their father's surname. For the older generation, they placed a lot of importance on it.

This time, Lin Xinyan walked over with the soup. Before she could place it on the table, Wen Qing urgently asked, "The children have followed your surname?"

He had a brief understanding of Zong Jinghao's marriage. As Zong Jinghao was initially reluctant to share, he never told Wen Qing anything about Lin Xinyan. Wen Qing was busy too, so he did not really find out much about Lin Xinyan's identity and background.

Lin Xinyan was stunned for a moment as Wen Qing's question arrived too abruptly.

"That's a long story. In short, it's because I had disappointed them greatly. With regards to whose surname the kids take, I think that it's only appropriate for them to take her surname. After all, she's the one who has raised them." Naturally, Zong Jinghao could tell that Wen Qing was very bothered and upset about this.

Directly before Wen Qing, he grabbed Lin Xinyan's hand and pulled her to his side.

"When I got a divorce, I didn't know that she was pregnant. I only knew afterward..." He did not elaborate on what had happened. However, he made it clear that everything was his fault. Hence, he would not change the children's surname.

If a child were to take his surname, they could just have another one. In any case, Lin Xinyan agreed with him.

As for Zong Jinghao, he knew that they had divorced for a short while after getting married.

The children's age seemed to correspond to the series of events.

"The most unfilial act is to not continue your family's bloodline. Although Xichen is your son, he doesn't take your surname. What will his identity be in the future? Will he belong to the Zongs or the Lins?" Wen Qing was still insistent that the two children should have to change their surnames.

Nothing would convince him to accept the fact that the children took their mother's surname.

Zong Jinghao tightened his grip on Lin Xinyan's hand and stroked the back of her palm. She turned around to look at him.

However, he did not meet her gaze. All Lin Xinyan could see was his chiseled side profile. From this angle, she could even see his eyelashes clearly.

With a soft, yet determined voice, he asserted, "We're a married couple. We're one."

Wen Qing stuttered in fury, "Y-You..."

"What did your Dad say?" he asked, thinking that Zong Qifeng should have had a say in this.

However, Zong Qifeng had a clearer understanding than Wen Qing about what had happened. Hence, he did not oppose the children's surname.

After all, Lin Xinyan had personally raised the kids for so many years. If she were willing to change their surnames, he would naturally be overjoyed. However, if she were unwilling, he would not force her to do so either.

“He’s gone old and he’s confused. He’s so enchanted by that woman that he can’t even discern between right and wrong.” Wen Qing’s fury rose, upon the mention of Zong Qifeng. He still could not get over how quickly Zong Qifeng had married Cheng Yuxiu after Wen Xian had passed away.

Lin Xinyan’s body stiffened, knowing clearly who Wen Qing was referring to.

Noticing her slight reaction, Zong Jinghao had a vague understanding of why she would feel that way.

Is she so close to Yuxiu that she’d become nervous every time someone would mention her name?

“That happened a long time ago, so I don’t want to dwell on it further. I know that you’re repulsed by it, but I must tell you something.” A serious expression crossed Wen Qing’s face. “Back then, your father could marry her because he had agreed on one condition. However, I realized recently that she might have broken the agreement...”

“Eat first. Let’s continue chatting after the meal. Anyways, there’s no point in digging up the past, right?” Li Jing placed the alcohol in front of Wen Qing.

He thought for a while. After all, Zong Jinghao did not visit that often. If he told him now, he might not even have the appetite to eat anymore. Hence, he uttered to Li Jing, “I’ll listen to you. Help me pour some alcohol.”

Smiling, Li Jing poured a glass each, for him and Zong Jinghao.

“It’s a joyous occasion today. Drink more with your Uncle, okay?” suggested Li Jing with a grin.

Zong Jinghao nodded.

Lin Xinyan sat beside him distractedly. Wen Qing’s interrupted speech must have had something to do with what Cheng Yuxiu had told her over the phone.

So many years have passed already. Why is he refusing to move on?

In addition to that, everything was planned by Wen Xian. Now, she’s making Cheng Yuxiu bear the consequences.

This is so unfair.

Cheng Yuxiu has sacrificed so much.

"If you're free, bring your kids over to play." Li Jing poured some soup for Lin Xinyan. While the men drank, they ate instead. "I wasn't aware of what you would have liked to eat, so I'm not sure if the dishes today will suit your liking."

Li Jing's voice interrupted Lin Xinyan's train of thoughts. Quickly returning to her senses, she responded with a reassuring smile, "I'm not a picky eater. This is good enough!"

"Alright then, make yourself at home!"

"Okay."

Li Jing was very thoughtful and she kept placing food into the children's bowls.

Wen Qing no longer mentioned anything about Cheng Yuxiu at the dining table. Instead, he chatted with Zong Jinghao about current affairs, politics, and the nation's development.

"We don't understand what they're talking about, anyway." Li Jing placed some vegetables into Lin Xinyan's bowl. "They can chat while we eat."

Lin Xinyan flashed her a smile and nodded politely. Nevertheless, she still felt extremely anxious as she did not know how Zong Jinghao would react if he discovered that the Tea Silk belonged to the Cheng family.

He clearly knew that she had mastered the skill of weaving Tea Silk.

With his intellect, he would definitely associate this with what happened at Baicheng.

She was afraid that this matter could no longer be concealed.

Nonetheless, she felt extremely conflicted. On one hand, she wanted to let Zong Jinghao know of this matter. After all, she did not want to leave him with any regrets. How sad would it be if he had to remain oblivious to his biological mother's identity?

Yet, on the other hand, she wanted to keep him in the dark. She did not want to let Cheng Yuxiu's years of bitterness and tolerance go to waste.

After the meal, Wen Qing summoned Zong Jinghao to the study room, leaving both her and the children in the living room. Li Jing turned the television on for the kids, worried that they would soon grow bored.

She placed the sliced fruits onto the table and called out to the children, "Come and eat some fruits."

Pouting, Lin Ruixi uttered sweetly, "I'm already full."

As she spoke, she even rubbed her stomach. Chuckling, Li Jing offered, "Let me touch your stomach and see if it's protruding."

The little girl giggled as she was tickled.

Lin Xinyan kept shooting glances at the study room, feeling extremely anxious. However, she did not dare to reveal her nervousness to Li Jing.

“What was Uncle going to say just now?” Lin Xinyan tried to elicit some information from Li Jing.

“It’s probably about Yuxiu. After all, he was extremely close with his sister. When Wen Xian passed away, he’d locked himself up for three days, refusing to even eat or drink. The first time I’d ever seen him cry was when Wen Xian had passed away. There’s actually a tender side to such a masculine man like him. He’s always been bothered about Zong Qifeng’s remarriage, so he’s harbored ill feelings towards Yuxiu.”

Li Jing had married Wen Qing just a while before Wen Xian had passed away. Furthermore, as Wen Xian had never really told her about it, she was not very clear about what had happened that year.

Li Jing sighed. “Even till now, he still hasn’t gotten over it. I kept telling him that it was all in the past. Now that we’re getting older, we should just let bygones be bygones. Yet, he’s so stubborn that even I can’t convince him.”

Li Xinyan agreed, “Yeah, everything has happened so long ago. It’s time to get over it. Worrying too much is not good for one’s health too.”

“That’s right. Unfortunately, he just refuses to listen. In my opinion, Yuxiu is quite a good woman. Sometimes, I even think that she’s quite pitiful to not have any children. How can a woman be considered a woman, if she never had a child? It’s going to be a lifelong pity,” lamented Li Jing emotionally.

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Lin Xinyan cast her eyes downwards. Although Yuxiu had given birth to Zong Jinghao, she had missed the critical period of taking care and bonding with her child.

As of current, Zong Jinghao was still very distant from her.

This was not only a lifelong pity for Cheng Yuxiu. She was a miserable, yet noble lady.

If Lin Xinyan was in Yuxiu’s shoes, she might not have been able to do what Yuxiu had done.

“Try to convince Jinghao to stop being so bothered by it.” Li Jing sighed. “I actually understand. If my father married barely a month after my mother had passed away, I might

even have hated the woman. In fact, I might have even possessed an urge to stab her with a knife. Regardless of who experienced this, no one can say for sure that they know exactly how a person would feel.

Yet, Jinghao managed to control his impulses. Although his relationship with Qifeng became tense, he did not cross the line. He's giving Qifeng the cold shoulder because he just can't get over this emotional hurdle. As Jinghao's wife, you should try to counsel him more."

Lin Xinyan nodded gently.

Li Jing was right too. It was impossible to know exactly how he felt in that situation. Only someone who had gone through the exact same thing could truly understand his state of mind.

Upon listening to what Cheng Yuxiu had said, she continuously thought from Yuxiu's perspective on how to persuade Zong Jinghao.

However, she had never stood in Zong Jinghao's shoes, to think about it from his perspective.

He did not know the fact that Cheng Yuxiu was his mother, as well as the complications that had occurred in the past, along with the sacrifices that she had made for him.

Hence, she should approach this issue by thinking from his perspective.

"I'll take my leave first."

At this moment, the study room's door opened. Zong Jinghao soon walked out.

"I'll send you out," offered Wen Qing.

However, Zong Jinghao rejected his offer, saying that it was cold out there. As their car was parked just outside, they could quickly reach the car.

When Lin Xinyan saw the both of them walk out, she stood up from the sofa. Zong Jinghao walked towards her and urged, "Let's go home."

Lin Xinyan nodded.

"It's still early. Why don't you stay a little while longer?" Li Jing tried to hold them back.

"It's okay. It's actually getting late." Lin Xinyan was eager to learn about what Wen Qing had told Zong Jinghao.

Li Jing merely said that out of courtesy. She could tell that Lin Xinyan had really wanted to leave. "Come when you're free."

"We'll definitely visit when we've gotten the chance to." Lin Xinyan helped the children wear their coats, while Li Jing walked over to help as well. "It's Chinese New Year's Eve tomorrow."

"I'll be a year older after the New Year!" declared Lin Ruixi cutely as she blinked.

Li Jing chuckled. "Yeah, a year older. While you kids grow up, your grandaunt will also grow older."

"You're not old, grandaunt," refuted Lin Ruixi.

Li Jing laughed even louder as she praised, "You're such a sweet-talker."

At that moment, Wen Qing walked over and handed them two envelopes.

"As it's your first time here, I've prepared some gift money for you, in celebration of the new year. I'll give it to you again when you visit the next time."

"I'm fine," protested Lin Xinyan, thinking that it was not right for her to accept the bulging envelope. Although Wen Qing was very extreme when it came to Wen Xian, he was still righteous and honest at heart.

"It's for the kids. Plus, it's your first time visiting my house. The money is not only for tradition's sake, but rather, it's also a piece of my sincerity." Wen Qing liked to speak as though he was a high-ranking officer.

Li Jing agreed, "Take it. The children will be happy too. Well, I didn't prepare any gifts for them."

Lin Xinyan instructed the children to thank Wen Qing.

"Thank you, granduncle," exclaimed the children simultaneously.

"You're welcome!" Wen Qing stroked Lin Xichen's head. "Eat well and grow taller, so that you can follow me to the army and become a soldier."

"Okay!" Lin Xichen nodded firmly, looking extremely interested in becoming a soldier.

Standing at the door, Li Jing and Wen Qing watched them take their leave.

Soon, their car sped off. Lin Xinyan sat beside Zong Jinghao, so close that she could smell the faint alcoholic scent on his body.

Unable to hold herself back, Lin Xinyan asked, "What did the both of you talk about in the study room?"

Zong Jinghao had already expected her to ask this question. However, he was surprised that she would ask him so eagerly and quickly.

Leaning against the seat, he gazed at her silently.

Being put at unease by his stare, Lin Xinyan blinked. "Why are you looking at me like that? Is it something that I shouldn't ask about?"

"Yeah."

Lin Xinyan's heart skipped a beat.

When Zong Jinghao noticed the change in Lin Xinyan's expression, he sighed and pulled her into his arms.

"I'll tell you when we reach home."

Laying in his embrace, Lin Xinyan thought about it for a while before saying, "I'm sorry. I kept persuading you to accept Yuxiu, but I never considered how you might have felt."

Zong Jinghao lowered his gaze in surprise and delight. He pulled Lin Xinyan closer to him.

"Shall we change the kids' surnames?" asked Lin Xinyan suddenly.

She had heard Shen Peichuan mention that the children should change their surnames. Back then, she did not take it to heart. However, after witnessing Wen Qing's dramatic reaction, she wondered if it was only right to change their surnames.

After all, she had already accepted Zong Jinghao and the family.

"Why change it?" Zong Jinghao did not see any problems with it.

"If we don't change their surnames, won't they belong to the Lin family?" Truthfully, Lin Xinyan was even more unwilling to let them take the Lin surname. She only did that because she was left with no other choice.

"The children are yours. They have nothing to do with the Lin family." Zong Jinghao had never thought that the children had belonged to the Lin family just because of their surnames. In his opinion, the children belonged to Lin Xinyan. After all, she was pregnant with them for ten months and she had raised them bit by bit. No one was worthy enough to take her place.

Lin Xinyan tugged his collar. "We're a couple now. How would the others think, if they learn that the children have taken my surname?" She teased him on purpose, "Will the others think that it's because you're merely a live-in husband?"

“You’re being so mischievous.” Chuckling hoarsely, he bent down and kissed her ear. “I don’t mind, as long as I can marry you.”

Lin Xinyan shifted away quickly. The chauffeur was right in front of them, but he still acted so brazenly.

His smile grew wider.

When Qin Ya woke up in the hospital, it was already the afternoon.

“Are you hungry?” Su Zhan returned to the hospital after changing into a clean set of clothes. When he saw that she was still asleep, he continued staying by her side.

Instead of going downstairs to buy lunch, he instructed the maids at home to cook and send the dishes over. After all, his grandmother was unused to eating food that was not home-cooked.

As Qin Ya had slept for a really long time, she soon felt a bit dizzy. She sat up for a while before her strength began to return to her body. Gazing at Su Zhan as she rubbed her eyes, the memories flooded through her mind again. She was about to leave earlier when Su Zhan’s grandmother had suddenly gotten a stroke. Hence, she followed them to the hospital...

She stood up from the sofa. “I should leave.”

Clenching his fists, Su Zhan pretended to not hear her. “You’ve slept for a long time. Aren’t you hungry?”

Qin Ya shook her head. “Not really.” Then, she raised her head and glanced at him. “Let’s... let’s end things now.”

Is this woman really that ruthless?

Su Zhan stood up and shrugged. “You can leave. However, since you’d slept with me, you’ll have to compensate me for my emotional distress.”

Qin Ya was rendered speechless, her expression morphing instantly.

He’s acting as gangster-like as he had been before!

“How much do you want?” Qin Ya reached out for her bag as she began to fish for her wallet.

Su Zhan smirked. “How much do you think I’m worth?”

After a moment of contemplation, he suggested, “Five hundred thousand, then.”

He thought that Qin Ya would be unable to afford such a huge sum. Hence, he would have a reason to keep her by his side.

“Do you think that you’re a prince? You aren’t worth that much!” Qin Ya almost cursed at him. Why don’t you rob a bank instead?

Yet, her remaining rationality informed her that this was the hospital. It was rude for her to yell at him, so she held herself back.

Even if he had tried to coax her nicely, he wouldn’t be able to hold her back. After all, this woman was heartless.

Hence, deciding that he had nothing left to lose, he offered, “You should know clearly whether I’m worth that much. Well, that’s an unchangeable fact. If you can’t afford it, stay behind and continue being my wife.”

Qin Ya scoffed furiously. Whipping out a card from her wallet, she threw it onto his face. “Don’t appear before me again!”

Su Zhan was shocked. She can actually afford it!

She’s merely Lin Xinyan’s assistant. How can she have so much in her savings?

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Qin Ya could not even bear to look at his astounded expression.

Wearing her coat and grabbing her bag, she left.

Su Zhan lowered his head and stared at the credit card beside his foot. Picking it up, he quickly chased after Qin Ya, who had just left the room. He grabbed her wrist and dragged her out.

Struggling to break free, Qin Ya yelled furiously, “What are you doing?”

Su Zhan ignored her. Instead, he pulled her to the parking lot and shoved her into the car. To prevent her from alighting, he locked the car door after pushing Qin Ya in.

Furious, Qin Ya slammed her fist against the window repeatedly. “Su Zhan, what are you doing?”

Still ignoring her, Su Zhan rapidly drove out of the hospital.

“If you do this, you’ll only make me despise you further! Not only are you disloyal, but you’re also a shameless bastard! Why did I even agree to marry you? I must’ve been out of my mind!” Qin Ya rubbed her cheeks frantically, trying to calm herself down.

However, when confronted with such a shameless person as Su Zhan, she found that she could not calm herself at all.

He’s so disappointing!

“Aren’t you leaving? Your luggage is still at home, so I’m sending you back to retrieve it,” muttered Su Zhan sarcastically with a smirk. “You call me a heartless scoundrel, but what about you? You’d left immediately, without giving me a second chance. Have you considered how I might’ve felt? I’d contemplated it over and over again before I’d finally decided to marry you. Indeed, my ex-girlfriend has returned. But I don’t love her anymore! Yet, you’d pursued the issue relentlessly, not willing to accord me even a single shred of trust!”

The more Su Zhan spoke, the more upset he became.

“Trust is mutual. If you don’t trust me, how can I trust you?” Qin Ya looked at him. “I’ve given you a chance before. Didn’t I say that you’re not allowed to meet her? Nonetheless, you’d met her multiple times. You had plenty of opportunities to come clean to me, but you didn’t. If you truly cared about me, you’d think of me whenever you’d met her. I won’t be anxious every time you visited her, nor will I feel sad by it. I’m an orphan. Although I was adopted by a nice couple who had given me a happy childhood, I’m still a very insecure person. Do you know how much courage I’d mustered before deciding to marry you?” Her voice turned hoarse. “Do you know how hopeful I was?”

Su Zhan’s eyes reddened. Upon listening to Qin Ya’s accusations, he found that he could not rebuke her statements at all.

Regardless of whatever reason he had, the fact that he had met Liu Feifei was unchangeable.

Qin Ya covered her face with her hands. “We need to calm down.”

The car stopped at the neighborhood’s parking lot.

Su Zhan sat there silently, while silence enshrouded them.

After a while, he broke the silence. “I’m returning this to you.” He placed the credit card on her lap and explained, “I said those words due to a fit of anger. Don’t take it to heart.”

Qin Ya did not move or respond.

Once again, the car fell into another state of silence.

After a while, Qin Ya moved. She pushed open the door and alighted the car quietly.

Although she did not utter a single word, Su Zhan knew what she was going to do. He was overwhelmed by a feeling of powerlessness.

After all, he single-handedly caused this situation to occur. Who else was to blame?

Qin Ya walked out, dragging a suitcase behind her. She walked to the car doors and placed the keys onto the seat. "These are the house keys."

Then, she left. She no longer had any reason to keep the house keys.

Su Zhan remained silent.

Qin Ya glanced at him. Somehow, she could not utter a single farewell. Pulling the suitcase behind her, she walked out of the neighborhood.

Su Zhan opened the car door and gazed at her back. "If you have time, can you visit grandma? She doesn't want us to break up. I'll lie to her, saying that we've reconciled. I don't want her to worry. If you don't visit her, she'll definitely suspect that we haven't gotten back together. Since she's getting old already, can you please do me this favor?"

Qin Ya stopped in her tracks and promised, "I will."

She did not do it for Su Zhan, but for his grandma.

Su Zhan stumbled forward, trying to hold her back. However, as he was unable to find any other excuses, he could only say, "Thank you."

Without even turning back or replying, Qin Ya left with her suitcase.

Su Zhan closed his eyes and squatted down on the floor, not caring about his image anymore. He fervently ruffled at his hair, frustrated at himself for not holding her back.

However, when he thought of his grandmother in the hospital, he had no choice but to pick himself up and return to the hospital to take care of her.

He was not to reveal his inner state of despair to his grandmother.

Su Zhan felt a thousand times worse this time than when Liu Feifei had left him.

When he returned to the hospital, his grandmother was awake. However, as she could no longer speak coherently, as she soon appeared quite crestfallen. After all, not everyone could immediately accept the reality that they could not speak.

"Mm..."

Su Zhan walked over and held her hand.

“Mmmm...” Su Zhan’s grandmother wanted to say something. He patted her hand and asked, “Are you asking about Qin Ya?”

She nodded.

Su Zhan lied, “She’s been a bit tired, so I’ve sent her back to rest.”

Worried that she would not believe him, he added, “She’ll visit when she’s free. Don’t worry and rest well, okay?”

His grandmother held onto his hand. Despite the words that she was bursting to say, she could not utter them right now. In the end, she merely sighed.

All she could do was pray that Su Zhan and Qin Ya would not break up.

“Sleep first. I’ll watch over you,” assured Su Zhan as he patted his grandmother as if he were coaxing a child.

Over at the Zongs, the two children opened the envelopes immediately upon returning home.

The bills were probably just withdrawn from the bank as they were still fresh and crisp. Even the serial numbers were consecutive.

Lin Xichen counted them. “6666.”

Lin Ruixi passed her envelope to her brother. “Count it for me too.”

Lin Xichen glanced at his sister and sighed. Looking as though he had no choice around it, he took her envelope. “We definitely got the same amount of money.”

“How would you know if you didn’t count it?”

“It’s just social etiquette! We are siblings, so we won’t be treated differently.”

“Count it for me,” insisted the little girl.

Lin Xichen had no choice but to take the money out and count it.

While Lin Xichen counted the money, Lin Ruixi became very bored. Hence, she stacked the bills up for fun. Raising her head, she looked at Lin Xichen and asked, “Xichen, how are you going to spend all this money? Will you buy a Chinese New Year’s gift for me?”

Lin Xichen glanced at his sister. “I’m going to buy a present for Mommy.”

She blinked. “Oh, yeah! It’s going to be Mommy’s birthday soon, after Chinese New Year.”

Zong Jinghao was on a call, standing in front of the French Window. When he heard the children's conversation, he glanced at them. Were they talking about Lin Xinyan's birthday just now?

When is it?

When is Lin Xinyan's birthday?

"Call me after you've arranged everything."

After the other party received his instructions, Zong Jinghao hung up the call. It was going to be Chinese New Year tomorrow. Throughout the years, the company had always hosted a gala. However, as Zong Jinghao was absent from the company for a long time this year, the planning for the event started later. In fact, they were still rushing it, a day before Chinese New Year.

The branch companies locally and overseas would also publish their end-of-year report.

When he entered the house, Guan Jing called him and reported this matter to him. Lin Xinyan had gone upstairs, while the children were counting their money on the sofa. Zong Qifeng and Yuxiu were not at home.

Zong Jinghao looked at his son and asked, "When's your Mommy's birthday?"

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After he had finished counting the money, Lin Xichen passed it to his sister and looked at Zong Jinghao. He blinked, his eyelashes fluttering. "You don't even know my Mommy's birthday. How can you call yourself her husband?"

Zong Jinghao was rendered speechless.

He could not even rebuke Lin Xichen. Yeah, he's right. I'm not a qualified husband. We've been married for six years. In fact, it'll be seven years after tomorrow. Our kids are going to be six years old already, yet we've not even slept together yet.

Am I not an unqualified husband?

It's my fault for not giving my wife happiness—in life and in bed.

Although Lin Xichen had already accepted Zong Jinghao, he had never forgotten about how Zong Jinghao had abandoned them. If he wants to win Mommy's heart, he'll need to put in some effort.

"Find out yourself." It was evident that Lin Xichen was unwilling to reveal that piece of information. Crossing his arms over his chest, he announced, "Let me give you a hint. You don't have much time left."

Zong Jinghao raised his eyebrows. Not much time left?

Does this mean that her birthday's going to happen in a few days?

Zong Jinghao crouched down to look his son in the eyes. "Do you believe that I can find out just by asking a single question?"

Nonetheless, Lin Xichen reacted swiftly and slapped a hand over his sister's mouth.

He was afraid that Zong Jinghao would ask his sister. After all, Lin Ruixi was an easily-swayed person who always clung to Zong Jinghao. If he were to ask her, she would definitely spill the beans.

"Don't try to coax my sister." Lin Xichen glared at Zong Jinghao.

On the other hand, Lin Ruixi felt a bit flustered. What's going on?

Why did Xichen suddenly cover my mouth?

"Mmm..."

"What are you doing?" asked Lin Xinyan. When she was walking down the stairs, she saw Lin Xichen covering Lin Ruixi's mouth.

Zong Jinghao glanced at his son and grinned happily. "Just now, Ruixi said that your birthday is on the day after Chinese New Year. Then, Xichen insisted that she was wrong and covered her mouth."

"It's on..."

"Mommy!" interrupted Lin Xichen loudly, worried that she would reveal it.

He glared at Zong Jinghao. "You're playing dirty!"

"I'm not!" Zong Jinghao shrugged. "Aren't we going to rely on our own capabilities?"

This time, Lin Xichen was at a loss for words.

Puzzled, Lin Xinyan patted her son's shoulder and told him to release Lin Ruixi. "If you keep covering her mouth, she'll feel uncomfortable."

"Mommy, don't tell him! Let him find out when's your birthday himself. If he fails to do so, it means that he's insincere," explained Lin Xichen to Lin Xinyan.

She blinked, starting to understand the situation.

Although Lin Xichen had faith in Lin Xinyan, he did not trust his sister that much. Hence, he dragged her to the bedroom. "Follow me to the bedroom!"

"What about my money?" Lin Ruixi stared at her brother pitifully. With all that money, I can buy a lot of things for Mommy.

I can't bear to leave the money there. What if I lose it?

"Mommy, help us pick up the money." Lin Xichen was adamant in preventing his sister from interacting with Zong Jinghao. He's such a cunning man. He almost tricked Lin Xinyan into revealing it!

Lin Xinyan nodded.

After the kids entered the room, Lin Xinyan stared at Zong Jinghao and asked, "Why are you arguing with a child?"

Zong Jinghao sat beside her, while she picked up the money. He took the bills from her hands and helped her pick them up. "Your son provoked me first."

Yeah, I'm actually the victim here.

Lin Xichen bullied me first, okay?

Lin Xinyan rolled her eyes, feeling speechless.

Zong Jinghao placed the money back into the envelopes, which he then put on the table. "Accompany me to a gathering today."

"What meeting?" asked Lin Xinyan. She could guess that this was the company's internal gathering instead of a business gathering.

Before Zong Jinghao could respond, Lin Xinyan rejected his offer, stating, "I don't want to go."

She knew that Zong Jinghao's intention of bringing her to the annual gala was to introduce her identity to the company's staff.

As her relationship with Zong Jinghao was not extremely stable yet, she did not want to be influenced by outsiders.

Still, she acknowledged his goodwill.

Burrowing herself into his arms, she explained, "We didn't even have a wedding ceremony. When we'd decided to get married, it was very secretive and barely anyone knew about it. If I suddenly appear at the company's gala, with you introducing me, what would the others think? If they knew about our children, what kind of speculations would they have? Would they say that I'd married into money? Or that I'd used the children to force you to marry me? Someone like you would attract a lot of gossips. I just want to have a peaceful life with my kids. I know that you're worried about me and that you want me to live openly, but it's better if we take it naturally."

She raised her head and glanced at him. "I understand your kind intentions, but I'm not prepared yet."

Zong Jinghao pursed his lips. He only wanted to introduce her true identity to the others, but he had never considered the negative consequences of announcing it so abruptly. Indeed, if he suddenly declared that he was married, it would invite a lot of speculations.

"What did Uncle tell you?"

Lin Xinyan still wanted to know what Wen Qing and Zong Jinghao talked about, and what they were planning to do.

She needed to know Zong Jinghao's thoughts about it.

Indeed, he did not know about Yuxiu's background, nor did he deliberately investigate it.

This time, he learned from Wen Qing that the Tea Silk belonged to the Chengs.

In exchange for marrying Zong Qifeng, Cheng Yuxiu offered them a skill that had been passed down for generations in her family.

As of now, someone had picked this skill up again.

Wen Qing knew that someone had mastered the skill, but he did not know that it was Lin Xinyan.

When Zong Jinghao heard about it, he was surprised.

He lowered his head and planted a kiss on Lin Xinyan's forehead. Without leaving, he mumbled, "You probably know about the Tea Silk's background, right?"

Although he was asking a question, his tone was affirmative.

Lin Xinyan's heart skipped a beat. Lowering her voice, she forced herself to sound as normal as possible. "When Cheng Yuwen taught me, he informed me that it was the Chengs' ancestral business."

His kiss moved to the corners of her eyes. "Are you still unwilling to tell me?"

Lin Xinyan's body stiffened. "I'd promised that I wouldn't."

So don't force me to do as such.

"Does he want you to take action against me?" asked Lin Xinyan hoarsely.

Indeed, that was what Wen Qing had said. "Initially, she promised me, but she's now going against her words. By breaking our promise, she's pushed it too far. If I didn't know about it, I'd just leave it be. However, now that I am aware of it, I will definitely not just stand aside and do nothing."

Back then, Zong Jinghao did not say anything in defense. He knew that if he had tried to convince Wen Qing against pursuing this matter, it would only serve to raise his suspicion.

Hence, Zong Jinghao tried to shoulder everything himself. Only then could he protect Lin Xinyan and stop Wen Qing from feeling suspicious.

Now, Zong Jinghao suspected that this was all a part of Cheng Yuxiu's evil plot. She deliberately involved Lin Xinyan in this issue, because neither he nor Wen Qing could do anything to Lin Xinyan.

"With me around, no one can harm you." Including Wen Qing.

Lin Xinyan knew that Zong Jinghao was currently stuck between a rock and a hard place.

She did not want to put him in a tough position, nor did she want to ignore what Cheng Yuxiu had told her.

Cheng Yuxiu had sacrificed too much for Zong Jinghao's sake. Did she even have to give up a skill that had been passed down for generations?

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"I won't let anyone know about this yet." She wanted to put matters relating to the Tea Silk and the fashion show on hold first.

It did not mean that she was going to give up on them. Rather, she was waiting for an appropriate opportunity.

If she insisted on pursuing this matter regardless of everything else, she would only make things more difficult for Zong Jinghao.

Fortunately, there was still a lot of time.

His kiss slid to her ears as he uttered hoarsely, "You're still unwilling to tell me."

Sweat dotted her forehead and nose. Her body trembled while her mind was in a state of turmoil.

In the end, she still decided to keep silent about it.

At three in the afternoon, Guan Jing called Zong Jinghao, informing him that everything was now ready. He could head over now.

Standing at the porch, Lin Xinyan tidied his collar and tie attentively. He hugged her waist and asked her, "What if I don't want to go anymore?"

Lin Xinyan replied, "If you aren't afraid of demotivating your staff, you don't need to go."

The employees from the headquarter and branch offices would be there. In fact, just by counting the members from the upper management, there were already two hundred people. As it was rare to see Zong Jinghao even once a year, it would be quite unpardonable if he did not show up at the gala.

Zong Jinghao pinched her cheek, his eyes scanning her face carefully. As his fingers stroked her lips, he asked, "Will you wait for me until I return home?"

Lin Xinyan nodded. "Yeah."

"I'll come back as soon as possible." He planted a gentle kiss on her soft and tender lips. The longer he kissed her, the more addictive it became. Hence, he hugged her waist and deepened the kiss.

Click!

They heard the door open. Lin Xinyan pushed him away hurriedly, while Zong Jinghao released her.

Zong Qifeng and Cheng Yuxiu entered. Looking at how neatly dressed Zong Jinghao was, Zong Qifeng asked, "You're going out?"

"I'm going to the office," replied Zong Jinghao curtly.

Zong Qifeng did not say anything either. After all, he had stopped managing the company for a long time and he had complete faith in Zong Jinghao's abilities. There was nothing else for him to instruct.

Lin Xinyan held the coat up for Zong Jinghao, who reached his arms into the sleeves. He shrugged slightly and the coat fit onto his body snugly. It was a high-quality grey woolen coat, without any creases on it. When he wore the coat, he exuded a dignified and exceptional aura.

Lin Xinyan sent him out.

As it was cold outside, Zong Jinghao told her to head back into the house.

Watching the car drive out of the courtyard, Lin Xinyan closed the door and entered the house.

“Did you visit the Wen family?” The moment Lin Xinyan turned around, she saw Cheng Yuxiu standing behind her.

She answered honestly, “Yes.”

“He didn’t place you in a difficult position, right?”

“No. He doesn’t know that it’s me and Jinghao tried to deflect him. I think that he probably won’t know anytime soon.” If he remained oblivious, he would not take any action.

However, even if he knew something, Wen Qing would not act as ruthlessly as he had before. After all, she was Zong Jinghao’s wife.

She could tell that Zong Jinghao was very important to him.

As for the children’s surname, Wen Qing was not so bothered about whether they had followed the Zong family’s surname. Instead, it was about whether they had followed Zong Jinghao’s surname.

After Zong Qifeng had married Cheng Yuxiu, Wen Qing no longer had any feelings left for his ex-brother-in-law.

Cheng Yuxiu heaved a sigh of relief. “That’s good, then.”

She was afraid that she would cause Lin Xinyan trouble.

Cheng Yuxiu beckoned Lin Xinyan over to the sofa, before instructing the maids to pour them two cups of steaming tea.

“We went to Wen Xian’s grave today.” She and Zong Qifeng would go there every year. “Initially, we wanted to invite you along. However, as you still have two kids to take care of, I didn’t ask you to come.”

No matter what, Wen Xian took care of Zong Jinghao for six years on her behalf. Although Wen Qing was quite mean to her, Wen Xian never did anything wrong.

After all, she was willing, right from the start.

Chen Yuxiu took a sip of the tea and asked, "What do you want to eat for dinner? I'll cook for you."

As Lin Xinyan did not have much appetite, she answered, "Anything's fine."

Cheng Yuxiu smiled. "Okay, then. I'll just cook a few dishes. You don't look too well. Go and rest!"

Indeed, Lin Xinyan felt a bit exhausted.

There was still quite a while before nighttime. She soon agreed, "Then I'll take a short nap."

"Go on." Cheng Yuxiu waved her hands.

Laying on the bed, Lin Xinyan unknowingly drifted off to sleep. Even when the sun began to set, she still had not woken up yet. It was the knocking on the door that had jolted her back to reality.

"Mommy, it's time for dinner," Lin Xichen called out.

She stood up, washed her face, and went downstairs. Other than Zong Jinghao, everyone was present in the dining room.

Initially, she had wanted to take a short nap before helping Cheng Yuxiu for dinner. Unfortunately, she had overslept in the end.

It was quite inappropriate of her to sleep, while her elders had labored.

"Why didn't you wake me up earlier?"

"Don't be so polite! You were outside for such a long time. Now that you've returned, you deserve a good rest." Cheng Yuxiu poured her a bowl of nutritious soup and passed it to her. "It's suitable to drink this during the winter."

Lin Xinyan received it with both hands. The soup was still steaming when she took a sip of it. It was quite hot, with a slight hint of ginseng.

"I've added red ginseng to it. It's good for women. Drink more later, when you have the appetite," reminded Cheng Yuxiu.

Lin Xinyan nodded. "Thanks, Mom."

"You're welcome!" replied Cheng Yuxiu brightly. Even if she could not hear her son call her 'Mom', she was still happy to be acknowledged by her daughter-in-law.

After dinner, the maids cleared the table. Cheng Yuxiu offered to take care of the two children, as she helped in getting them to bathe and sleep. As the children had met her before, they were familiar with her and were willing to interact with her.

Lin Xinyan was happy to let Cheng Yuxiu help. Since Zong Jinghao was not around either, it was good for them to spend some time together.

After watching the television with the two kids, she headed upstairs.

Glancing at the clock, she realized that it was barely nine o'clock. As she had slept too much in the afternoon, she no longer felt tired. She took a shower and changed into her white, silk sleeping gown. Then, she picked a book that she liked and started reading it on the bed.

As time ticked by, it was already past midnight and she began to feel tired. Yawning, she placed the bookmark on the page she was reading, closed the book, and placed it on the table. She then pulled the sheets over her body and turned the bedside lamp off. Just as she was about to sleep, she heard the door open downstairs.

As it was late into the night, she could hear even the slightest noise.

She turned the bedside lamp on again.

Soon, she heard footsteps coming up the stairs...

The door was pushed open quickly.

Through the faint golden glow of the lamp, he could see the woman lying on the bed while staring at him. "You aren't asleep yet?"

"I'm waiting for you."

Lin Xinyan glanced at the white specks on his shoulder and asked, "Is it snowing outside?"

Only then did Zong Jinghao realize that he was still wearing his coat. Casting his gaze to the side, he saw a few snowflakes on his shoulder. They must have landed on him when he had alighted the car as he walked towards the house.

"Yeah," he replied. Afraid of bringing the cold air into the room, he hung the coat on the coat rack before walking in.

Then, he closed the door and approached Lin Xinyan.

Gazing at him, she moved to the edge of the bed. Her jet-black hair was scattered messily over her shoulders, while her fair, flawless skin had a rosy tint to it. Even her pink lips were as moist and alluring as that of a rose petal, giving one the urge to taste them.

Bending down, he inched closer to Lin Xinyan. She could smell a scent on his body. There was a slight smell of alcohol, though it was not too pungent.

“Did you drink today?”

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“A little.” The managers from the branch offices had been coaxing him to drink, so he had to take a few sips.

Zong Jinghao came closer to her face as he spoke. Lin Xinyan could feel his breath tickling her cheeks and she soon turned away from him, but Zong Jinghao gripped her chin and turned her face back towards his. “Do I smell bad?” he asked while making her look at him.

Lin Xinyan nodded. “You reeked of alcohol. How do you feel about that?”

“Oh. Then I’d better wash up now.” Zong Jinghao chuckled. “Would you like to wash up with me?”

Lin Xinyan pushed him away as her face became a shade of crimson red. “Stop teasing me.”

Zong Jinghao’s grin widened further as he got up and went to the bathroom.

Soon enough, the sounds of running water sounded from the bathroom.

Wrapping herself in a blanket, Lin Xinyan could not help but feel nervous out of the blue.

“Get me my clothes, please.” Zong Jinghao’s husky voice sounded out from the bathroom after he was done.

Lin Xinyan looked up at the glass door of the bathroom. Only then did she recall that she had worn the one and only bathrobe inside the bathroom and that Zong Jinghao had nothing to wear now.

Goodness! I’ve forgotten to put another one inside. Lin Xinyan could not help but smack her forehead in regret.

She went to the wardrobe to get him a brand new bathrobe, which she had bought shortly before moving over. Lin Xinyan removed the price tag of the robe before knocking on the door. “Here.”

Soon enough, Zong Jinghao opened the door. Before she could react, Zong Jinghao grabbed her wrist and pulled her inside. After pulling her in, he pressed her against the cold, tiled walls.

He had just finished his shower, hence the bathroom was misty with vapor, from the hot shower. His firm and naked body still dripped with droplets of water.

“What are you... Mhm...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Zong Jinghao trapped her lips in a passionate kiss.

...

The kiss then turned into a heated love-making session behind the glass door, which continued for a long time as the couple danced and drowned themselves in their fiery feelings of passion.

Lin Xinyan had lost track of time as fatigue overcame her. By the time Zong Jinghao had finally decided to stop, she only knew that she had turned into a lump of jelly. She would have collapsed right then if he hadn't supported her.

In her blurry state, Zong Jinghao carried her back to the bed, as she wrapped her blanket around herself. To her misfortune, Zong Jinghao still continued his assault on her lips, despite how tired she was. Poor Lin Xinyan had no choice but to muster all her strength as she bit on his attacking lips hard. Zong Jinghao frowned at the sudden pain before he soon relaxed. “Still want to continue?” he asked in his muffled voice.

“You horny idiot!” Lin Xinyan scolded accusingly. Unfortunately, her voice turned out like a cute whimper instead, due to her weakened state.

Seeing the countless number of hickeys on her body, Zong Jinghao knew that she was really tired this time. Hence, he did not press on further and merely hugged her to sleep. “Yes, I know that I'm an idiot. I'm the biggest idiot here,” Zong Jinghao cooed while patting her back soothingly.

Lin Xinyan slept very soundly this time. By the time she woke up, there was no sign of Zong Jinghao beside her.

She took her handphone from the table to check the time and widened her eyes in horror. It's already one o'clock? Did I sleep the whole morning away?

My God! Zong Jinghao's parents are here too! How does that make me appear, waking up this late?

What will the elders think of me, after this incident?

Lin Xinyan kicked her blanket off frantically. Perhaps it was due to the aggressive love-making from the night before, her knees buckled the moment she had touched the floor.

She had almost fallen. Fortunately, she was quick to catch hold of the table to prevent her fall. She only dared to take baby steps towards the toilet after stabilizing herself. When she reached the bathroom, Lin Xinyan finally had a proper look at the hickeys covering her body. Goodness! This is embarrassing! How am I supposed to cover these up? Lin Xinyan thought with a frown as she cursed Zong Jinghao internally.

After washing up herself, she took out a black turtleneck, pairing it with a checkered skirt before going downstairs.

She was relieved to see that Zong Qifeng and Cheng Yuxiu were not in the living room. If it were otherwise, she would have been terribly embarrassed to meet them.

“Good morning,” Aunt Yu greeted upon seeing Lin Xinyan. It was New Year’s Eve today, and everyone was here, in Zong Jinghao’s place now. Hence, Zong Jinghao had invited Aunt Yu over to celebrate the Chinese New Year with them.

Lin Xinyan ran her hand through her hair to cover up her face. She merely hummed in reply without looking at Aunt Yu.

Zong Jinghao shut his laptop upon hearing his wife’s voice and stood up from the sofa. “You must be hungry now?”

Nonetheless, Lin Xinyan made it evident that she was upset at him as she gave him the cold shoulder before heading for the dining hall downstairs.

Aunt Yu uttered with a smile, “I’ve just heated your meal in the kitchen. Let me serve it to you.”

Lin Xinyan pulled out a chair and sat down while Aunt Yu served her the warmed dishes. When Zong Jinghao entered the hall, Aunt Yu immediately retired knowingly, while she uttered, “It’s snowing outside. I’m going out to enjoy the beautiful scene now.”

With his hands supporting the table by her sides, Zong Jinghao leaned down from behind and trailed his lips against her ear. “You’re mad at me?”

Lin Xinyan continued to ignore him while sipping on her soup.

Zong Jinghao planted his kiss on her cheeks instead. The more Lin Xinyan ignored him, the more he had tried to annoy her, as his hands slowly sneaked beneath her sweater...

“Zong Jinghao!” Lin Xinyan yelled and stood up to glare at him. “Do you know how shameless you are? What if anyone sees you behaving in such a manner? Do you want to die of embarrassment?”

Zong Jinghao found her mad and reddened face adorable instead, as he chuckled lightly, reminding her, “There’s no one at home now.”

Cheng Yuxiu and Zong Qifeng had brought the twins out to play, and they would only return at night.

What? There's no one at home now!

"Then why didn't you wake me up this morning? You're not the only one who stays here! Your parents are here, and our children are here, yet the whole family is awake. All except for me. What does that make me, in the eyes of your parents? Did it ever cross your mind of how embarrassing that is for me?"

"But you looked so tired." It was late in the night when he had returned home, and even at that, he couldn't control himself when making love with her. By the time they were done, it was already morning and Lin Xinyan had only just managed to sleep then. How would he have the heart to wake her when she was sleeping so soundly then?

Zong Jinghao came over to hug her, only to have his hands slapped away by his wife.

After such an experience last night, the poor woman had started to develop a phobia against his intimacy.

Zong Jinghao ignored her protests and trapped her forcefully between his arms. He had even crossed her arms and pinned them to her chest, in an effort to stop her from struggling. With his firm chest against her back, Zong Jinghao leaned down and whispered in her ears again. "Did I hurt you last night?"

Lin Xinyan lowered her eyes in embarrassment. She had been begging him to stop, the night before, but not once did he go soft on her.

The poor woman could still feel the embarrassing soreness between her legs.

Zong Jinghao buried his head into her affectionately. He knew that he had lost control, the moment he had felt himself inside of her. The only thing that he had in mind then, was to pleasure her and to become one with her.

"I have no idea why either. I just couldn't control myself," he mumbled into her neck.

He had been living a single life of abstinence for over thirty years, which explained his high sex drive and insatiable appetite, the night before.

Zong Jinghao lifted his head from her neck and rubbed his face against hers. "I'll be gentle, next time."

Lin Xinyan struggled to get away from him. "Can I... not?"

"No way!" I can comply with anything, but not this one!

Worried he would scare her off, Zong Jinghao continued to coax her gently. "I am a normal man with needs. You know that I'll fall sick if I practice abstinence for too long. Can we do it three times a day?"

Last night was like the first night of marriage to him, as it was the first time he had finally made love to her while being awake.

Lin Xinyan felt speechless at his insatiable sexual needs.

Three times a day is too much for me! "Once a day."

"No!"

"Then there's no need to negotiate further." Lin Xinyan held her ground firmly.

Zong Jinghao blinked his eyes pleadingly. His long eyelashes brushed against the corner of her eyes, which caused her to turn away from the itch. Zong Jinghao thought that his wife was mad at him and sighed internally.

"Fine, once a day then." I shall make that one and only session longer if that's the case.

Yup, that way, I won't lose out much.

Zong Jinghao kissed her eyelids and trailed his lips down her cheek towards her neck.

Lin Xinyan groaned in annoyance. "I haven't eaten yet."

Zong Jinghao paused and let go of her reluctantly. Oh, yes. She looks so skinny already. If I don't feed her well, I might even break her waist while bedding her.

Suddenly, Zong Jinghao's phone rang from the sofa.

Lin Xinyan was relieved to have a reason to push him away. "Go and answer your phone."

"Sit down first." Zong Jinghao pulled out the chair for her.

Lin Xinyan obliged and sat down obediently. "You should eat more. You look too skinny now," Zong Jinghao uttered while kissing her forehead.

Lin Xinyan did not answer him as she munched on her lunch.

Zong Jinghao smiled at how hungry she had looked before picking up the call.

Shen Peichuan's voice sounded from the other end of the line.

"Is this Jinghao?" Shen Peichuan was afraid that the one who had answered the call was Lin Xinyan instead, hence he had to check first.

His voice sounded urgent from the earpiece.

Zong Jinghao frowned at the urgency in his tone. "Yes, I am."

Shen Peichuan finally dared to convey his message out loud. "Lin Guoan is dead."

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Zong Jinghao glanced at his wife with a deep frown. He was not uneasy over Lin Guoan's death. Rather, he was uneasy over his intuition that Lin Guoan's death must have been related to Zhuang Zijin.

From the day when she had decided to remarry Lin Guoan, Zong Jinghao already had a bad feeling about this. As predicted by him, Lin Guoan was dead, on New Year's Eve.

Zong Jinghao went to the window and only spoke after making sure that Lin Xinyan couldn't hear him. "Where was he found dead?"

"At his home. I'm at the crime scene now. This news came as a shock to me as well. He just died so suddenly, without any sickness or injuries. Is this karma coming into play?" Shen Peichuan rambled on.

Naturally, Zong Jinghao brushed that superstition off.

"I'll go over now." If it weren't for the fact that this incident involved Lin Xinyan's relatives, Zong Jinghao wouldn't even have bothered to pay heed to such a matter.

In fact, Lin Guoan's death was not enough to make him take this matter into his own hands. He was worried that Zhuang Zijin was involved in his death, and that was why he had to take care of it.

For so many years, Lin Xinyan and Zhuang Zijin were inseparable as they pulled through their hardships together. They had a very connected mother-daughter relationship. Although Lin Xinyan was mad at Zhuang Zijin for not listening to her as she insisted on remarrying Lin Guoan, Zong Jinghao could see that his wife still cared for her mother deeply.

It would be good if Zhuang Zijin were not involved in this case. But if she is...

Zong Jinghao hung up the call and returned to the dining hall. Lin Xinyan still continued to ignore him as she enjoyed her meal.

A strand of her hair slid over her shoulders as she lowered her head. Zong Jinghao tucked the loose strand behind her ear and uttered softly, "I'm going out now."

Lin Xinyan hummed in reply.

"There's no one else at home today, so you can go back and sleep for a while after you're done eating," Zong Jinghao added gently.

Lin Xinyan nodded and asked, "You're going to your company?"

Zong Jinghao hesitated and lied, "Su Zhan and Shen Peichuan have asked me to join them for lunch."

"Oh, okay. Don't drink too much. It's bad for your health," Lin Xinyan uttered in concern.

Zong Jinghao was surprised by the concern in her voice, and his eyes curved into a hearty grin. For so many years, there was no one else who actually cared about his health, and Lin Xinyan was the first. He kissed his wife affectionately as warmth enveloped him. "Wait for me to come back."

Lin Xinyan pushed him lightly. "Go now. Don't keep them waiting."

Zong Jinghao hummed in reply and left with his coat.

Right after Zong Jinghao had left, Aunt Yu entered from the courtyard.

She removed her snow-covered coat at the entrance and saw that Lin Xinyan was still by the dining table. The hems of Lin Xinyan's sweater were rolled up slightly, revealing a bruise on her waist.

Aunt Yu thought that her eyes were playing tricks on her and approached Lin Xinyan to check on her waist.

She rounded her eyes in horror when she saw that it was really a bruise. "Your waist..."

Hearing that, Lin Xinyan pulled her sweater down frantically.

"Did Young Master Jinghao hit you? Does he have a tendency for violence?" Aunt Yu's eyes were filled with disbelief. Who else could have hit her if not Zong Jinghao?

"No, I fell down and knocked my waist last night," Lin Xinyan lied.

Aunt Yu still refused to believe her. "How did you end up knocking your waist?"

Lin Xinyan lowered her head and let her hair cover her beet-red face. "I slipped in the toilet, that's how I knocked my waist. Excuse me, I'm going up first."

Afraid that Aunt Yu would pester her further, Lin Xinyan got up and escaped from the dining room frantically.

Aunt Yu eyed the unfinished bowl of soup and called out, "Are you full? You haven't finished your soup yet."

"I'm full now."

Without turning back, Lin Xinyan ran into her room and closed the door. After panting out a heavy sigh, she raised her sweater to check her waist in the mirror. Only then did she see the bruise on the back of her waist. No wonder it feels so painful here! That horny Zong Jinghao had been taking me by the side of the sink last night!

She then loosened the fly of her skirt and tucked the sweater in, in case the hem of her sweater rolled upwards to reveal her waist again.

When she was done, the tired Lin Xinyan plopped herself on her bed. To her misfortune, she couldn't sleep at all, even after quite some time.

Since she couldn't sleep, Lin Xinyan got up again and went downstairs. Aunt Yu was wiping the dining table now. They had booked a place at a renowned restaurant for their reunion dinner, so Aunt Yu was not busy at all as she didn't have to cook.

"Aunt Yu, let's go shopping." Lin Xinyan decided to get some presents for her kids and the elders for the Chinese New Year celebration.

Aunt Yu nodded with a smile. "Sure! But you should wear something thicker. It's snowing outside."

Lin Xinyan took note of that and returned upstairs to get her handbag and coat. The driver was on holiday now, so Lin Xinyan would be the one driving. Aunt Yu wanted to take the backseat, but Lin Xinyan insisted for her to sit in the passenger's seat instead.

Her act surprised Aunt Yu greatly. Although she was favored by Zong Jinghao, she was always aware of her status as a mere servant to the Zong family.

Nevertheless, Lin Xinyan merely smiled. "We are a family, so don't be so distant with me."

With that, Aunt Yu finally took the passenger's seat. Despite the cold weather, Aunt Yu felt that she was wrapped in warmth by Lin Xinyan's kind gesture.

"Young Master Jinghao is lucky to have married you." She was not praising Lin Xinyan because of her beautiful face alone. She was praising her for her kindness and down-to-earth personality towards the servants, seeing as Lin Xinyan had never acted like a stuck-up woman who had married into a rich family.

Most of the maids who worked for rich families were always treated like slaves or even discriminated against, as though they were thieves who would steal their properties. Getting

scolded by their masters was common for maids and housekeepers, especially when they did something that was not in their master's favor.

Aunt Yu thought that she was lucky enough to be serving kind families like the Zongs and the Wens, but never had she expected that an outsider like Lin Xinyan would be just as easygoing as the two families too.

In contrast, it never crossed Lin Xinyan's mind of how kind her gesture was. To her, Aunt Yu was merely someone who she should respect, as she was the one who had taken care of Zong Jinghao throughout his life.

As much as she didn't want to think so, Lin Xinyan knew that Aunt Yu was the one who was by Zong Jinghao's side most of his life, instead of Cheng Yuxiu and herself.

Zong Jinghao's undivided trust towards her was enough to show that Aunt Yu was indeed a kind and selfless woman.

Soon enough, they arrived at the mall.

According to the Lunar traditions, tomorrow would be the start of the year of the Rat, hence the place was lavishly decorated with red and gold decorations of the rat. The mall was still crowded with people coming out for some last-minute shopping before the Chinese New Year.

Lin Xinyan and Aunt Yu started to walk around the ground floor. The ground floor mainly consisted of the kid's zone with foods and clothes for children. Since the twins were not with her now, Lin Xinyan planned to get something here for them.

Being the mother she was, Lin Xinyan was very familiar with their favorites and soon came out with bags of food and new clothes.

They then proceeded to the second floor. When they passed by a menswear store, Lin Xinyan spotted a nice suit that would look good on Zong Jinghao at the display window. Thus, she entered.

Aunt Yu followed her in with a smile. She found that Lin Xinyan now looked exactly like a normal married woman who was shopping for both her husband and kids.

A heartwarming sight indeed.

Zong Jinghao usually wore dark-colored suits, which were either black, grey, or dark blue with no patterns and designs. However, this particular suit which Lin Xinyan had spotted for him had dark checkers that would reflect a light hint of blue when shone underneath the light. For Zong Jinghao's lean figure, this suit would be perfect for him, as the patterns were not that obvious, suiting his tastes for simple-looking suits.

The shop attendant praised Lin Xinyan for her choice. "That's a wonderful choice from you. Our store specializes in high-end business wear for men, and this suit that you've chosen is

our limited edition. Your husband can wear it to any formal occasion and would give off a staid and serious vibe with its dark colors.”

Lin Xinyan checked the price tag and was stunned in her place; the price came up to a grand figure of a hundred and eight thousand.

For the entirety of her life, she had never once bought herself such an expensive piece of clothing before.

However, she really liked the suit, and soon she asked the attendant. “Do you have any discounts?”

The attendant shook her head. “I’m sorry, there’s no discount at the moment. If you think that this suit is too pricey, you can check out the other cheaper suits over there. They range from around thirty to sixty thousand, so they should be more affordable for you.”

For any high-end menswear store, the cheapest set of suits would also be worth around ten thousand. However, when Lin Xinyan compared the cheap ones with Zong Jinghao’s set of suits, she realized that even the lousiest ones that he owned were of much better in quality than most of the suits in the store.

He is rich, of course, he can afford to buy the best suits available. I don’t have so much money to spend like him.

Nonetheless, I can’t expect him to wear such a lousy suit, right? With that, Lin Xinyan gritted her teeth and asked the shop attendant to wrap up the painstaking suit that she had chosen.

Poor Lin Xinyan could feel her heart bleeding when she swiped her card.

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After Lin Xinyan came out of the menswear store, they continued on their shopping spree and she bought Cheng Yuxiu a nice fur coat. When they passed by another boutique, Lin Xinyan spotted a black cashmere coat that would suit Aunt Yu perfectly. She then asked the shop attendant to get the coat for Aunt Yu to try on.

Aunt Yu waved her hands in shock. “I don’t need this! I have enough clothes to wear myself. Don’t take it for me.”

“Your daughter just wants to be filial to you, so you should try it. Nice clothes would make you look younger.” Judging from Aunt Yu’s age, the shop attendant assumed that Aunt Yu was Lin Xinyan’s mother and not her mother-in-law, as it was rather rare for women to shop for clothes with their in-laws.

From the shop attendant's experience, it had always been a mother-daughter duo, which was why she had said as such, to persuade Aunt Yu to try on the coat.

Aunt Yu's face paled at her words as she scolded the shop attendant. "What nonsense are you speaking of? This is my young mistress, and I'm her servant. How can you say such words to embarrass me?"

Lin Xinyan patted Aunt Yu's shoulder soothingly. "Don't be mad, it's fine! You're about my mom's age, anyway."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." The shop attendant was stunned momentarily before she soon apologized to them. This was the first time she had actually seen someone buying clothes for their maid; a coat of good quality, in fact.

How is it possible that there's still such a kind-hearted, rich woman in this world? The shop attendant thought internally.

This is a real eye-opener for me.

"Then you should take her offer and try on the coat! There are not many people who are lucky enough to be employed by such a kind-hearted young mistress." The shop attendant was desperate for her commission, hence she really wanted Aunt Yu to try on the coat and buy it.

"Go and try it on." Lin Xinyan smiled.

"But..."

"Come with me then! I'll bring you to the changing room." Without further ado, the shop attendant dragged Aunt Yu to the changing room.

Aunt Yu was a petite lady, which was why the short coat that she had tried on looked really good on her.

"See how good you look in this coat!" The shop attendant praised.

"Then I'll take this one."

"I really have enough clothes to wear. I don't need such a nice coat." Aunt Yu grabbed the attendant to stop her from wrapping the coat.

"Oh, I'm not buying this as a gift for you. I expect you to take good care of Xichen and Ruixi in the future," Lin Xinyan uttered purposefully.

“Taking care of them is my responsibility,” Aunt Yu answered. “Besides, I’m paid to do so.”

Zong Jinghao had always been kind to her. Throughout the years, all the credit cards that he had given her had no spending limitations.

That only served to show how reliable and trustworthy she was, in the eyes of Zong Jinghao.

“You are so lucky! I’ve never come across such a kind-hearted boss myself. I’m so envious, you know.” The shop attendant joked, “Shall I work in your stead then?”

Aunt Yu waved her hands frantically. “Oh, no way.”

She was worried that others could not take care of the family well. It was not because she was reluctant to let go of such a high-paying job, leaving her kind employer.

The shop attendant quickly wrapped the coat whilst Aunt Yu was distracted.

By the time Aunt Yu realized the coat was wrapped up, she knew that she couldn’t reject the gift anymore and left the store with it after Lin Xinyan had paid for it.

After three hours of shopping, their hands were now full of shopping bags.

When they descended downstairs, Lin Xinyan passed by a winter clothing store by the name of AQ. Back when she was still living in Country A as a kid, she was terribly afraid of winter months, as Zhuang Zijin was poor and couldn’t afford to buy warm winter clothes for her.

When she was twelve, Zhuang Zijin had used all of her earnings for the month to buy a down jacket for her, and she could still remember that it was bought from AQ.

That was the warmest piece of clothing that she had ever worn.

Lin Xinyan turned around to face Aunt Yu. “Wait for me in the car.”

Aunt Yu nodded and left with their bags.

Lin Xinyan entered AQ once Aunt Yu had left.

“These are our latest designs. Feel free to have a look here.” The shop attendant welcomed her.

However, Lin Xinyan did not follow her recommendations. Instead, she turned to another area.

For many years, Lin Xinyan could never find the same design that her mother had once bought her. I bet that it’s out of fashion now.

After all, it has been so long.

The shop attendant followed her and recommended, "These are winter wear for people in their middle ages. Are you going to buy it for yourself or as a gift?"

Lin Xinyan spotted a knee-length grey down jacket with a mink coat hood. She remembered that Zhuang Zijin had rheumatism, due to the extreme winter coldness in Country A, which was why she was fond of long down jackets that could cover her knees.

Zhuang Zijin was about 165cm tall, so she would look good in long down jackets.

Lin Xinyan stroked the fine fabric of the down jacket as she recalled her past with Zhuang Zijin. "Is there an M size for this one?"

The attendant shook her head. "We only have L, XL, and XXL. If you really want an M size, I can get it from the headquarters and courier it to you, if you have no time to collect it yourself."

Lin Xinyan pondered over the suggestion. "Then please get it from your headquarters."

"Alright. Would you like to collect it yourself or have us send it to you?"

"I'll give you an address and please send it right there." Lin Xinyan was afraid that she would quarrel with Zhuang Zijin again if she had met her directly, hence she requested for the store to send it over on her behalf.

"Alright. Please write it down here." The shop attendant handed her a paper and a pen. "Please leave your contact details too, so that we can contact you once the jacket has arrived at its destination."

Lin Xinyan hummed in reply while writing down the Lin residence's address and her contact, before paying for the jacket.

Meanwhile, in the Lin Residence.

The household was sealed by the police cordon, while the maids and Zhuang Zijin were brought back by the cops for further investigation. It turned out that Lin Guoan had died in his bed, and the forensic doctor was doing an autopsy to assess his cause of death.

"There's no sign of fighting or physical struggle in the bedroom. According to the maid, Zhuang Zijin's relationship with Lin Guoan had been close, and she would cook for Lin Guoan every day. They were inseparable, so she doesn't think that this is a case of murder."

Initially, Shen Peichuan had also suspected Zhuang Zijin of murdering Lin Guoan, as Lin Guoan had been terrible to her before that.

Surprisingly, when he arrived at the crime scene, he didn't find any evidence of a murder at all.

Zong Jinghao raised his eyes and glanced at Shen Peichuan. "If you were in Zhuang Zijin's shoes, would you have forgiven a man who has betrayed you, abandoned you for years, and who was indirectly caused the death of your child?"

Shen Peichuan gave it a thought and shook his head. "Of course not! I'm not crazy enough to..."

Shen Peichuan halted midway, suddenly realizing the meaning of Zong Jinghao's words. "You mean, you're suspecting..."

"I'm not suspecting." Zong Jinghao was certain that this was a murder. He didn't think that Lin Guoan's death shortly after his remarriage to Zhuang Zijin was a coincidence, especially when Zhuang Zijin had been so insistent on remarrying him.

At that moment, the forensic team came down from upstairs.

Shen Peichuan approached them immediately. "Any clue?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes."

Shen Peichuan frowned. "What have you found?"

"I can't confirm the cause of death yet. I can only tell you after the lab test," the doctor replied.

"Then when will the results be out?" Shen Peichuan asked.

"Latest by the day after tomorrow," the doctor answered.

"Alright. Time to clear out. Bring the body back." Shen Peichuan ordered his subordinates.

He then returned to Zong Jinghao's side. "What if it really is Zhuang Zijin..."

Shen Peichuan trailed off. If it was really Zhuang Zijin who had murdered Lin Guoan, then she would be charged with murder. How is Lin Xinyan going to take this?

"Don't let this news get out." Now was not the worst yet, as there was no evidence to prove that Zhuang Zijin was the one who had murdered Lin Guoan.

Chapter 322

All they could do now was to hide this murder from Lin Xinyan first until everything was confirmed.

"Do inform me of any progress." Zong Jinghao checked the time. "I've got to leave now."

“Alright.”

When they reached the door, Zong Jinghao paused in his stride.

“Since you’re all alone, come and join us for the reunion dinner.”

Shen Peichuan was not a local and his family was not in B City with him. Even in the past, he had hardly spent New Year’s Eve with his own family and would often gather with Zong Jinghao and Su Zhan instead. But this year, Su Zhan was married, and Zong Jinghao had to spend the new year with his kids. With the two of them being unable to gather outside, the still single Shen Peichuan was now lonelier than ever.

“Sure.”

Shen Peichuan smiled. “I thought that the both of you had forgotten about me after getting married.”

Zong Jinghao reminded him. “Don’t spill the tea.”

“I know that.”

With that, Zong Jinghao turned around and walked out of the villa. It was snowing heavily now, and his grey coat danced, in the icy cold wind as a small flake of snow hung on his hair. Taking out his car key, Zong Jinghao unlocked his car and climbed inside immediately.

He then rolled down his car window and gazed at the villa. When the villa was almost covered in snow, only then did he retract his gaze, as he soon drove away.

When he arrived home, Zong Jinghao could see the two red lanterns hanging on the eaves, which shone brightly through the falling snow.

He was then greeted by the sight of his children hanging up the Chinese New Year decorations. It was their first time spending the New Year with a complete family, hence they were very excited and had fun decorating the household.

Staying close to them were Zong Qifeng and Cheng Yuxiu, who were afraid that the children would fall down and hurt themselves.

Aunt Yu came over to take his coat.

“Where’s Xinyan?” Zong Jinghao asked.

“In the room,” Aunt Yu answered.

“She slept for the whole afternoon?” Zong Jinghao asked again.

Aunt Yu shook her head. “We went shopping just now,” she bragged.

“She had even bought me a new coat. I have never met such a kind-hearted girl, throughout my entire life.” Aunt Yu choked out as she spoke.

She was never married, hence she had no children of her own. Zong Jinghao was nice to her and had even given her a lot of money for her expenses, but no one else had ever thought of buying something for her.

Zong Jinghao patted her shoulders. “I’ll go up and check on her.”

“Go then,” Aunt Yu uttered with a grin.

Upstairs, Lin Xinyan sat by the window with her pillow, as she stared at the falling snow outside.

She was so engrossed in the view that she didn’t hear the room door opening behind her.

“What are you thinking about?” Zong Jinghao came over and placed his hands on her shoulders.

Lin Xinyan turned around at his words. Zong Jinghao could see that her eyes were red, and he stroked her face endearingly. “Why?”

“I miss my mother.” Lin Xinyan wrapped her arms around his waist. She had actually wanted to visit her mother at the Lin Residence, but she was scared she would quarrel with her mother again.

They had always spent the New Year together. This year was the first time that she did not spend it with Zhuang Zijin, and Lin Xinyan felt really upset about that.

“Shall we invite her over?” Zong Jinghao asked cautiously.

Nonetheless, Lin Xinyan shook her head. “No need for that; I’m just scared that we’ll quarrel again. I just don’t understand why she would remarry a selfish man like Lin Guoan. She’s the one who should know better.”

“Don’t waste your energy thinking about sad things then. You should change now; we’re going out for the reunion dinner soon.” Zong Jinghao tried to distract her.

“Oh, yes! I’ve bought you a new suit. Come and try it on.” Lin Xinyan let go of Zong Jinghao and went to her shopping bags in her slippers. She then opened the sealed bag and took out the suit. “I think that it will look good on you, so I bought it.”

Zong Jinghao's clothes were all custom-made overseas. He didn't have to shop for clothes, as the boutique had records of his size and would send him his clothes for different seasons all year round.

Lin Xinyan returned in excitement. "Can you try it now?"

Zong Jinghao hummed in delight.

Lin Xinyan removed his clothes and helped him to put on his suit; it fitted him perfectly. She didn't know his size, truthfully. However, since she was a fashion designer, Lin Xinyan had an acute sense of a person's physical size. She only needed to know the person's height and his approximate weight to predict which clothing size would fit him the best.

Lin Xinyan fixed the collar and flattened the wrinkles on his suit with a pouty face. "I haven't even bought myself such an expensive piece of clothing before."

In the old days, all she ever had in mind was to save as much money as possible to spend on her kids. This was the first time that she had actually spent so much in one go, and it was not on her kids, but rather, on her husband instead.

Zong Jinghao chuckled. "Oh. Does that mean that you love me more than you love yourself?"

So, she had willingly spent her money on me, even when she has always been reluctant to spend for herself?

Lin Xinyan pouted further. "I've regretted it now. I shall return this tomorrow."

Zong Jinghao felt speechless at her words.

"No, you can't."

Zong Jinghao liked the suit; not because it was expensive, but because it was chosen by Lin Xinyan. He would wear anything that she had bought for him, even if it were a cheap piece of clothing that she had bought from a roadside stall.

Lin Xinyan took off his suit and placed it back in its shopping bag. "Well, since you won't let me, there's no use returning it then even if I want to."

A cunning glint flashed in his eyes as he raised his brows. "Oh? You mean you still regret buying it?"

"Yeah... Wait... No no no!" Lin Xinyan changed her words the moment she saw his cunning smile.

"Too late!" Before she could finish her words, Zong Jinghao had already pulled her into his arms. "Stop being naughty!" Lin Xinyan pushed him in rejection.

“Since when have I been naughty? Hmm?” Zong Jinghao rubbed his lips on her cheeks.

Lin Xinyan changed her attitude quickly. “Fine, I don’t regret it. I’ll buy anything for you as long as you like it, okay?”

Unfortunately, I will go bankrupt to suit his expensive taste, though.

“Good wifey.” Zong Jinghao kissed her cheeks. “Let’s go down then.”

Knock! Knock!

Aunt Yu knocked on their door. “Young Master, Young Mistress. It’s time to go.”

“Alright,” Zong Jinghao answered. He soon released his hold on Lin Xinyan and smoothed her ruffled hair while enjoying the sensation of her smooth strands passing through his fingers. Her waist-length hair was never permed before, hence it shone healthily as it flowed past her shoulders.

“Don’t keep them waiting,” Lin Xinyan uttered.

By the time they reached downstairs, Shen Peichuan had already arrived at their house. He had played around with the twins before, so he was rather familiar with them. Lin Ruixi was the most excited to see him, as she dragged him around. “We have lots of fireworks! Do you want to play with us?”

Shen Peichuan stroked his chin in contemplation. “Fireworks... Is that fun?”

Lin Ruixi answered innocently, “Yes, of course!” She gestured with her hands. “It’s something that shoots up in the sky and explodes loudly into a huge colorful flower! It’s very beautiful to watch!”

Beside her, Lin Xichen could not help but cover his eyes in embarrassment. “Do you think that Uncle Shen really doesn’t know about fireworks? He’s merely making a fool out of you,” Lin Xichen informed his sister.

However, Lin Ruixi blinked her eyes innocently. “Making a fool out of me? How is he doing that?”

Lin Xichen smacked his forehead at his sister’s silliness.

Suddenly, Lin Ruixi dashed towards her mother and pleaded cutely, “Mommy! I’m so hungry!”

“Alright, then let’s go now. The restaurant has called and said that they are ready.” Cheng Yuxiu handed Zong Qifeng his coat. “Wear this.”

Zong Jinghao extended his arms to carry his daughter, who was hanging onto Lin Xinyan’s leg.

Nevertheless, for some reason, Lin Ruixi insisted on wanting her mother to carry her. "I want mommy to carry me."

"No, you can't," Zong Jinghao refused to oblige to her demand.

"Why?" Lin Ruixi retorted unhappily.

Zong Jinghao eyed Lin Xinyan worriedly. "See, your mother is so skinny now. She doesn't have the strength to carry you."

"She can! She could carry both me and Xichen at the same time, previously!" Lin Ruixi retorted.

You don't know mommy as well as I do. The little girl thought internally.

"Your mommy is injured now, so she cannot carry you," Aunt Yu uttered, upon recalling the bruise on Lin Xinyan's waist. "There are no anti-slip mats in your bathroom, am I right?"

Chapter 323

Although Aunt Yu was never married herself, she knew about love marks on the bodies of a loving couple. The only thing that she wasn't aware of, was that some love-making sessions could be aggressive enough to leave bruises on the body.

Everyone shifted their gazes to Lin Xinyan, including Zong Jinghao. "You're injured? Where did you injure yourself?"

Before Lin Xinyan could speak, Aunt Yu replied on her behalf, "She had slipped in the shower, and there's a huge bruise on her waist. I saw it when her sweater rolled up during lunchtime. If I didn't notice that, I'm sure that she wouldn't have mentioned it."

"Should we send you to the hospital then?" Cheng Yuxiu asked in concern.

"No, There's no need for that. I'm fine." Lin Xinyan struggled to maintain a casual tone as she spoke.

She was so embarrassed now that she had just wanted to dig a hole and hide in it.

On the other hand, Zong Jinghao sank in deep thought. She had slipped last night?

Why didn't I notice that?

“Let’s go! We’re going to be late!” Lin Xinyan tried to divert their attention as she helped Lin Xichen into his coat.

Zong Jinghao landed his gaze on her waist and his lashes flickered in understanding.

Cheng Yuxiu was still worried as she whispered beside Lin Xinyan. “Are you sure that you’re alright?”

“Yes, I’m really fine,” Lin Xinyan answered, without lifting her head while tying her son’s shoelace.

Cheng Yuxiu could see that Lin Xinyan did not want to continue the topic.

However, Aunt Yu didn’t catch Lin Xinyan’s obvious avoidance and asked once again, “There are no anti-slip mats for the bathroom upstairs, right? If we don’t install them, it’s easy to slip and fall.”

“We did, actually,” Cheng Yuxiu replied. In fact, they had not only had anti-slip mats. The tiles in the bathroom floor were also made of anti-slip materials of high quality, so it shouldn’t have been possible to slip in the first place. Lin Xinyan’s fall might have merely been an accident.

Cheng Yuxiu did not think of other possibilities when she responded as such.

Currently, Aunt Yu was confused. Hmm? If there are anti-slip mats, then how did our young mistress slip in the bathroom?

“Alright, let’s go,” Zong Qifeng called out.

Everyone put on their coats and headed out of the house. The wind was blowing strongly, as sounds of their crunchy footsteps in the snow joined in, with the whooshing sounds of the wind.

Lin Ruixi finally did not insist on making Lin Xinyan carry her and stayed obediently in Zong Jinghao’s arms.

Perhaps it was due to the reflection of the pristine white snow, their surroundings still appeared pretty bright, despite the night’s darkness.

The cars left the villa one by one.

The snow-covered road was now printed with crisscrossing tire tracks.

The restaurant they were heading to was booked by Zong Qifeng, as it had a private room that could host twenty people. Back to the times when Zong Jinghao did not return to celebrate the New Year, all the maids and drivers would often join the Zong family household for the reunion dinner, as though they were from the same family.

That would make the dinner more cheerful, with so many people to celebrate together.

Compared to the past few years, Zong Qifeng was the happiest that he had ever been this year. He could hardly remember how long had it been since he had last spent the New Year's Eve with Zong Jinghao.

When everyone took their seats, the waiter came over and asked to serve the dishes.

Before Zong Qifeng could answer him, Lin Ruixi replied impatiently, "Please serve the dishes. I'm hungry!"

The waiter smiled but still turned to Zong Qifeng for confirmation.

"Listen to my granddaughter then," Zong Qifeng confirmed with a wave of his hand.

"Alright," the waiter answered and retreated from the room. A while later, a row of waiters started to serve the delicious dishes.

Lin Ruixi salivated at the delicious food before her. "Wow! It smells so good! I want to eat it now!"

She couldn't wait to taste the food now.

"Before we start eating, I have a few words to say," Zong Qifeng suddenly spoke and gestured for Cheng Yuxiu to take something out, that he had prepared beforehand.

"For the past six years, I didn't know that I was already blessed with a pair of grandchildren, and I feel extremely guilty for not giving them the greatest care that they had deserved. I would like to express my gratitude to Lin Xinyan, who has given birth to them and has raised them well for the past few years."

Zong Qifeng gestured for the waiter to fill their glasses. The waiter immediately caught his meaning and filled Lin Xinyan's glass with wine.

"For the first toast, I would like to direct it to Xinyan." Zong Qifeng raised his glass.

Surprised by the gesture, Lin Xinyan immediately stood up with both hands on her glass. "Oh, please don't say such things. I'm the one who has willingly given birth to my children, raising them myself, and I'm not complaining about that. I'm the junior here; it is only polite for me to toast you and not the other way round."

Lin Xinyan toasted him and downed her champagne in one go, which burnt her throat as the hard liquor went down her esophagus.

"I'm not good at drinking," Lin Xinyan uttered while covering her mouth.

"Eat something to clear off the burn." Zong Jinghao filled her bowl with food.

Zong Qifeng gestured for her to sit down to which Lin Xinyan complied.

She then popped the food that Zong Jinghao had given her into her mouth and munched on it silently.

Zong Qifeng's mood lifted significantly at the sight. He was very happy with this daughter-in-law of his, as she was the one who had brought Zong Jinghao home and had given birth to his adorable grandchildren.

He then took the two folders that his wife had taken out for him. "These two folders contain my shares in my company. I've divided them into half; one is for Xichen, and the other half is for Ruixi."

Although he had retired and Zong Jinghao was now the one in charge of his company, Zong Qifeng still held a significant amount of shares, which he had now intended to pass on to the twins.

Lin Xinyan stood up once again. "They are still so young! They can't accept such a grand gift from you."

Nevertheless, Zong Qifeng was firm in his decision. "I've signed the documents already. I know that they are still too young to manage it, so I'm entrusting you to manage it for them."

Zong Qifeng handed the folders to Lin Xinyan, but she dared not take them from him. "This..."

"Why? Is this too little?" Zong Qifeng pretended to be upset. This was half of Wanyue's shares, and yet, she was not in the least bit moved by it.

Zong Qifeng nodded internally. He knew that Zong Jinghao's wife had to be a trustworthy woman who could withstand all sorts of temptations for him to not worry about his son.

"No, I don't mean that. I mean, the kids are still young and they don't need any of this. I understand your intention and love behind this gift, but this is too important a gift for me to accept on their behalf." Lin Xinyan still dared not accept the folders. That was half of Wanyue in it!

If she accepted on the twin's behalf, then half of Wanyue would be theirs now. Although the shares were under their name, the twins probably had no idea what it had actually meant to them, as they were only six. As their parent and guardian, Lin Xinyan had the duty of managing the shares for them. That meant that she would be indirectly holding half of Wanyue's shares in her hands.

That was precisely the reason why she couldn't accept the shares.

However, if the shares were given to the twins when they were adults, of course, she would not stop them. After all, they were descendants of the Zong family.

Seeing how she dared not accept the shares, Zong Jinghao took the folders on her behalf instead. He knew very well that there were not many lines of descendants in the family. For Zong Qifeng's generation, he only had an older brother who had died in his teenage years. Zong Qifeng's father also only had a younger brother, namely Zong Qifeng's uncle. He did badly in the business realm, as two of the company's branches had gone bankrupt in his hands.

Knowing that he was not a business person, Zong Qifeng's uncle had since then decided to stop his business endeavors as he resorted to becoming a mere shareholder of Wanyue, with no administrative power.

Later on, he had a son, which was Zong Qifeng's cousin. By right, he was entitled to half of Wanyue's shares as well, but he had happened to be sterile. He was born with necrospermia, a condition in which he had a low percentage of living sperms and a high percentage of immotile dead sperms.

The aforementioned cousin had spent a lot of money to treat his illness but it was to no avail. He was still alive; only a few years younger than Zong Qifeng, yet he was a withdrawn man who didn't like to socialize because of his sterility and he was never in contact with Zong Qifeng at all.

This cousin of Zong Qifeng's still held twenty percent of the shares, while Zong Qifeng himself held fifty.

As the only male descendant of the family, Zong Jinghao himself held the remaining thirty percent of the shares.

The twenty percent with Zong Qifeng's cousin was insignificant to the family. It only served to provide his cousin the yearly earnings of the company, in which twenty percent of the earnings would be banked into his account.

Although he had no children of his own, he was still lucky enough to live a rich and luxurious life, especially during his young days. He might not be young anymore, but he still could afford to enjoy the fun that this world had to offer, as he was never short of money for that.

Zong Jinghao filled Lin Xinyan's plate with food again. "Just take it."

"Aren't you scared that I will kick you away from your position?" Lin Xinyan muttered.

Her voice was soft, but Zong Jinghao had heard it, anyway. He leaned in, closer to her and whispered in her ears, "I don't mind that. I can give it to you if you'd like."

Chapter 324

Lin Xinyan's face flushed crimson.

Surely, she could deprive Zong Jinghao of his position if she wanted to. After all, she had fifty percent of the shares in her hands.

On the other hand, Cheng Yuxiu had also prepared gifts for the children. Unlike Zong Qifeng, it wasn't money but a token from the heart.

She had gone to South China Temple in person to ask for an amulet with the hope that the children would grow up safely and healthily.

The amulets were in a small yellow silk bag, embroidered with Buddhism-related motifs. Cheng Yuxiu brought them forward and hung them on their necks.

It wasn't that she was a superstitious person, but it would be better to believe in something than nothing at all.

"Today is New Year's Eve, and I can't just come empty-handed." Shen Peichuan had also prepared a gift for the children – a Nephrite jade pendant. "I don't know much about jade, but I was told that it'd be good to wear this when I bought them. Men should wear it in the shape of the Guanyin statue, while it should be the Buddha for women, although I don't really understand what it means."

He gave the pendant with the Guanyin statue to Lin Xichen and the one with the Maitreya Buddha to Lin Ruixi. The little girl opened the red velvet box to see the beautifully carved Maitreya Buddha inside grinning pleasantly while holding the Buddhist prayer beads.

"Thank you, Uncle Shen. I love it," the little girl beamed while stroking the pendant.

Shen Peichuan sighed in relief. "I was afraid you wouldn't."

He had been feeling very uneasy since the day he purchased the pair of jade pendants. Gifting was a matter of catering to someone else's liking, but getting them a plush toy didn't seem right for this occasion.

"Thank you, Uncle Shen. I love it too," Lin Xichen chimed in politely. Growing up abroad, he didn't understand the Buddhist culture back home so he asked, "Men should wear it in the shape of the Guanyin statue, while it should be the Buddha for women. Is it because the Guanyin is a female and the Buddha is a male?"

There was a moment of silence at the table.

No one had expected Lin Xichen to ask such a question.

“That’s not how you interpret it, and you can’t just say that.” Lin Xinyan patted her son’s head. “It’s not very respectful.”

“It’s all right. He’s just a kid.” Zong Qifeng waved his hand. “Let’s eat.”

Zong Jinghao had a couple of drinks with Shen Peichuan to celebrate the occasion.

He thought it didn’t matter if he drank himself unconscious since the drivers were around.

Outside, fireworks were on display.

Lin Ruixi inhaled her food and finished the bowl of soup in one gulp, earning a frown from Lin Xinyan. “Slow down. Why are you in such a hurry?”

“I wanna play with fireworks,” the little girl said hurriedly, her voice muffled as she shoved another mouthful of food into her mouth.

Lin Xinyan stroked her hair lovingly. “Still, there’s no need to rush. There are so many of us who haven’t finished our food yet. It’s not like you can go out on your own, right?”

Upon consideration that it wouldn’t be fun to play alone outside, the little girl jumped off from her chair and urged, “Then hurry up! I wanna play outside. Don’t keep me waiting.”

Amused, Shen Peichuan said, “There are so many dishes. It’ll take at least twenty minutes for me to finish them.”

The little girl blinked. “Then just finish this plate of fish in front of you.”

“Oh, no, I need to fill myself up,” Shen Peichuan said, grabbing a crab roe bun. “Besides, I don’t like to eat fish.”

“You’ll get fat if you eat too much,” Lin Ruixi piped. “And a fatty can never find a girlfriend. Look at Uncle Su doing so well with Aunt Qin Ya. Nobody will want to go out with a fatty.”

Everyone at the table roared with laughter.

“I’m done,” Shen Peichuan said, putting down his chopsticks.

She’s right. I’ll never find a girlfriend at this rate.

“Eat up, Uncle Shen,” Lin Xichen piped up as he refilled Shen Peichuan’s plate.

“You’re the best, Xi,” Shen Peichuan said, patting Lin Xichen’s head.

“Even if you’re not fat, you can never find a girlfriend,” Lin Xichen said, putting a piece of braised pork in his mouth. “You might as well eat, Uncle Shen.”

Shen Peichuan was rendered speechless at the sudden verbal attack.

The reunion dinner ended with joyful laughter. After leaving the restaurant, they arrived at a vast space where Lin Ruixi could set off fireworks.

At that moment, all sorts of fireworks were readied in the trunk, and the little girl couldn’t get any more excited.

Shen Peichuan first ignited her two sticks of fireworks, known as Little Stars. The name was such because it resembled a star when it ignited.

She gave Lin Xinyan a stick and said, “Mommy, mommy, this is for you.”

Lin Xinyan bent over to accept it, and the little girl dashed off in her snow boots.

Zong Jinghao stood next to her. In the distance, Shen Peichuan was setting off fireworks with the kids.

“This is their first time celebrating at home. We weren’t allowed to set off fireworks when we were abroad.” Lin Xinyan’s lips quirked up into a faint smile, watching as the kids hopping around happily.

“Are you happy?” Zong Jinghao asked, draping an arm around her shoulder.

“I am, but it’s not perfect,” Lin Xinyan answered. It was her first Chinese New Year without Zhuang Zijin. She felt a little disappointed because it wasn’t a perfect reunion, especially since she had just reunited with the children’s father this year.

Sensing her dampened mood, Zong Jinghao buried his head inside her coat. “When did you fall down? How come I don’t know? Here, let me take a look,” he said, reaching inside her coat to lift her sweater.

Lin Xinyan pushed him away in shock. Not knowing if she was too strong or if Zong Jinghao did it on purpose or if it was because his feet slipped, his body leaned back the moment she pushed him. In just a split second, he fell over while taking hold of her hand and pulling her down together.

“Ah!” Lin Xinyan shrieked reflexively, but she shut her mouth immediately in fear of alarming Shen Peichuan and the kids.

Zong Jinghao landed on his back first, and with his coat opened, Lin Xinyan fell on his chest.

Lin Xinyan tried to stand up, but the man yanked her arm, causing her to topple over again. Pressing her head with one hand while fondling the back of her waist through her sweater with the other, he lifted his head slightly and captured her lips with his.

Her long hair cascaded down, covering both of their faces. His kiss was deep, and his body was burning up despite the cold weather.

Lin Xinyan struggled to break free from his arms.

“Don’t move,” the man said, loosening his grip. “I’ll be gentle.”

Just then, with a deafening roar, fireworks burst through the dreary and hazy night, making the sky a kaleidoscope of colors.

However, Lin Xinyan feigned ignorance and took advantage of the distraction to get up and run away.

Chapter 325

Lin Xinyan ran off in the rainbow of starlight. The past year had been a remarkable year with many happenings, and each of them was beyond her expectations. It might have been a lucky year or a lousy year, but one thing for sure, it had been a year full of surprises.

She stood in the whirling snow, holding the hands of her two children, looking up at the blaze of colors bursting in the sky.

Zong Jinghao, on the other hand, stood watching them from not far away.

This year had no doubt been a surprise to him as well.

Chinese New Year’s Eve was all about staying up late. After having a fun time outside, they were greeted by a whiff of warm air as they pushed the door open. Zong Qifeng and Cheng Yuxiu were sitting on the couch in the living room, watching the Spring Festival Gala on TV while Aunt Yu and another maid had prepared a table of fruits.

The two children had probably stayed too long outside and digested their dinner because they started munching again while watching TV as soon as they entered inside.

At twelve o’clock, the Chinese New Year bell tolled.

The kids were so excited that they refused to sleep, and they ended up spending the first day of Chinese New Year in bed.

On the second day, it was Lin Xinyan’s birthday.

Lin Xichen had bought her a huge cake.

After giving birth to two children, Lin Xinyan never celebrated her birthday. She understood that it was the day to celebrate her mother instead who had undergone excruciating pain in giving birth to her.

Therefore, every year on her birthday in the past, she wouldn't buy a cake nor remind anyone, but she would buy a gift for her mother.

The huge cake Lin Xichen bought had eight layers, and sitting on top of the cake was a doll in a wedding dress.

It didn't look like a birthday cake but a wedding cake.

"Do you like it?" Lin Xichen asked.

Lin Xinyan nodded. "Yeah, but it's a little weird."

"You mean her?" Lin Xichen pointed at the doll.

Before Lin Xinyan could say yes, he went on explaining, "You're a fashion designer. You've designed many wedding dresses for others, but you've never worn one yourself. I want you to wear it once too, and I think you'll look best in it."

Lin Xichen had heard it from Zhuang Zijin that Lin Xinyan had never worn a wedding dress.

There was once when Lin Xinyan had designed a beautiful wedding dress for a customer, but Lin Xichen had said, "Mommy would definitely look better in it."

Zhuang Zijin, at the side, had a gloomy expression on her face.

After making a few discreet inquiries, it dawned on Lin Xichen that Lin Xinyan had never worn a wedding dress despite being married, and he had despised Zong Jinghao for that.

At this moment, Zong Jinghao was on the phone with Shen Peichuan. The results reported that Lin Guoan didn't die a sudden death but was poisoned, having consumed nitrites.

"According to the maid's confession, Zhuang Zijin had been preparing three meals a day for Lin Guoan. She had the opportunity and the motive to poison him. Zhuang Zijin has been officially detained and is currently waiting to be investigated."

Zong Jinghao shifted his gaze toward the living room.

"I can't condone such things as a criminal police officer. But of course, I know who she is, so I can try to make it a case of manslaughter. I won't let her suffer too. Lin Guoan was surely at fault, but what she did has violated the law. As for Xinyan..."

There was a big difference between intentional homicide and manslaughter.

“Just keep it from her for now.” He didn’t know how to approach Lin Xinyan with this news. More so, he didn’t want to disturb nor destroy their happy moments, seeing as they were having a good time.

“Got it,” Shen Peichuan said.

Zong Jinghao hung up the phone and cast his gaze on the doll on the cake as he walked over.

“Daddy.”

“Hmm?”

Lin Ruixi beckoned him over. “Bend down. I want to tell you a secret.”

Zong Jinghao did as he was told, leaning his ear toward her.

“The secret is...”

She stretched out her hand from behind her back and smacked Zong Jinghao’s face with cake.

“The secret is that I want to smear your face with cake. Hehe...”

Zong Jinghao froze for a moment before picking her up. “Why, you little...”

The little girl giggled.

“Aren’t you getting mommy something?” Lin Xichen asked deliberately, thinking that Zong Jinghao didn’t know about Lin Xinyan’s birthday.

Lin Xinyan was somewhat looking forward to it upon hearing her son’s words.

Zong Jinghao pondered for a while before answering, “I didn’t prepare anything.”

Lin Xichen’s face instantly fell. “Hmph! Don’t think that my mommy belongs to you now.”

Lin Xinyan was a little disappointed as well. But considering that a man like him would probably never prepare a gift for someone, she thought it would be surprising if he did.

Zong Jinghao looked at Lin Xinyan and chuckled, “Who would dare to take her away from me?”

I’m gonna skin that person alive if he does.

“All right, all right,” Lin Xinyan piped up and brought the kids who were covered in cream to wash up.

“But I still want to eat,” Lin Ruixi whined.

“I’ll clean her up later,” Aunt Yu said.

Seeing that there was no other choice, Lin Xinyan went up to change her own clothes instead. There was no one in the room. She found some clean clothes from the cupboard, then took off the cream-stained clothes she was wearing, not at all realizing that Zong Jinghao was on her heels.

Right then, Zong Jinghao pushed open the door. He saw her topless and that the bruise around her waist hadn’t completely faded. And because her skin was so fair, the patch was especially noticeable. Very quickly, she put on a sweater, blocking his view.

Lin Xinyan adjusted the collar and turned around to see Zong Jinghao standing at the door. “When did you come up?”

“I came up when you did,” he replied nonchalantly.

Lin Xinyan frowned.

Does that mean he saw me when I was changing? I mean, yes, he has seen me naked, but still...

Zong Jinghao walked in and closed the door. Looking at her slightly flushed face, he ran his fingers through her hair and said, “Are you blushing?”

“No.” Lin Xinyan looked away.

“Oh, don’t be shy. I’ve seen every part of you.”

Why, you!

Lin Xinyan shot daggers at him. “Can you be any more shameless?”

“Shh, I won’t let you suffer.” With a stretch of his long arms, he pulled the woman into his embrace and whispered in her ears, “I’ll prove it to you tonight.” No sooner than Lin Xinyan threw a fit, he shoved a blue velvet box into her hands.

“What is this?” She looked down at the simple yet elegant-looking diamond-shaped box.

“Why don’t you open it and have a look?”

Lin Xinyan blinked in confusion. “Is this for me?”

“Mm-hmm...” he uttered seriously.

Lin Xinyan opened the box under Zong Jinghao's blazing gaze. What laid inside was a huge diamond ring, oval in shape and pink in color.

"The Pink Star?"

"You know this?" Zong Jinghao asked in shock.

"I've seen this at the jewelry auction of the century. It was named 'The Pink Star' for its shape, color, and its flawless craftsmanship. It was bought by a famous jewelry mogul in 2017 for a whopping seventy-one point two million. How did it end up in your hands?"

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Zong Jinghao stared at Lin Xinyan dumbfoundedly.

"You wanna know how I know so much about it?" Lin Xinyan continued, chuckling. "Actually I was there at the auction back then."

She didn't go to buy anything that day but to have a glimpse of the auction's grand finale.

As a fashion designer, she needed a lot of inspiration.

Zong Jinghao was lost in thoughts. He had seen a figure similar to her at the jewelry auction three years ago. But by the time he had squeezed through the crowd to look for her, she was already nowhere to be seen. He had Guan Jing check the footage from the surveillance camera, but it just so happened that the surveillance system had malfunctioned on that day.

In other words, he wasn't mistaken that day. It was her.

Lin Xinyan did a double-take. "You were the one who bought that ring?"

How could I forget that Zong Jinghao is a businessman?

Ever since 1947 when De Beers advertised diamonds with their famous slogan – "A Diamond is Forever", diamonds had become the symbol of love.

To get married, there should be a diamond ring to show that you love a person because "A Diamond is Forever" simply meant that a couple's marriage would last forever.

Buying a diamond ring for the person you love proved that your love was much more solid than a diamond ring. A stone after giving the value of "love" would become priceless, and at the same time, brought in great wealth to those who hyped it.

Lin Xinyan touched the ring in the box and said, "How evil."

She wasn't familiar with Wanyue's business, and she didn't know how many businesses Zong Jinghao had developed.

"Are you talking about me?" He hugged her waist from behind. "Why don't you put it on?"

Lin Xinyan rejected, "I'm afraid I'll get mugged."

Not only was it too conspicuous on the hand, but a diamond of that size didn't really suit her slender fingers.

"Hmm?" His voice echoed from his chest. With his arms tightening around her waist and her back sticking close to his chest, she could clearly hear the sound of his strong and powerful heartbeat.

Zong Jinghao removed the ring from the box and slipped it on her index finger after finding it unfit for her ring finger and middle finger. "Why are your fingers so thin?"

"It's not that my fingers are too thin," Lin Xinyan laughed. "The ring just doesn't suit me."

After a moment's silence, Zong Jinghao suggested, "How about I find a craftsman and turn it into a necklace?"

"I don't want," she replied, knowing that it would still stand out regardless.

She would usually buy jewelry for herself, but they were mostly on the small and delicate side. As a fashion designer, she knew what suited her best.

He nibbled on her neck and asked, "What don't you want?"

Lin Xinyan's heart fluttered. She bit her lip and said, "I don't want anything."

Zong Jinghao paused, then bit her neck again in a punitive manner, causing Lin Xinyan to grunt in pain.

He had abstained himself from touching her last night because of her excuse of having a backache. Surely, he had overdone it that day, but she had promised to do it with him once a day.

"We have to do it twice today to make up for yesterday," he smirked.

"Zong Jing... Argh!"

The man held her by the waist and flipped her over, taking her by surprise as he pinned her on the bed before she could finish her sentence.

Zong Jinghao grabbed the lower hem of her shirt and pulled it up in an attempt to take it off. "Don't wear such clothes again."

It was a hassle to remove them, and he would prefer those with buttons.

Lin Xinyan's breathing hitched as she gripped the bedsheet beneath her nervously.

Looking at her flushed face, Zong Jinghao pinched her chin and sized her up, teasing, "What's with that face? You looked so ugly."

Lin Xinyan glared at him. "How am I ugly? If I'm ugly, then why are you...." The words "screwing me" got stuck in her throat.

"Well, there's no turning back now. I'll have to make do with your ugly face," he laughed with imperceptible gentleness.

Buzz... Buzz...

Just then, Lin Xinyan's phone on the table vibrated. She turned around and reached for her phone, but Zong Jinghao was a step ahead.

"I just wanna see who it is," Lin Xinyan quickly said in case he hung up.

It was an unknown number.

Zong Jinghao didn't want her to answer her phone at this time. Thus, he simply brushed it off and hung up, only for it to ring again shortly after.

This time, Lin Xinyan was quick to react. Though it was an unsaved number, it wasn't necessarily a harassment call. She picked up her phone, and a female voice sounded from the other end of the line. "May I speak to Ms. Lin, please?"

"Speaking," Lin Xinyan said.

"I'm afraid I can't deliver the clothes you told me to. Do you have the time to drop by the store to pick them up?"

"Why is that?" Lin Xinyan asked.

Did I give her the wrong address?

"That villa has been sealed off. I heard someone died in there, and the police have intervened..."

Colors left Lin Xinyan's face, and she could no longer hear the sales assistant's voice.

Someone died? Who could it be?

It couldn't be mum?

"What's wrong?" Zong Jinghao cupped her bloodless face worriedly.

"M-My mom could be in trouble," she said, her voice quavering with emotions and tears brimming in her eyes.

Zong Jinghao's heart sank. He grabbed the phone from her hand at once, eager to know who the caller was.

But at this moment, Lin Xinyan got up like a raving madwoman and rushed out, wanting to look for Zhuang Zijin.

Zong Jinghao hurriedly grabbed a coat from the clothes rack and chased after her.

He took hold of her hand and said, "I'll take you there. Put on some clothes first."

"No, it can't wait. I told her that there's no way Lin Guoan will turn over a new leaf. Why didn't she listen to me? If something happens to her, I swear Lin Guoan won't get away with it!"

Well, I guess I can't hide it anymore.

"Get in the car. I'll take you there." Zong Jinghao zipped up her down jacket.

Lin Xinyan nodded and quickly got in the car.

Immediately, Zong Jinghao took out his phone and sent a text message to Shen Peichuan, telling him to make the necessary arrangements as he would be taking Lin Xinyan over.

Upon getting into the car and revving up the engine, Zong Jinghao asked, "Who was it on the phone just now?"

"The clothing store. I bought my mom a down jacket at the mall that day. I was afraid we would get into an argument if she saw me, so I had the store deliver it. Until that call... saying that they can't send it over because..." Lin Xinyan trailed off in a choked voice. "What should I do? What should I do..."

Zhuang Zijin was a weakling in her eyes, so instinct told her that Zhuang Zijin could be the victim.

Hearing that, Zong Jinghao held her hands. "It's not Zhuang Zijin who's in trouble."

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Lin Xinyan was stunned. "H-How did you know?"

But soon after that, she figured it out. Narrowing her eyes, she asked, "Did you know it a long time ago? It's just that you didn't tell me, right?"

Zong Jinghao tightened his grip on her hand. "Now don't start to imagine things-"

"I am not. If you didn't know it already, you wouldn't have told me just now." After the initial nervousness, clarity began to set in.

There must be a reason that Zong Jinghao hid it from me.

A thought popped into her head. Could it be that it was Lin Guoan who has died and not Zhuang Zijin? But it must have something to do with Zhuang Zijin... I mean, that's why Zong Jinghao was hiding it from me, right?

It suddenly dawned on her that Zhuang Zijin had had a hidden agenda for insisting on remarrying Lin Guoan.

Thinking of this, she began to regret not stopping Zhuang Zijin at the time.

"When did it happen?" She had her eyes cast down while asking.

After a long silence, Zong Jinghao replied, "It was before Lunar New Year."

In other words, it was just a few days ago.

"Is there any evidence?" asked Lin Xinyan.

"COD for Lin Guoan was because of nitrite overdose. And according to the maids, your mother has been cooking for him every day."

She parted her lips but could not say anything. With a lump in her throat, she was annoyed that she didn't notice what Zhuang Zijin was up to earlier.

In the cold wind, Zong Jinghao parked the car in the compound of the Criminal Investigative Division of B City.

Shen Peichuan, who was waiting at the entrance, took a few steps forward when he saw their car.

Soon after that, Lin Xinyan got out of the car, but hesitation stopped her in her tracks when she reached the entrance.

Zong Jinghao then came up to her to wrap his arms around her and comforted, "With Peichuan here, she won't suffer. Don't worry."

Lin Xinyan nodded her head.

"Let's go," urged Shen Peichuan.

After entering the hall, Shen Peichuan led them to his office as he arranged for Zhuang Zijin to be brought over here.

"I'd like to talk to her in private," Lin Xinyan said.

Shen Peichuan looked up at Zong Jinghao to get his consent before replying, "Come on in. I'll bring her over later. No one will come here today."

He was implying that she could say anything to Zhuang Zijin as no one would eavesdrop on their conversation.

Lin Xinyan nodded her head and walked into the office. The place was all cleaned up, so it was very tidy.

Sitting on the sofa, Lin Xinyan was not in the mood to think about other things. She just wanted to see Zhuang Zijin quickly and to ask her if things were like what she had thought.

Soon, the office door was pushed open. She immediately tensed up and straightened her back, but she did not dare to turn around.

Zhuang Zijin was also a little hesitant when she walked inside. Meanwhile, Shen Peichuan poured two glasses of water on the table and said in a low voice, "Take your time."

They could stay however long they wanted.

Lin Xinyan responded in acknowledgment while Shen Peichuan exited the room and closed the door behind him.

After a while, Zhuang Zijin, who was standing behind her, broke the silence and called her, "Yan."

Lin Xinyan clenched her fists, but said nothing.

Sighing, Zhuang Zijin walked over.

Lin Xinyan looked up and saw that Zhuang Zijin had become a lot thinner. It was probably all thanks to Shen Peichuan that she was not handcuffed and looked the same, like how she always was.

She studied Zhuang Zijin for a long time.

When she was on the way here, she had a lot of things to say, to question, and to complain, but the moment she saw her, she couldn't bring herself to say anything.

It was probably because she did not know where to start.

Zhuang Zijin sat down across from her and apologized, "I'm sorry."

It was all because of her. She only thought of herself and did not have Lin Xinyan's interests at heart.

All the emotions that Lin Xinyan had been holding in came flooding out at this moment as she sneered. "What's the use of apologizing? Is it worth it to get yourself in trouble in such a way—"

"Of course, it is," Zhuang Zijin interrupted her. "He's responsible for my son's death. What I did was just sending him to meet my son. Am I wrong?"

Lin Xinyan looked at her in astonishment.

"In fact, since we came back and met him by accident, I've started to get in touch with him. I know that he was interested in the relationship between you and Zong Jinghao, and wanted to seek a connection with you. So I took this opportunity to get close to him. He thought I was still the same old me who would get cheated easily. But, who knew, he was the fool!" Zhuang Zijin got a little agitated when she said this.

She could still remember how much pain Lin Guoan had suffered before the poison ended his life. Standing by the bed, she watched him put up his deathbed struggle, but no one could save him.

"It's you?" Lin Guoan bellowed with his bloodshot eyes.

“It’s me.” She looked at him condescendingly, her voice and expression void of warmth, appearing even colder than the snow outside. “Where did you get the confidence to believe that I can still forgive you abandoned and hurt me?”

“So you’ve come to seek revenge.” Lin Guoan’s heart raced. His breathing became shallow as if he would breathe his last in the next second.

Zhuang Zijin laughed. “A person like you doesn’t deserve to live. If it weren’t for you, Yan wouldn’t have to follow me and suffer so much. I feel sorry for my brother as I didn’t take good care of her. I feel sorry for my son, who had been living on borrowed time since birth, but his life was eventually taken away. It’s all your fault, Lin Guoan! If you hadn’t sent me away, Yan wouldn’t have to suffer with me, and my son wouldn’t have died. You brought it all upon yourself!”

Lin Guoan widened his eyes in shock. Son? What son?

He crawled to the edge of the bed and tugged at the hem of Zhuang Zijin’s top. “Your son?”

“I was pregnant when you sent me away.” Zhuang Zijin paused and looked at Lin Guoan. “But because I had a rough pregnancy, he was born autistic...”

Recalling her son’s death, Zhuang Zijin still felt her heart aching even to this day.

More precisely, she had never forgotten the pain of losing her son.

If it were not for Lin Xinyan, she would not have made it this far.

Lin Guoan opened his mouth, but nothing came out. I once had a son, but he died?

When he was sending Zhuang Zijin away, Shen Xiuqing said that she was pregnant with his son, which was why he made up his mind to send Zhuang Zijin away.

However, he did not know that Zhuang Zijin was also pregnant with a son.

At this moment, Lin Guoan regretted his decision back then.

As a man, he wanted a son.

Yet now, Zhuang Zijin told him that he had had a son, who had come to this world and seen a part of this world – unlike the one in Shen Xiuqing’s belly, that was gone even before he was born. But he had no knowledge of it at all.

At this instant, even a cruel man like him was also filled with regret.

Seeing Lin Guoan’s agony, Zhuang Zijin smiled. “Considering that you won’t be alive for long, I will tell you another secret – Yan is not your daughter.”

Lin Guoan widened his eyes. W-What did she say? Lin Xinyan isn’t my daughter?

“Y-You betrayed me...”

Zhuang Zijin did not want to explain, just so she could watch him suffer.

“Y-You b-b*tch.” Lin Guoan’s hand suddenly dropped to the side of the bed, as he breathed his last. His eyes were still wide opened as he was unwilling to die in peace.

Zhuang Zijin looked at him with indifference. If her brother hadn’t had a terminal illness and died at a young age, she would not have married Lin Guoan and brought along her family business.

She thought that Lin Guoan would be the right one for her, but to her chagrin, he was not even human.

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“I don’t regret it.” Even now, Zhuang Zijin didn’t think that she was wrong. The fact that Lin Guoan was dead actually brought her some relief.

Lin Xinyan looked at Zhuang Zijin for a long time before finding her voice again. “Have you ever thought that this is against the law? Have you ever thought about me?”

“Yes, I have.” At the time, Zhuang Zijin thought that she would continue to help Lin Xinyan take care of her children if she did not get caught. But if she were caught, she would be punished by law and could no longer help to do so. “You’ll be doing fine even without me. I think Zong Jinghao is pretty good. After all, you gave birth to his kids. So for their sake, he will treat you well.”

Lin Xinyan balled up her fists. “So, you’ve had it all planned out for me, haven’t you?”

“I’m sorry.” Apart from this, Zhuang Zijin did not know what else she could say.

Lin Xinyan had mixed feelings, but she tried her best to hold them in so that she didn’t shed tears in front of Zhuang Zijin. “Two days ago, Xichen and Ruixi said that they missed you. What do you want me to tell them in the future? Do I tell them that their grandmother is a murderer?”

The mention of the word “murderer” caused a change in Zhuang Zijin’s expression.

Only then did Lin Xinyan realize that she had said something wrong, but it was too late to take back what she had said, leaving her vexed with herself.

“Have a great life.” Standing up, Zhuang Zijin walked to the door and put her hand on the doorknob, but she didn’t turn it and just stood there in silence. After a while, she added, “At this point, there’s no more turning back. I promised to take care of you, but I didn’t. I hope you don’t blame me. I’m truly sorry, Yan.”

Lin Xinyan didn’t notice the meaning behind her words at all as she kept beating herself up.

If I had cared more about Zhuang Zijin, I would’ve realized what she was up to, and she wouldn’t have made such a big mistake.

Initially, I had a chance to dissuade her, but now...

Lin Xinyan covered her face and cried. She will definitely go to jail no matter what sentence she receives.

She could’ve enjoyed her remaining years, but she ruined her life ahead just because she wanted to avenge Lin Guoan.

Is it worth it, though?

Listening to Lin Xinyan’s hushed cries, Zhuang Zijin felt her heart ache. “Don’t be sad. Since I’ve chosen to do it, I’ve thought about the consequences. What I’ve overlooked are the feelings of you and the kids. Tell them...” Zhuang Zijin choked up, and continued with reddened eyes and a hoarse voice, “Tell them that I’ve gone far away. Don’t bring them here or tell them what I did. After all, I’m not exactly a role model.”

Zhuang Zijin then turned the doorknob and opened the door. “You don’t need to come and see me anymore.”

After that, she walked out quickly, for fear that she would hear Lin Xinyan crying again, and that she would regret her decision if she stayed any longer.

Standing in the corridor, Shen Peichuan and Zong Jinghao looked over at the same time upon hearing the sound of the door opening.

“Could I have a second with you?” Zhuang Zijin looked at Zong Jinghao.

Zong Jinghao pursed his lips and said nothing, but Shen Peichuan understood what he meant, so he said, "I'll leave you two to it."

Then, he walked away.

Clasping her hands, Zhuang Zijin walked over and hesitated for a while before she asked, "Can I ask you a favor?"

"Yes, what is it?" Zong Jinghao's tone of voice was so calm that it was void of emotion.

"Yan has suffered a lot with me. I've failed to take good care of her, and now, I've even upset her. I feel very sorry and distressed for her. In the future, I'm afraid I can no longer take care of her and the two kids, so I'm counting on you to look after them."

"They're my wife and children, so I definitely won't let anyone hurt them." It was not a promise, but at this moment, his words were solemn and carried a weight behind them.

"I believe in you." Zhuang Zijin took out a necklace from her pocket and handed it to Zong Jinghao. "Please give this to her, and tell her that her mother left it for her."

Yet, Zong Jinghao did not take it.

Seeing that, Zhuang Zijin hurriedly explained, "She's a little emotional now, so—so..."

Getting what she meant, Zong Jinghao took the necklace from her.

It was a thin platinum necklace without a pendant. With his eyes on the necklace, he carefully pondered what Zhuang Zijin had just said. Feeling that something was wrong, he asked tentatively, "You're leaving this for her?"

Zhuang Zijin was silent for a while before replying, "Yes." She paused and added, "She's still in the room and is not in a very good mood. You should go comfort her."

After that, Zhuang Zijin walked to the entrance to call Shen Peichuan.

However, Shen Peichuan did not take her away immediately, but instead, he turned to look at Zong Jinghao for his opinion.

Zong Jinghao waved his hand.

Taking the hint, Shen Peichuan took the hint and left with Zhuang Zijin.

Standing at the same spot, Zong Jinghao looked down to study the necklace in his hand, still feeling as though there was another meaning to Zhuang Zijin's words.

But he quickly negated his suspicion. If Zhuang Zijin isn't her mother, who else can it be?

He felt that he might have overthought this and that Zhuang Zijin merely happened to use the wrong term.

With that, he put the necklace away and walked towards Shen Peichuan's office.

The door was ajar, and a broken, sobbing sound was heard coming from the inside.

It sounded repressed and was filled with unspeakable pain.

The look in his eyes darkened as he opened the door gently and walked in.

Hearing the noise, Lin Xinyan stopped weeping. It was not that she had stopped feeling bad, but she simply didn't want to cry in front of others.

Zong Jinghao walked up to her.

Without looking up, she wiped the tears off her face and said, "Let's go."

Zong Jinghao took her by the arm and pulled her into his arms without saying a word. Stroking her long hair, he said, "Just cry if you want to. You don't need to put on a brave face in front of me."

As soon as he said that, Lin Xinyan buried her head in his chest. "I am angry and sad, not because she is hiding it from me, but because it's not worth it. Ruining her own life for a scumbag isn't worth it at all."

"Perhaps she thinks it is?" Zong Jinghao tried to talk some sense into her, "Let me ask you if something keeps weighing on a person's mind and he keeps brooding over it, will he be relaxed, joyful, and hopeful?"

Lin Xinyan was bereft of speech. She had to admit that Zong Jinghao had a point, but she still could not accept it.

She tugged at Zong Jinghao's collar tightly and asked in a low voice, "If the evidence is conclusive, how long will she get?"

He stroked her back gently to soothe her as he replied, "She won't get a long sentence."

Lin Xinyan was still feeling uneasy, but she had calmed down a lot. With Shen Peichuan's help, she believed that Zhuang Zijin's sentence could be reduced.

"Let's go back." Zong Jinghao wrapped his arms around her.

Lin Xinyan leaned into his arms and nodded her head. Then he draped his coat against her shoulders and walked out of the office, where Shen Peichuan was waiting for them.

Shen Peichuan comforted Lin Xinyan by saying, "Don't worry, Xinyan. I'll make sure that your mom won't suffer. Besides, this is an accident, and her sentence will be reduced later, so it won't be too long."

As he emphasized the word "accident," Lin Xinyan instantly understood what he meant.

"Thank you," she said sincerely.

"Don't thank me, or I'll feel I'm being treated as a stranger," Shen Peichuan replied with a smile.

Chinese New Year had passed, and it was still cold outside. However, the snow had melted, and the sound of water dripping could be heard everywhere.

They drove back to the Zong family's residence.

Lin Xinyan wiped her face dry and patted her cheek so that she wouldn't look so pale as she did not want her kids to know that she had cried.

Before she even had time to change into her slippers, Lin Ruixi ran over and wrapped her arms around her leg. Waving the diamond ring in her hand, she asked, "Mommy, mommy, is this for me?"

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Lin Xinyan lowered her head and saw the diamond ring in her daughter's hand.

She was in a hurry earlier, so her things were left on the bed. Lin Ruixi went up to find her, but she saw something gleaming on the bed instead.

She liked this shiny diamond very much, but she didn't know its value, as she simply thought it was something fun to play with.

At that moment, Lin Xinyan didn't know what to do, so she glanced back at Zong Jinghao for his opinion. This was not a normal toy, and she could not make the call.

Besides, how can this be a toy?

However, Zong Jinghao didn't think it was a big deal. Lin Xinyan didn't like it anyway, so he was happy that his daughter liked it.

He stroked his daughter's hair affectionately. "You like it?"

The little girl nodded her head earnestly. "Yes, I like it. It's so shiny. I have never seen such a shiny stone. Daddy, Mommy, where did you find it?"

She wanted to go and find one too herself.

It was so pretty.

After all, girls liked all things pink and shiny.

Lin Xinyan was speechless.

Stone?

She squatted down to be at eye-level with her daughter and patiently taught her, "Ruixi, this is not an ordinary stone that you can find anywhere. It's very rare, and you can't just bring it outside. I'll help you keep it. When you grow up, I will give it to you, okay?"

If this thing were brought outside and was spotted by some greedy people, she might be at risk, and it would not be worth it.

The little girl didn't quite understand, but she realized that this stone seemed to be quite valuable.

She looked down at the diamond ring, which was really shiny.

She liked it very much.

Seeing that her daughter was reluctant to let her keep it, Lin Xinyan sighed softly and said, "It's not that I won't give it to you, but this thing is very valuable. If a bad guy sees it when you bring it outside, he will snatch it away from you, won't he?"

The little girl seemed to be able to imagine that someone was going to snatch it away from her as she held the ring tightly in her arms.

Her exaggerated reaction amused Lin Xinyan.

Why didn't I notice that she likes shiny things so much?

“Can you not take it outside, then?” Lin Xinyan knew she could not talk her daughter into giving it to her anymore. Therefore, she was planning to help her keep it when she started to lose interest.

The little girl hesitated, as the possibility that it would be snatched away scared her. If it were snatched away, she would no longer have it.

Still feeling very reluctant, she handed it to Lin Xinyan. “Mommy, you should keep it and give it back to me when I grow up.”

Lin Xinyan pinched her cheek. “What a good girl.”

The little girl grinned, revealing a set of dazzling white teeth.

“Young Master, Young Mistress.” Aunt Yu walked over. “Master wants you to see him at the study.”

When Lin Xinyan heard that, she then asked her daughter to play on her own and turned to look at Zong Jinghao.

As their eyes met, Zong Jinghao replied calmly, “Alright.”

Lin Xinyan was a little nervous. Zong Qifeng must have wanted to meet them because something was going on, but she didn’t know whether it was a good thing or a bad thing.

Zong Jinghao patted her on the shoulders and said, “I’m with you.”

Only then did she feel more at ease.

When they walked to the door of the study, Zong Jinghao looked up and knocked on the door. After the man inside gave them permission to go in, he opened the door and walked in with Lin Xinyan.

Only Zong Qifeng was in the study, and he was practicing calligraphy. When he saw them coming in, he put down the brush and asked them to sit down.

“The two kids are almost old enough to go to school. What’s your plan?” In fact, Zong Qifeng had been wanting to ask why they were not sent to a kindergarten to familiarize themselves with the learning environment. But when he thought that there must be a lot of inconveniences in taking care of two children by herself all these years, he did not raise the question.

They were already six years old now and could go to elementary school in the second half of this year. So he thought that they could go to kindergarten to familiarize themselves with the environment.

“I’ve made the arrangements.” Zong Jinghao had thought of it a long time ago and had made the arrangement before the New Year.

Lin Xinyan looked at him. Why have I never heard about it?

There was no chance for him to tell her in the past few days. Initially, he wanted to tell her today, but he didn’t have a chance to say it because of what happened to Zhuang Zijin.

“Shengdun?” Zong Qifeng asked.

This kindergarten had the best education and environment. Most importantly, it was invested by Wanyue, and their teachers were relatively trustworthy, so he would feel more comfortable sending two of his grandchildren there.

It was often said that parents treated their grandchildren better than they treated their children, and it seemed to be the case for Zong Qifeng. He was more concerned with his two grandchildren than he was with Zong Jinghao back then.

“Yes,” answered Zong Jinghao.

“From now on, you can let us take care of the kids, while you go about your business,” said Zong Qifeng.

He was aware that Zong Jinghao was busy, while Lin Xinyan had her own career too, so he and Cheng Yuxiu would take over the task of looking after the kids.

Due to the wall Zong Jinghao had put up between him and Cheng Yuxiu, the latter did not show up at the study, for fear that he would turn them down.

In fact, during his stay here, he no longer gave Cheng Yuxiu cold stares like he used to, apart from not talking to her.

He had been reluctant to let go merely because of Wen Xian.

Lin Xinyan was willing to follow their arrangements, as she was not very familiar with the situation in the country. Besides, she had no worries about Zong Jinghao’s arrangements.

As everyone was on the same page, the conversation was quite pleasant. After all, they had the same purpose, which was wanting the best for the kids.

After the conversation, Zong Jinghao and Lin Xinyan left the study. When they were about to go upstairs, the doorbell rang.

Aunt Yu went to open the door and saw that Su Zhan was standing wobbly at the door. He did not wear a coat and had just a thin suit on while reeking of alcohol.

She knew him and knew his relationship with Zong Jinghao, so she turned and said, "Young Master, it's Mr. Su. He seems to be drunk."

Zong Jinghao frowned. Why does he come here after he's drunk?

"Xinyan, Xinyan..." Su Zhan leaned against the door frame and shouted.

Lin Xinyan walked over and saw him in his drunken stupor.

Meanwhile, Zong Jinghao shot him a look of despise. "Come in."

Aunt Yu helped him sit on the sofa in the living room.

Soon after that, Lin Xinyan went to the kitchen to make a glass of honey water and handed it to him. "Drink some honey water to sober up."

Su Zhan grinned. "Thank you, Xinyan." Taking the glass, he downed the content in one go.

He handed Lin Xinyan the glass. "Can you give me another glass?"

Lin Xinyan took it and went to make him another one. Only this time, he did not finish it.

"So tell me what's the matter?" Lin Xinyan sat down beside Zong Jinghao.

Su Zhan looked at Lin Xinyan grievingly. "You have to help me, Xinyan. Qin Ya doesn't want me anymore."

On New Year's Eve, Qin Ya had even appeared at the ward and counted down with him and the old lady, who was also in a good mood.

But in the past two days, he could not reach Qin Ya, as she refused to see him and even avoided him.

Lin Xinyan frowned. "Are you having a fight?"

She was not worried about Su Zhan, but Qin Ya.

Women in a relationship were more sensitive and vulnerable than usual.

At this point, he had to tell the truth, "You see, I have an ex-girlfriend. She came back, and we met several times..." Then he hurriedly explained, "We only met up and talked. Nothing else. But Qin Ya doesn't believe me and insists on breaking up with me."

Regardless of whether it was right or wrong, she stood her ground and supported Qin Ya.

Su Zhan and Qin Ya are already in a relationship, so why does he still want to see his ex-girlfriend?

“Do you still have feelings for your ex-girlfriend?”

“No.”

“Why did you want to see her, then?”

Facing Lin Xinyan’s tough question, Su Zhan was at a loss for words. After a long silence, he found a suitable explanation. “Well, we are still friends-”

“I can’t help you.” Lin Xinyan interrupted him decisively. After knowing Qin Ya for so many years, she knew what kind of person she was. “She isn’t an unreasonable person, so you must have crossed the line, otherwise, she won’t be so determined to break up with you. Considering that she had promised to marry you, she must have certain expectations. The fact that she could break up with you decisively shows that you must have broken her heart.”

“Yes, it’s my fault.” Su Zhan admitted that he was wrong and shouldn’t meet Liu Feifei without telling Qin Ya. However, he believed that he should be given another chance instead.

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“I know I messed up, Xinyan. Please just help me out.” Su Zhan begged flirtatiously while clinging onto Lin Xinyan’s sleeves. “Have mercy on me and help me talk to Qin Ya. Please?”

Zong Jinghao frowned as he went ahead and pulled Su Zhan away from Lin Xinyan. “Just talk. There’s no need for all this touching!” he exclaimed.

Su Zhan paused.

“Xinyan. If you don’t help me out, I really just might die.” Su Zhan gave Zong Jinghao a glare and dived right onto the couch. “I’m not leaving until I see Qin Ya,” he continued.

Su Zhan was being persistent.

This place was great anyway. It was huge and had spare guest rooms. Not to mention him not needing to worry about food.

“Go ahead,” Zong Jinghao replied and dragged Lin Xinyan upstairs.

She looked at Zong Jinghao with uncertainty. “Are we going to just let him be?” Lin Xinyan asked.

Zong Jinghao kept quiet as he pulled her up the stairs. The issue was not whether she should help him. When it came to relationships, things would get really complicated. Su Zhan should be the one to clear things up with Qin Ya, so he did not want Lin Xinyan caught up in their relationship. If they managed to patch things up, great. But what if something went wrong? Would Lin Xinyan be blamed?

On the other hand, Lin Xinyan could actually tell that Su Zhan was going through a rough time.

But in any case, he should suffer a little in order to understand and cherish this relationship.

“I’m giving Qin Ya a call.” She looked at Zong Jinghao who closed the room door. “I won’t involve myself. I’m just concerned about Qin Ya.”

It was obvious that the separation was not doing Qin Ya any good either. She would not have accepted the marriage proposal if she did not have feelings for Su Zhan.

Lin Xinyan pulled out her phone and dialed Qin Ya’s number.

Qin Ya had moved out of her place with Ellen and no one knew where the new place was. It was not big but the living space was just right for her.

Qin Ya sat at the bay window with a book in hand as rain poured down outside. The book was called ‘What is Happiness’. There was a line in the book that she repeated numerous times. It read, ‘What is happiness? Happiness is but the warmth of sunlight in the cold winter. It is but the refreshing iced tea served under the summer sun. When you are content, the smallest of things grants happiness.’

It made so much sense to her. The more one wanted, the more discontented one became. Happiness was lost in the process.

It was like her current situation. The only things on her mind were complaints and regrets. Why did Su Zhan break his promise? Why did she say yes to his proposal that ended up leaving her in this sorry state?

But come to think of it, it's actually not that big of a deal. I just have to let go.

Su Zhan was just a passerby in her life. He was just someone who made good memories with her but would not stop her from moving on.

As long as she wanted to, happiness would be an arm's reach away and she would be under the warmth of the winter sun.

Buzz...

The phone beside her suddenly rang. She looked at who the caller was but did not immediately pick up. The shop's grand opening was scheduled on the 8th; it was still early. Incoming calls for her before that would most likely be related to Su Zhan.

"Ms. Lin," she answered the phone after a momentary contemplation.

Lin Xinyan walked to the window. The snow outside had already melted away as water dripped from treetops and eaves. She silently braced herself before she said, "Are you free right now?" Lin Xinyan did not want to jump straight into talking about what happened between Qin Ya and Su Zhan.

Qin Ya pursed her lips and asked, "Did Su Zhan ask you to call me?"

"He's drunk," Lin Xinyan replied honestly. "He came knocking on my door and said he wouldn't leave if I don't help him. Don't worry though, I'm not calling to talk about that. There are more than enough rooms here for him to stay. I just wanted to ask how are you?"

"I'm doing alright." Qin Ya lowered her head.

I'm doing much better when I've figured things out.

Qin Ya understood that she should not be avoiding her issues. Instead, in order to let go, she had to confront them.

"If he's being unreasonable, just ask him to call me." She had blacklisted Su Zhan's contact prior to Lin Xinyan's call but decided to undo that. Although she had not forgiven him, it was time to move on. She was ready to confront him with her composure now.

"He really looks like he's suffering," Lin Xinyan smiled as she replied, "I'm not trying to persuade you here. I'm just telling you what I see."

Qin Ya also smiled. "He really doesn't let anyone feel secure, does he?"

Maybe he has feelings for me.

"I'll tell him that," Lin Xinyan replied.

After that, they proceeded to talk about work. The conversation went on pleasantly. As they hung up, Lin Xinyan went downstairs to let Su Zhan know that Qin Ya would be picking up his calls now. But it turned out that he was already fast asleep.

Aunt Yu covered him with a blanket. Sighing, Lin Xinyan left him alone. We'll talk in the morning.

She returned to her room and saw that Zong Jinghao was lying flat on his back with his arms and legs stretched outwards. It was truly unsightly. Lin Xinyan gave him a look and suggested, "Su Zhan fell asleep. You wanna get him into a room?"

Zong Jinghao turned to his side with one hand supporting his head and signaled her with his index finger. "Come here."

As for Su Zhan, the house was heated so he was at no risk of catching a cold anyway.

Lin Xinyan instinctively backed away and exclaimed, "What are you doing?"

Raising an eyebrow, Zong Jinghao grinned. "What are you afraid of? I don't bite," he teased.

"You're weird." Her lips curled.

Zong Jinghao paused.

How am I weird?

"Come here. I have something for you."

Lin Xinyan skeptically took another step back.

A sudden sense of defeat welled up from within Zong Jinghao seeing how nervous she was.

He let out a sigh and took out the necklace that Zhuang Zijin had given him from his pocket. "Your mom wanted you to have this."

"It's my mom's?" Lin Xinyan replied hesitantly as she gazed at the trinket in his hand. She went up to him but refrained from reaching out. In fact, Lin Xinyan was still considering the truth of his words.

After all, she had never seen this necklace on Zhuang Zijin, nor was this something Zong Jinghao would buy.

A brief moment later, Lin Xinyan extended her hand toward the necklace. The moment she touched it, Zong Jinghao grabbed her arm and tugged at her, causing her to fall into his arms.

“Are you gonna hide?” He smiled.

“Nope,” Lin Xinyan replied while shaking her head.

She quietly stayed in his embrace and asked, “Did my mom really ask you to give me this?”

“Yes,” Zong Jinghao assured her.

Lin Xinyan inspected the necklace carefully but did not find anything unusual about it. It was just a plain and simple platinum necklace. “Put it away if it makes you feel uncomfortable,” Zong Jinghao said as he cuddled her from behind.

She shook her head. “Help me put this on.”

As a matter of fact, Lin Xinyan already had her closure. She was just saddened by the future trials and tribulations that Zhuang Zijin had yet to face.

Since the necklace was hers, she decided to wear it as it felt as though her mother was still beside her.

Zong Jinghao placed the necklace around her neck and clasped it in place. Although he noticed some tiny wordings on the clasp, he assumed those were the marks of the necklace brand and did not inspect any further.

The chain was very thin but bright at the same time. It stood out brilliantly from Lin Xinyan’s black sweater.

Life after the new year was a peaceful one. The two kids went back to school after the fifteenth. Lin Xinyan’s plans to feature Tea Silk in a fashion show was put aside. On the other hand, Zong Jinghao had gotten quite busy recently. She rarely saw him because he left home early and came home late.

As for Qin Ya and Su Zhan, Lin Xinyan did not concern herself with their issue any further. Su Zhan left on the day she told him about Qin Ya being able to see him. She never saw him since then.

Time flew by and almost a month had passed since the new year. February was near when Lin Xinyan received a call from Zong Jinghao asking her to head to his company.

After she hung up, she got off work. She was getting ready to meet up with Zong Jinghao when she passed by the washroom to see that Qin Ya was throwing up inside.