

Surprise 521

Chapter 521 She Said That I Am a Good Man

After a while, the door swung open again, and Mike came in with his hands behind his back.

By then, Lila had already given up the idea of being angry at him. She knew that she could never get through to his dense head, and he would never understand the deeper meaning behind people's words.

"Quickly, eat your food. The soup is cold now."

Lila buried her head as she took in a mouthful of noodles while picking out the beef from the bowl and putting it into another bowl. However, she was caught off guard by the touch of pink from the corner of her eyes. When she looked up, she saw Mike grinning at her with a balloon in his hand.

"What's this?"

Mike began to tie the balloon to her bedside and rambled on about how he had rescued a little girl by the side of the road today. Finally, he stared at the pink color balloon and muttered to himself indifferently, "Her mother said that I was a good man. This is the second time anyone has ever said that to me."

When Lila heard this, she froze.

At that time, she was naive. Now that she had gone through so many things, she did not have the courage to insist that he was a good person.

With an embarrassed smile, she said, "You're just unattentive."

"Do you think they'll let me back if I perform well?"

After being asked that, she was silent.

She continued to use the chopsticks to stir her soup.

If there were a chance to turn back the fatal mistakes one made, this world would have been too cruel to those innocently dragged into the abyss by such errors.

While she was immersed in her thoughts, a gentle force ruffled her hair. The person who asked this was supposed to be comforted, yet, the person who listened could not extricate himself from a certain depressed mood for a moment.

No, she had seen too many TV shows. The people who did wrong never had happy endings.

Then, she snuggled up to the man's sturdy chest and slowly started to narrate, "My father used to gamble when I was young, and I would often see my mother staring at her phone alone at home. Later, when he owed the casino money and couldn't pay his debt, his hands were chopped off, and the debt collectors forced my mother to her death. I used to hate all of them back then, but now, I just hate my dad."

Suddenly, warm dampness permeated Mike's shirt. He thought that Lila was going to talk about the debt coolers. He didn't expect her to chuckle to herself and say, "Vietnam, I was so worried every time you went out that I couldn't sleep. I feel the same way right now, but I can't follow behind you anymore."

She was fumbling with the hem of her hospital gown, and her tone was a little calm.

Mike's eyes flickered when he heard this.

"I'll find a way. You can be cured."

That wasn't the point of her story, so she merely shook her head as she heard his declaration.

"I've always felt that there is no turning back once you've done something wrong, but you seemed to be the lucky one. God has taken special care of you. So, I hope you'll be a good person instead of trying to cure me."

Lila raised her arm, her thin fingertip slowly moved along the outline of the balloon at the head of the bed, and her eyes twinkled with warmth.

Mike was silent as the blue veins in his arms began to protrude from supporting himself by the edge of the bed. The boiling blood in his body constantly clamored for the shock that the words had just brought him.

It wasn't until the person lying down on his shoulders slowly fell asleep that his breath regulated, and a cold light appeared in his forbearing eyes.

After Mike tucked Lila in, he turned off the lights and left the ward. The slightly tired future walked along the dimly lit corridor, and the sound of tapping from the phone's keyboard echoed.

"I'll take the second option. We'll meet at the same place at 10:00AM two days from now."

He quickly got a message back.

"Coward."

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Two days later, it was pouring in Melrose City. The late autumn rain swept through every corner of the city with an obvious chill.

A man in a black leather jacket was sitting in a shabby noodle soup with a bowl of beef noodles that had been placed on the table for a long time; the aroma of the meat was carried by the heat. He took a pair of chopsticks and ate a big mouthful.

The woman opposite him was wearing an unseasonable black cap with a pair of foxy eyes that showed nothing but disgust. She sat upright, trying to touch as few things as possible.

The sound of rain crackled on the top of the room, upsetting everyone. Finally, the woman took off her black mask coldly and said, "I'm not here to watch you eat noodles."

Mike took another two mouthfuls of the beef noodle soup contentedly before putting his chopstick down, taking out a flash drive from his pocket, and pushing it to her. He watched her face darken and calmly explained, "You're still a wanted criminal in Vietnam. Don't think everything will be fine if you continue hiding in Melrose."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

Mike wiped his mouth and continued, "It won't do me any good to report you. All I need is your money. As long as you keep your end of the deal, I'll promise to keep everything a secret."

When the woman heard what he said, she crossed her arms contemptuously and scoffed, "Are you threatening me?"

"Nah, it's not my style to threaten other people. I'll do everything I promise you, but this time, you'd have to ensure that all the surgical expenses charged to your account are paid when everything is done."

Mike accepted the job and had always been indifferent when he spoke. However, he paused this time before adding, "This time, I want an additional 500,000 to ensure that she'll get to live a normal life once she's discharged from the hospital."

"Mike, you're really infatuated."

The woman's smile deepened as she leaned her body closer. With the closing distance, it was clear that scars covered her heavily made-up face.

As her smile dropped, her eyes began to seep a terrifying aura.

"If I go back on my deal, did you think you could've threatened me with these?"

However, Mike did not seem surprised by such an answer. Rather, he pushed the bowl of noodles aside and leaned in as well, meeting the pair of vicious eyes, showing no vulnerability.

"You've managed to escape a catastrophe in Vietnam. How did you and Courtney get to this point after moving to Melrose? You clearly know that if your identity is accidentally found out, it will be an abyss of eternal redemption. What kind of hatred drives you to take such a risk. Even if it's not for yourself, have you thought about Jackie?"

He paused before spitting out, "Britney Price."

"You!"

The woman's face immediately changed when she heard this and stood up. The chair rubbed against the white floor tiles and let out a screech that caused Mike to frown.

His mouth curled into a victorious smile as he watched the pain and anger grow in her eyes.

"You investigated me."

Then, in a sweep of her hand, she threw the bowl of soup to the ground in a crash, and fragments of the bowl flew everywhere. The sharp sound echoed in the place was not enough to vent the anger in the woman's heart.

Mike let out a chuckle and continued to provoke the woman. Finally, he took a photo from his inner pocket of the leather jacket and showed it to the woman.

"I heard that you used to be a big star, yet now you're just a wanted criminal with an odd face. It must be uncomfortable for you. Look how beautiful you were back then, and look at yourself now."

Chapter 522 I'll Explain To the Police

Britney's body began to tremble uncontrollably, and her clenched fists turned pale and feeble.

Under her black cap was a face that had been unable to be saved, even after multiple surgeries. As long as she touched the uneven surface of her skin, the thought of her being burned by the wire would torment her uncontrollably.

In the past five years, she had been awakened by nightmares. She lingered around like a cockroach, too afraid to die yet too scared of living simultaneously.

"Courtney Hunter, this is all your fault!"

She began to put all the blame on Courtney. Ever since she showed up, the trajectory of Britney's life had gone downhill, and she was thrown into an uncontrollable abyss.

Now, just mentioning Courtney's name was enough to drive her crazy.

"I don't want her dead. I just want her to suffer!" Britney banged on the table hysterically. "I want her to suffer more than I do."

This maniac action did not move Mike at all as he sat there indifferently, meeting Britney's sinister gaze.

"As long as it's done, it'll be enough to send her to prison for the rest of her life once it's exposed. But, this depends on your choice."

Before she spoke, she felt her chest tighten. Then, through gritted teeth, her following words were extremely domineering, "Money means nothing to me now. I'll transfer the money as soon as the news is out."

After she regained her composure, she coldly let go of Mike's collar. She straightened her body, put on her mask again, and adjusted her cap. Then, she said maliciously, "But if my identity is exposed, Lila will die."

As she said that, she kicked the chair behind her and stomped out of the noodle shop through the thick curtains.

Mike's eyes completely darkened once the curtain fell again as he poured himself a cup of barley and took a sip before leaving the stall.

Outside, he stopped a car and got it to follow closely behind the SUV in front. The car turned a few corners on the street in the heavy rain before reluctantly driving onto the main road and entering the city center.

The underground parking lot of the Melrose Auditorium was filled with cars from the underground level to the second floor of the parking lot. The vast auditorium was also bustling with life. The sweet sound of the violin echoed throughout the entire auditorium. Once the music slowly stopped, the whole space reverberated with heavy applause.

Today was the exchange ceremony between Melrose City and Shanghai Education Commission. Ten programs had been chosen from all the schools in the city. Rehearsals began two months ago to allow a proper showcase of Melrose's education style today.

Tina was wearing a navy blue dress and had just stepped down from the stage. The door on the west side of the auditorium opened into a gap, and a black figure scurried in with their back bent and quietly sat in the farthest corner of the auditorium.

"Just now was a violin concerto brought to you by the second-year student of Melrose High School. Next—"

As the announcer's voice echoed in the air, a sinister light appeared in the eyes of the figure under the cap and there was a mirthless sneer on their face. After a while, a cold wind blew into the auditorium. People near the door looked back in discomfort, just in time to see a figure scurrying out again.

Britney walked along the stairs to the underground basement, feeling inexplicably happy after seeing Tina. She even walked down the stairs with a little skip to her step.

At the underground basement, the woman's hum echoed. Her fingers slid across the videos of cars before finally stopping in front of a yellow school bus.

She stared at the big character printed on it; Melrose High School. Then, her lips curled up into a sinister smile.

She pulled out a utility from her bag, and the sharp blade flashed strangely in the light. Britney got under the car and came out a moment later, raising her knife, almost chuckling.

Suddenly, the faint footsteps that sounded behind her forced her to turn around vigilantly, just in time to meet Mike's inquiring gaze.

"In order to take revenge on Courtney, you're going to risk the lives of the people in this car?"

He had his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket as he stood one meter away from Britney. His eyes were emotionless, and his tone was flat.

Britney put her knife away when she heard this and spoke blatantly, "I didn't know you knew how to stalk people before."

As she said that, she tried to get around the man but was grabbed by the arm. Unexpectedly, a dull voice sounded in her ears, "I've already promised to help you. Why are you still doing this?"

Mike couldn't understand the depth of her hatred in her heart. After she heard this, she almost chuckled and shook off his hand.

"I want her to be in as much pain as possible."

"Then, you'd better mind your own business," Mike said and walked away.

The violent sound of the engine and brakes rang in the confined space. Mike stood in front of the yellow bus with downcast eyes as if he was caught in a rock and a hard place.

After a while, Lila's cold and beautiful face appeared in his mind. She would lean onto his shoulder and slowly spit out the words, "I hope you can be a good man."

When he thought of this, he frowned and pulled out his phone from his pocket.

As he turned around to lean on the body of the school bus, he keyed in a number off his memory. It was Cameron's number that he had memorized back when he was in the commissary.

The phone rang for a long time before it finally connected. Courtney quietly slipped out of the side door of the auditorium. After she answered the call, she reflexively lowered her voice and asked, "Who is this?"

"There is a problem with the Melrose High School bus brakes. Use another one."

Then, the phone was hung up before Courtney could even respond. The simple yet shocking news echoed in her mind repeatedly making her tremble in shock. So, she automatically tried to dial back the number, and the phone was unsurprisingly turned off.

Finally, just as she was about to return to the auditorium, she realized that the doors were open, and the crowd was swarming out of the congested door. Cold sweat started to form on Courtney's back as she ran towards the underground parking lot.

Outside the school bus, she watched the last student sit down. She had no time to explain as she began pounding on the door, urging the driver to get down.

"What's wrong with this woman?"

The driver frowned and began to start the engine. When Courtney heard this, she looked through the window and shouted, "Stop the car!"

At this point, the driver had no choice. She immediately jumped on the moment he opened the door as she dragged the driver off his seat and panted, "The brake!"

The driver left as he suspiciously checked the brakes when he heard her exclamations before leaning against the door with a pale face.

"Thank God, thank God! We avoided a big accident."

After his exclamation, he was suddenly washed with doubt as he looked at Courtney suspiciously.

"How did you know there is a problem with the brakes?"

Although Courtney was in disbelief, she couldn't be bothered to explain it to the driver. Instead, she called the police. After she ended the call, she answered, "I'll explain this to the police."

Chapter 523 You Guys Conspired

The rain went on for three more days, filling the air with humidity. When Courtney woke up and heard the sound of rain outside, she pulled the curtains open. A frown furrowed her brows. The sky was overcast, and she had no idea what time it was. Frustration welled up within her. She changed into new clothes and went into the dining room. Alexander and Jordan were reading the finance news of the day.

Tina changed into her school uniform and came downstairs. She noticed the extra plate on the table, and she asked, "Is Grandma back?"

She looked into the kitchen and was about to go in when Alexander said, "It's Oliver."

Courtney was having her milk, and she cocked her eyebrow and looked at Alexander. The guy was burying his face in the newspaper. "I thought he was helping the police arrest some criminals at the border. They've already arrested those folks?"

"Yeah. He's on leave now." Alexander flipped the newspaper absentmindedly. Courtney was surprised that Oliver told Alexander before her that he was coming back.

She took the newspapers from Alexander and Jordan's hands. "You can read these after you have your breakfast."

The men looked at each other sheepishly while the maid took the chance to serve them breakfast. Tina wiped her mouth and went upstairs before coming back down, saddling her bag behind her. "It's my turn to clean the class today. The driver will take me to school, so I won't be following you guys."

She went to the porch and changed her shoes in a hurry. A maid handed an umbrella to her, and she was about to take it, but Alexander shot the porch a look and said gently, "You don't have to go to school for a while, Tina."

"What?" The umbrella slipped out of Tina's hands and fell to the ground. She looked at Alexander, apparently upset. "I told you I'm not going to Sunhill."

After they came back from the police station the day before, Alexander suddenly suggested that Tina quit school and start work at Sunhill. He looked adamant and she had to throw a big tantrum before he gave up. He's gonna bring that up again? Annoyed, she tried to go out, but the girl bumped into someone. She could smell the scent of rain coming from him.

Oliver held her before she fell. "Aw, you didn't even wait for me? But I thought you knew I was coming back."

A slight pause later, Tina beamed. "Mr. Oliver?"

Before she could hug him, he held her shoulder down and took her back to the dining table. His camo shirt was looking heavy on him. "The flight's scheduled for ten. You seem to be in a hurry."

His shirt was drenched and he left muddy footprints from the porch all the way to the dining room. Then, Oliver sat down and dug into his breakfast.

“What flight, Mr. Oliver?” Tina sat back down, looking confused.

Oliver explained through a full mouth, but it only made her more confused. “Oh, you don’t know? Didn’t your father say anything about it?”

He was famished as he finished his breakfast in just a few moments, and then he shot a look at Alexander.

Alexander put his cutlery down calmly. “I haven’t had the time.”

Tina was getting really flummoxed. “I thought you wanted me to quit school and work at Sunhill.”

“Nope. You’re going on a study tour to Everlorn. New York University is recruiting a few study tour groups, and the members will visit the top ten universities of Everlorn within six weeks. This is a great opportunity, and the members might even snag a spot in one of these universities in the future.”

“Wait, so like a recommendation?” Tina’s eyes widened in disbelief. “But I’m not even in high school yet.”

“It’s alright. You can be admitted into the best high schools in Everlorn. If you don’t want to, they can keep a record of you, and you can send your application to them after you graduate high school.”

Tina was still confused, but Oliver cocked his eyebrow mysteriously. “I have two spots here. Jordan has one. Do you want one, Tina? I’ll give it to Mrs. Yliaster if you don’t. I heard they got a spot too, so Leah will go, but her siblings won’t.”

“I’ll go!” Tina had made a decision as her eyes shone. She looked happy, and all she could think about was her dream university—Cambridge.

Alexander had picked his newspaper up again. He looked up from it and said, “Jordan can’t stay with me all the time either. See if you have any university you’d want to enrol in, and start preparing after you come back. You and Tina will start your studies there next semester.”

“Okay.” Jordan did not object, though he was giving Tina a mysterious look.

Tina had no idea about it, and she was looking at Oliver with excitement. “Where did you get these spots, Mr. Oliver?”

Oliver was eating his egg, so he did not look up. “Oh, we worked with the local police to crack the recent scam case. The one who liaised with us was Fiona, a pretty lady from Canada. Her father’s in charge of the Alliance’s department of education, and he’s working on a study tour in Everlorn. She talked to me about it, so I asked if I could have two spots.”

Courtney understood what was going on while Tina was red with excitement. She had forgotten all about the fact that she had to clean the class. “So, when are we going?”

Oliver looked at the time. “We have to be at the airport at ten. You have two hours and forty-three minutes left.”

Tina took Jordan and darted upstairs. Alexander raised his eyebrow and he asked while looking in Tina's direction, "I thought you were going to school."

She was on the last step of the staircase, but she turned around and shrugged. "This is more important than school. Maybe I can get a recommendation to Cambridge out of this, and you know Jordan can't handle Leah. I need to be there to help him."

She had a point and Alexander had no retort. He turned his attention back to the last page of the newspaper, and he sounded subtly happy as he said, "Slow down. You still have time."

When the kids had gone upstairs, Oliver cocked his eyebrow at Alexander, as if telling Alexander to praise him. Alexander noticed that, but he moved his newspaper up and pretended he saw nothing.

Courtney could guess what was going on. She crossed her arms and looked at the men. "You guys are in on it, aren't you? The PIC of the Alliance's education department? Working on a study tour to Everlorn? Once Tina calms down, she'll see that it's a lie."

The gentlemen could not keep up the act anymore. They could tell that she was upset, and Oliver went back to his breakfast, though he was nudging Alexander with his elbow.

Alexander put his newspaper down and answered seriously, "This was Oliver's idea."

Chapter 524 Keep Them Safe

Oliver almost choked on his breakfast. He leaned on Alexander's shoulders and coughed nonstop. His face was red, while Alexander looked annoyed. He pushed Oliver away.

"You got your food on my shoulder."

Courtney gave them a deadpan look and turned the conversation back to the topic at hand. "What are you two hiding from me?"

Oliver looked at Alexander with hesitation. Alexander took off his soiled suit in disgust and loosened his tie. He wondered if he should keep this a secret, but then he thought there was no need for that. "We're sending them overseas to keep them safe." A pause later, he added, "Oliver found something."

Courtney was not surprised at all, and she turned her attention to Oliver. "What did you find, Oliver?"

Oliver frowned. He had a serious look on his face as he said, "Remember the tattoo I told you about? I went to Vietnam to find out more, and the police there have some records about this. The reason the Crescent Church was disbanded was because of an internal feud. The leader was captured, but there's an important accomplice who's still on the run."

"And?"

"She's the key. The woman is the Crescent Church's leader's girlfriend. She also gave him a lot of stock after she started dating him five years ago. It's also thanks to her that the leader became the top drug lord in Vietnam. If I'm right, the stock she provided was the one missing during Dragon's case five years ago."

“What did you say?” A frown appeared on her forehead, and she felt a chill running down her spine. She also subconsciously clasped her hands together. The mention of Dragon caught her by surprise, and she was reminded of something awful.

Oliver noticed Courtney getting pale at a terrifying speed. He hesitated, and he eventually swallowed what he was going to say next. The man looked at Alexander.

Alexander leaned forward and put his hand on top of Courtney’s. Alexander’s warmth, in comparison to the cool table top, calmed her down a little. “Dragon and his men died in the fire on the island, and we found a female body too. According to the DNA test results, the body belonged to Poppy.”

Alexander sounded calmer than Oliver, and his voice soothed Courtney’s trembling heart down.

“Britney,” Courtney said with difficulty.

Oliver nodded.

“This drug lord had always been at odds with Dragons. The whole thing couldn’t have been a coincidence, so we suspect that Britney might have taken the drug lord’s side five years ago. She’s on the run now, and she might be in Melrose.” Oliver took an old photo out of his bag. It was the woman who pushed Natasha down the stairs. Then, he took out another old photo, but this time, it was a photo of Britney, and he laid it out on the table beside the first photo. Both of them were covered from head to toe, so they could not tell the difference between the two women. “We can’t see anything from this photo, but I sent this photo to my colleague in the Identification Bureau, and they told me that these women might look different, but their bone structure and body shape are a match.” In the end, he said, “I suspect Britney underwent a cosmetic surgery.”

Courtney felt a chill run up her spine. “If she is Britney, then she’s doing this to get back at me. Natasha, Grandpa, and even Tina. She’s trying to get her revenge, and she’s doing it fast.”

“If that’s true, then this is not the same Britney we know. I asked around, and the locals told me that she’s a fearsome woman in Vietnam. She destroyed the Crescent Church all by herself.” Oliver took another file out of his bag. “This is the result of the investigation I just got this morning. The brake lines of Melrose High School’s bus were cleanly cut, so someone did it on purpose, and all the surveillance cameras of the stadiums’ underground car park were destroyed. This was planned. Britney alone couldn’t have done this. Someone must be helping her.”

Courtney suddenly remembered something, and she froze up for a moment. “What about the number I gave you? Did you find out who’s the caller?” The guy who called her the day before could not be contacted even until now. Thanks to that call, a bunch of people were saved. She thought it would be great help if she knew who that person was.

Oliver’s frown deepened. “I did. The number’s under Lila’s name.”

“Mike.” Courtney knew who it was right away.

Oliver nodded, but he had no idea why Mike did that. “He’s the prime suspect behind Raymond’s death, and he was probably involved in Walter’s case as well. He’s the only one we know who’s helping Britney, so why did he tell you that your car was sabotaged?”

Silence fell upon them for a while. In the end, Alexander said hesitantly, "Maybe they got into a fight. What you found tells us that he might be doing this for money. He and Britney are both fugitives. There's no need for him to do this and attract the cops' attention."

Courtney thought that was a logical explanation. "Oh yeah! Lila! Mike did tell her he's gonna have a lot of money soon. He even told her his boss lent it to him. I think Lila doesn't know about this, but he is doing this for money."

Oliver leaned against the chair, tapping his finger on the marble table. He then nodded. "Keep calling. I've asked my colleague to keep an eye on this. We'll find something if we can establish a connection, but I think he'll burn this number and switch to another one soon."

Courtney nodded absentmindedly, as if she was in a trance. Alexander held her hand to reassure her. "So we'll send the kids overseas. Britney can't leave the nation as she is. They'll be fine, so don't worry."

Courtney smiled, but she looked pale. She mustered her courage and stood up, and the chair creaked as she did. When she spoke again, she sounded confident. "I'm not worried about her. She's not worth my time, but she will pay for what she did to Natasha and Grandpa." She shrugged, looking tired.

"I have a competition later. I have no time to worry." She went to the room and took her bag. Alexander changed into a new suit and followed behind her.

"I'll take you there." I'm worried about you. He did not say that, but Courtney could feel it. She saddled her bag and was about to nod, but before she could, someone called Alexander.

Alexander frowned. He looked at who was calling and wondered if he should take it. Eric did not let up. Alexander thought about the mission he sent Eric out on. He was worried, and in the end, he took the call, but when he heard what happened, his face fell.

He hung up, and Courtney could see that he was worried. She straightened his collar and tie out, then she smiled at him. "Go. Call me when you're done."

Chapter 525 She's Pregnant

Courtney never thought Alexander had to do anything for her, and she could understand his obsession with his career, so she told him to do his stuff first.

Alexander hesitated for a moment, a frown dotting his forehead.

The air was tense, and Oliver could see why. He got up, put his hands in his pockets, and wrapped his arm around Courtney's shoulder. "Leave your wife to me. I'll keep her safe for as long as I'm here."

Alexander's face darkened even further, and he stared at the hand on Courtney's shoulder. "She's your sister-in-law," he said, veiling a threat.

"Yeah. Still my sister."

Oliver looked a lot younger and livelier than Alexander was. Since he was so confident, Alexander said nothing. Right before he went out, he said, "I think I should call your wife."

Oliver looked horrified, and he pulled his hand away, as if he was electrocuted. "Hey, you're a man. You shouldn't snitch."

"I'm a businessman. I value efficiency and effectiveness." Alexander smirked. He stepped back and kissed Courtney's forehead, then caressed her cheeks. "I'll see you once I'm done with work." He then left. The sound of his footsteps rang in the living room, and he said, "Keep her safe."

The Melrose Intern Aptitude Tournament was an event jointly organized by more than a dozen public hospitals in the city. It was a biannual event, so not all interns had the chance to join. Registration was voluntary, but Linda had handed in Courtney's registration form behind her back. Not everyone could have the chance to join, and Courtney was brilliant enough to perhaps even win this, which would make her intern life a lot smoother. In fact, it would help with her career too. Courtney refused at first, but in the end, Linda told her, "You would have been fired if I hadn't covered for you. You have been taking a lot of days off lately." She agreed to join after that.

The wipers wiped the water away from the windshield, but the rain foggied everything up again. Courtney held the steering wheel tightly, driving as calmly as she could. It was silent in the car. Oliver was fiddling with a curio in the car. It was a husky with a bouncy head. Whenever the car bumped, the husky's head would bounce around cutely. "You like things like this?"

Courtney flicked the husky's head and answered nonchalantly, "Tina bought this for me."

"You didn't even send your kids off. Are you sure about this?"

Courtney looked away, and her eyelashes trembled. She kept driving, still looking calm. "Tina grew up with me. She already knew how to take care of herself when she was five, and she handles most of her own stuff up until this point. Maybe I did fail as a mother. That's why she's so independent." After a pause, her gaze darkened. "I can't leave now, and it might be safer for them if I didn't go."

"You have a point."

Oliver put on a relaxed front, and this time, he fiddled with the plushie that was used as a cushion. Courtney was still looking ahead, but the next thing she said hit his sore spot. "So, what's with you and Tessa? You looked a little uncomfortable when Alexander brought her up just now." She did not talk about it because Oliver would not tell her everything if Alexander was there. She wanted to leave it for later, but Oliver's behavior was worrying her.

Oliver put the plushie down and leaned back, looking at the car's roof dazedly. He had no idea what to say, and in the end, he answered, "She's pregnant."

"HUH?" Courtney slammed the brakes, and Oliver flew forward. He held his bruised forehead, wincing in pain. She turned around and gave him a look of disappointment. "So what's the problem with that?"

Oliver's face was red. He hemmed and hawed, and in the end, he said, "Nothing. I just drank too much that night, got a little impulsive, and I forgot to get the co—" His face got even redder, and Courtney smacked his head.

"I don't want the details! I mean, you and Tessa just need to get married, and things will go a lot better then. It's the last step now. You should know what to do, so why the long face?" She wondered for a while, and then she gave him a look of disdain. "Oh, so you don't want to marry her?"

Oliver rubbed his forehead, feeling a little sad. He took out a ring from his pocket. The quality of the diamond was great because it sparkled brightly, and the craftsmanship was impeccable. She could see it cost a lot, but to Oliver, it felt a little grating. "I'm not the one who doesn't want to get married."

Courtney understood what he was getting at. She kept quiet and revved the car back up again, then continued driving toward her destination.

Oliver had a cool look on his face, and he told her about what happened. About two and a half months ago, when Oliver was on a mission, he passed by Tessa's base and stayed there for the night. It just so happened he had a celebration with his team that night as well. He got a little drunk, and they slept together. A month ago, Tessa told him calmly that she was pregnant. They thought marriage would come next, but Tessa's superior was badly injured in a secret mission. She was appointed as captain in the interim, and if they succeeded in the mission, she would have a bright future ahead of her. Accidents like marriage or pregnancies at this time would ruin her future.

"She thinks her career is more important than the kid." That was what Oliver said, and he sounded dejected.

"And?" Courtney said nothing to that and waited for him to continue.

"We met a week ago, and I hid the ring in the cake when we went out for dinner. I was gonna propose, but she told me she wanted an abortion." After a pause, Oliver smiled bitterly. "So I took the cake and left. I had no idea what to feel. Heck, I have no idea how to describe how I felt."

She had been separated from them for five years, and Courtney found it hard to adjust. Oliver used to be a punk who kept complaining about how fierce Tessa was, and how he could not get used to it, but now he was looking all dejected after getting a de facto refusal.

"You want to hear what I think about this?"

"Sure." He nodded. She was the only one whom he could confide in.

"Before Alexander and I tied the knot, we went through a lot. Sometimes it's because of a lack of understanding, sometimes it's a lack of trust, sometimes it's a lack of honesty. In the end, we were separated for half a decade. If we could just be honest, the separation would not have happened." She started smiling. "Neither you or Tessa are in the wrong. This is something you guys have to overcome. If you can overcome it, then it'll become a memory for you, but if you don't, it'll be a hard trial." She paused for a moment. "That's all I have to say. You're smart. You should know what I mean."

The car was silent once more. This time, Oliver seemed to be immersed in his own world.

Chapter 526 You're on Your Own

Courtney had no time to prepare for the competition, and she even had no idea what the rules were before she reached the venue. When they came to the hall and found out that it was packed with the audience, their jaws almost dropped.

Linda pushed the throng away and tugged at Courtney, pointing at her. "You're wearing this for the tournament?"

“What’s wrong with this?” She was in a beige windbreaker, light brown cotton sweater, and a pair of gray palazzo pants. It was casual but stylish. She looked at herself, thinking that she was dressed appropriately.

Oliver stuck his head out and said, “She looks great.”

Linda felt like taking her heels off and hurling them at Courtney and Oliver. She pointed at the audience seat and growled at Oliver, “You get to the audience seat. Leave everything else to me.” She went off like the wind.

When Courtney pushed the crowd away and saw her competitors, she realized why Linda was so mad. She thought this would be a regular test or interview, but this competition turned out to be way more. She thought she was on a live recording set. There were cameras installed in all corners of the hall, and most of them were trained on the dozens of interns in the hall. Just like Courtney, they had passed the first elimination round. All of them were wearing white coats and standing there solemnly. Courtney took her number and stood among the crowd, though she looked really different wearing her beige windbreaker.

“Why aren’t you in your uniform? You can’t take part in the tournament if you aren’t in your uniform.” The moment she stood still, a patrolling judge came over to her sternly, as if he would eliminate her for not wearing a coat.

Courtney looked sheepish and was about to reason with him, but Linda barged in and handed her a coat. “We have a uniform! The competition hasn’t started yet.” Linda was huffing and puffing. Her hand was on her waist, and she forced a smile. After the judge left, she turned around and took Courtney’s windbreaker off. “Wear this. Can you at least pay attention to this?”

Courtney wore the coat, muttering, “You didn’t tell me the competition would be like this. It’s like a live show.”

“They’ll record the whole competition and make it into a promotional video for the hospitals. All the edited footage is gonna make it to the Internet. The public can see the early stages too. Aren’t you worried at all?”

Linda was almost bursting with fury, while Courtney teased, “Can I worry about it now?”

Linda rolled her eyes and left. “You’re on your own now,” she said.

The competition was an elimination race. All the contestants would be eliminated until there were only three left. Since Courtney was not familiar with the rules, she listened closely while the host was announcing them.

Oliver looked at the screen and noticed Courtney looking confused. He chuckled. She found her bearing after a few rounds, but by then, only about two thirds of the contestants were left.

The third round was a speed game. The host split the contestants up into groups of two according to the draw, and then they would be tested on their medical knowledge. The three groups with the lowest marks would be eliminated, leaving only twelve contestants. Courtney’s knowledge reserve was solid, and she knew the answers to all the questions. She was not keen on getting the top three, but she would not be eliminated easily. After the fourth round, there were only six contestants left.

Courtney had gotten into the mood at this point. When she snapped out of it, she was already looking tense and ready for the next challenge like everyone else.

“And now, for the last round of the tournament. This is it. This will decide the top three contestants. The top three of Melrose’s eighth Sunshine Cup shall be born!” the host announced, and the audience cheered in delight. A moment later, he announced, “And now, let’s welcome Dr. Allen from Melrose Hyperion Hospital to the stage. He shall be the last triallsperson for the contestants. Give it up for Professor Allen!”

The audience clapped, and Courtney looked at Allen who was sitting at the judging panel. He was about fifty years old, and he looked professional and lean. Although he had graying hair, his steps were filled with energy. He was a legend among doctors, and Courtney had heard of him as well. He was rumored to have operated twelve times in twenty-one hours. Lots of people marveled at this, but lots had their doubts about it as well.

Courtney and her colleagues had also discussed this before. The intern nurses did not believe it, but Linda had come in with her arms crossed and said, “Just because you can’t do it doesn’t mean nobody can. Expand your horizons.” Linda worshipped Allen. When she found out he was coming back, she tried her best just to see him, but her attempts failed for some reason. Now she was in the audience seat, and Linda was beside herself. Poor Oliver had his thighs bruised because she kept slapping it.

“We all know Professor Allen spends most of his time researching. He seldom performs any operation anymore, but I believe everyone has heard of his astounding achievement. Care to share your experience with us, professor?”

An eerie silence captivated the hall.

Allen was sitting in the middle of the panel of judges. His eyes were almost hidden behind his wrinkles, and reminiscence appeared within them. He never did tell anyone about his experience because he could never bring himself to say it. It was a gory and bloody experience. He might have decades of experience in this field, but the PTSD he gained from it forced him to retire from the operating theater. His eyes trembled, and his voice rang across the hall.

“This happened two years ago in Vietnam. I was in an exchange program at the capital’s hospital. One month before the program ended, something tragic happened.” He paused and kept his voice steady. What he said next shocked Courtney, who was just an audience until a moment ago. “The local police force called it ‘Operation Solaris’, which was an operation to arrest the local drug syndicate. The syndicate’s name was Crescent, so the police named themselves after the sun. An accident happened during the operation. Someone set off a chain of explosions, and hundreds of patients were sent to the hospital.” He was reminded of a grim experience, so he stopped for a moment and looked around before he could calm down.

Chapter 527 Who Would You Save

“It was that day I performed twelve operations in the span of twenty-one hours. That... was not something to be proud of. That day, all I felt was how fragile human lives were, and it shook me to my core. I still feel the same today.”

Some young soldiers who retired from the battlefield after the age of war might look fine from the outside, but they had to receive years of therapy to heal. Some even broke down and took their own lives because of the weight of the sin they had to carry. Those who had never gone through war could never imagine how bloody and cruel it was.

“Professor Allen, what was the most shocking thing you experienced?”

Allen might have agreed to answer that question, but he still shivered when the host asked him that. “It happened after my first operation. The corridor was packed with people. I didn’t even have time to take off my surgical clothes, and my assistant had taken me to another operating theater. The moment I went in, I heard a screech coming from the bed. Someone was crying,” Allen spoke quietly and slowly. Not even a sound was heard in the hall. Courtney was sitting on the chair a crew member gave her, and it was so quiet, she could hear her own heartbeat.

“There was a mother and a daughter on the bed. They were shopping for clothes in a nearby mall when the explosion happened. She instinctively protected her daughter at the moment of impact, so the woman was severely burned, and shards of glasses punctured her body. Her organs might have been destroyed as well. They were stuck together when the rescue team took them back. The previous surgeon had just finished separating them, but the surgeon fainted before she could complete the operation, so I was summoned instead. The mother was alive, but she was severely injured and needed to be operated on at once. Her child’s condition was stable, but she was weak. The child could not hold on any longer, and there was bleeding in her chest. It would be disastrous for her if we did not make an incision to check.” Allen spaced out, immersing himself in his past. He had stopped talking, but the audience started murmuring.

Linda clenched her fists, her attention on the humble man on the stage.

The host held his mic and asked, “What happened next?”

Allen looked away, as if snapping out from his reverie. He looked at the audience and talked a little faster. “All the other doctors were operating on other patients, and I was the only surgeon left, but I had two patients desperately waiting for me. Interns, here’s my question. Who would you save if you were in my situation?”

He turned his attention to the remaining interns on the stage. The question came too suddenly, and everyone looked at one another in confusion.

Only Courtney remained silent. She did not even look around.

Oliver noticed the solemn look in Linda’s eyes, so he leaned back and asked, “Who would you save?”

“The child, I think.”

Oliver only heard the answer a long while later, but he said nothing. He turned his gaze back to the stage.

“Can I say something?” A moment of commotion later, a doctor raised his hand. He adjusted his glasses, a look of confidence shining in his eyes.

Allen extended his hand toward the man, telling him to continue.

“If it were me, I would choose the best assistants available and set up two operating theaters to perform on them at the same time.”

The crowd broke into a discussion, and even Linda was shocked. The interns around him looked at the man, trying to figure out why he answered that so confidently.

Allen clasped his hands tighter together, but aside from that, he showed no other change. He seemed interested, and he said, “Continue.”

“Professor, you did say if I were in your position. If I had your abilities, I would try to save both of them at the same time, though all preparations must be done to prevent any more accidents from happening.” He paused and smiled. “Well, but I am just an intern who just graduated from medical school. I do not have your abilities as of now, but I love life. I love being a doctor. You’re my role model, and I aspire to be a respectable doctor like you.”

It was a perfect speech, and the contestants around him looked a little annoyed. Some of the short-tempered ones even muttered, “Wow, what a brown-noser.” Even so, Allen started to smile.

“It’s good to have ambition. I like young people who have that.” He clapped, and the audience followed suit. Oliver looked on with interest. When they were done applauding, Allen looked at Courtney, who had been looking a bit too calm. “Contestant number seven, you might be clapping your hands, but I can see you have a different opinion. I’d like to hear your choice.”

“Who, me?” Courtney was a little surprised. She paused for a moment before standing up from her seat. She did have her own opinion, but she did not want to say it out loud.

“Yes. I would like to hear your opinion.”

Allen insisted. Courtney hesitated for a moment, then she nodded. “Alright. I would save the child if I were in your place,” she said coolly, putting her emotions aside. “Of course, I admire contestant number three’s courage, but I would save the child first if I were in your place. Firstly, I’m a mother as well. The mother protected her child right away, and if she could make the choice, she would want her child to be saved as well. Secondly, the child had no outward injuries, but she had internal bleeding in her chest. It would take a shorter amount of time to save her compared to the mother. If the chest bleeding wasn’t treated in time, the intra-abdominal pressure would become too high, and she might die because we missed the best time to rescue her. As for the mother, her organs were very likely damaged, but nobody could be sure until they checked. If the damage was too severe, it would be too hard to save her, and I would have no idea how long it would take. If I were to save the mother first, I might lose both of them.”

Courtney’s answer rang out in the hall, and Allen’s face fell. He stared at her seriously, waiting for her to continue.

Courtney concluded, “After weighing the risks, I would save the child first. Operating on them at the same time would be too risky. Nobody can be sure about the patients’ conditions until we open them up and confirm their injuries. If I couldn’t handle it alone...”

Allen raised his hand, telling her to stop. She stopped talking and looked calmly into Allen’s eyes.

