

Chapter 31 Chased by a Spirit

Winona and Helen trembled in fear and ran to the office as fast as lightning. They finally calmed down when they saw people walking around the building.

When she turned back, she saw the white plastic bag again. It was following them and circling at the same place. Goosebumps and tingles erupted all over her skin.

She ran into Liam's office and his arms while crying.

"Liam!"

Lilly was showing Liam her drawing when Winona barged into the room.

Liam frowned and stepped back awkwardly.

Winona was going to throw herself into his arms, but when Liam stepped back, she fell face-down on the ground, causing her nose to bleed.

"Liam Crawford, you...!" Winona covered her nose and said angrily.

Employees who walked past peeked into Liam's office curiously.

Helen took out a napkin quickly and criticized Liam, "Hey, what are you doing? Winona is your wife! How can you let her throw herself on the floor?"

Liam replied harshly, "I'm not into this kind of gimmick."

Winona felt embarrassed. He made her look like she was seducing him.

However, she had no choice but to keep quiet. She could not let others know that she and Liam were not on good terms. Arguing here at the office will only make the situation worse.

Winona glanced at Lilly and suddenly a drawing on the table caught her eye.

Lilly's painting showed a portrait of a lady. Although it is not very realistic, it even looks a bit cartoonish...

It somehow reminded her of May Lee who was crushed to death at the construction site five years ago!

Lilly stood up straight on the chair. She glanced at Liam and carefully peeked at Winona.

Winona's face looked even scarier. The dark cloud covered half of her face and only both of her eyes were revealed. It looked scarier than ghosts and spirits!

Lilly covered her mouth and asked quietly, "Master, what is wrong with Aunt Winona?!"

Pablo shook his head in dismay, "Oh no, did you see that poo on her face? I guess she was slapped by May Lee just now."

Lilly glanced at her face and mumbled to herself, "No poo! But it's kind of stinky."

Winona heard Lilly and Polly murmuring words like "poo" and "stinky", and she could no longer hold back anymore.

She was so afraid that she forgot her face was covered with poo...

Winona gagged and immediately rushed into the washroom to wash her face.

Liam glanced at Helen coldly and asked, "Why are you here?"

"My dear Liam, please listen to me. You can't get a divorce with Winona. Zachary and Hannah are already so grown up and you must provide them a loving home..."

"It's normal for husbands and wives to quarrel...you should spend more time at home..."

"If you are here to talk about this, I guess you can leave now." Liam sneered.

The divorce agreement letter has already been given to Winona.

It's her choice whether to sign or not.

However, what was done, was done. Liam was going to get a divorce from her no matter what.

Liam's face darkened and pushed Helen out of his office without giving her a chance to finish her words.

When Winona came out from the washroom, Liam ruthlessly pushed her to the door and closed the office door with a loud bang.

The employees outside pretended to be busy with work, but actually, some of them took out their smartphones to film them secretly.

Winona's face turned red, "Liam Crawford, open the door!"

While in the office, Liam pressed a button on the telephone and muttered a few words.

In just a few minutes, two security guards came and sent Winona and Helen out of the building!

Both of them were extremely embarrassed as there were a lot of people staring at them.

"This is too much. I am his mother-in-law. How can he do this to his mother-in-law?!"

Winona felt agitated. Lilly's drawing sent shivers down her spine.

How did she know about May Lee?

What is she doing here at the construction site...

While Winona was deep in her thought, Helen was still ranting about Liam.

"Mom, go back! I will talk to Liam. You always mess things up!" Winona said irritably.

"What do you mean 'mess things up'?! I do all these because I care about you!" Helen gave her a death stare.

Winona ignored her and walked away.

Soon after more nagging, Helen left the scene as well.

At the back of the construction site, Winona sneakily walked toward the statue. She examined the statue up and down and felt relieved when everything looked normal.

As Winona turned her head, she saw a white plastic bag hanging on a tree.

It even swayed left and right creepily when Winona stared at it.

Winona's face turned pale. She ran as fast as she could.

“Shoo!”

The white plastic bag was blown by a strong wind and swirled behind Winona like a tornado.

Winona’s mind turned blank. She ran as fast as she could and even lost one of her high heels like Cinderella. Her hair which has always been well-kept has become a total mess.

She was chased by a spirit! She was so afraid that she let out a terrified wail while running, and all the dogs passing by were startled by her.

At the same time, Lilly laid her head in front of a window at the pantry located on the sixteenth floor. She tilted her head in confusion when she saw Winona running across the construction site like a maniac.

The plaza at the construction site has been built, and the ground was paved with floor tiles. There are high-rise buildings under construction not far away.

Lilly mumbled while caressing Polly’s head, “Polly, that person looks like Aunt Winona!”

Polly tilted his head and blinked his eyes, “Gorilla!Gorilla!”

Lilly corrected him, “It’s Aunt Winona, not gorilla!”

Polly said, “Winona, Winona is gorilla!”

“No, Polly. Aunt Winona is not a gorilla.”

“Gorilla!” Polly exclaimed, still tilting his head.

Lilly was speechless.

There were a few office ladies who were watching them while having their lunch.

“Oh my god, that’s so cute! She is talking to the parrot!”

“Whose child is this? I just came back and suddenly there’s a child here.”

“Is this Mr. Crawford’s child?”

One of them pointed at Liam, who was busy making milk formula for Lilly. The adults often have coffee, tea, or even milk tea during breaks. Liam felt that Lilly must drink something as well, so he brought a can of milk formula.

He was like a scientist in the laboratory. He read the instructions carefully, took two scoops of milk formula precisely, and put them in the cup according to the scale.

“Smack!”

Suddenly, a plastic bag smacked itself on the window.

“Hi, Ugly Aunty!” Lilly greeted.

“Hurry up, let me in!” She stuck out her tongue like a dog.

She was suffering in pain due to the sun.

How can you be so inhumane and let me work outside under the sun?

She almost died!

Pablo squinted his eyes as he lay his head lazily on the windowpane, “Calm down. I won’t let you die.”

His words made the female spirit startle.

Lilly raised her head and spoke earnestly, “Master, don’t lie, or else you will get struck by lightning.”

Just as Pablo was about to say something...

“Rumble!”

A small lightning flashed through the blue sky.

Pablo, “...”

Chapter 32 Showing Off His Niece

Pablo’s heart skipped a beat. He looked at Lilly in awe.

No way, is this just a coincidence?

He cleared his throat and said, “Return her to the jar. Do you still remember the soul-shifting spell, if you don’t...”

Before Pablo could finish his words, Lilly raised her hand and grabbed something from the window.

In no time, the Female Spirit returned to the jar.

Pablo touched his nose subconsciously.

What kind of sorcery is this...

Then, Liam handed over a round glass that contained milk, “Drink it, Lilly.”

Lilly took the glass politely and said, “Thank you, Uncle Liam!”

He grinned at Lilly proudly.

Even though he has two children of his own, he rarely spend time with his children. He admitted that he was not a good father.

He felt guilty when thinking of his own children. He petted Lilly’s head gently and asked mindlessly, “Lilly, do you think I should get a divorce with Aunt Winona?”

Lilly looked at him and asked innocently, “Uncle Liam, why do people marry if they are going to divorce anyway?”

She knew what “divorce” meant. It was a term that was frequently brought up by her father.

At that time she was still too young and did not really understand the meaning of it. However, she finally understood now; to divorce is to marry a new woman.

Lilly did not understand the ways of adults. It was their own decision to marry a person at first, why would they change their mind in the end?

Liam was startled by her question and did not know how to answer her.

He pursed his lips and said softly, “Well, it’s because Aunt Winona was pregnant with Zachary back then.”

Liam knew that it was a conscious choice he made, but the only thing that Liam was upset about was that he had no idea that he was cheated on until after Hannah was born.

At that time, Jean was extremely sick and even went missing. He did not have the right mind to think that much.

Lilly frowned and asked, “Why was Aunt Winona pregnant with Zachary? Do you like Aunt Winona?”

Liam shook his head, “No, I don’t love her... I guess!”

Lilly was silenced by his reply and stared angrily at him.

He was creeped out by her aggressive staring and asked why.

“You don’t love Aunt Winona, but she gave birth to your son, Zachary. Are you the so-called f*ckboy?” Lilly asked with a poker face.

Liam was stunned by the question and did not know what to say, “Uh...”

“It’s fine, Uncle Liam. I understand.” Lilly petted Liam’s back compassionately.

Liam was extremely confused by her instant change in opinion.

Uh, she is a child. What does she know?

Just as he was going to say something, Edward came back from the construction site.

“Lilly, come here, sweet pea!”

Edward stretched his arms and was going to carry Lilly without taking off his safety helmet, not to mention that he was also drenched in sweat.

“Go clean yourself.” Liam slapped away his hands.

Edward ignored Liam and carried Lilly out of the office.

“Lilly, isn’t it too boring here? Let’s go, I’ll bring you to the construction site!” Edward said excitedly.

He did his inspection at the construction site just now. Now that he was done with work, all he wanted was to show her off to his colleagues.

Liam disagreed with him, “It’s too dangerous for kids, and it’s for employees only!”

Edward said playfully, “Our darling is an employee as well. She’s our little CEO!”

“That’s right, I am an employee!” Lilly nodded proudly.

A while ago, Ugly Aunty mentioned that Aunt Winona went to the construction site. Something was hiding in the statue.

She needed to go and find out.

Edward was delighted. He carried Lilly in his arms and greeted everyone along the way, “Yo, this is my niece!”

“My niece is cute, right?”

“This is my niece. Isn’t she so adorable?!”

Lilly covered her face awkwardly. She couldn’t help but feel embarrassed after being praised and adored by so many people!

Her adorable actions made everyone laugh their heart out.

Edward was an easily irritable rough man who had a nasty temper. Surprisingly, he has transformed into a soft-spoken and gentle family man.

Unbelievable!

Edward still has some common sense. He prevented Lilly to enter the building that was under construction. Instead, he brought her to the plaza where the floor tiles have been laid and where the statue was situated.

“This plaza is fully built, and there’s a playground for children. Let’s go there and play!”

He then pointed at the high-rise building in front of them that was under construction, “That building is an office building, and the building beside it that is shaped like a bowl is a shopping mall. There’s even a huge supermarket in the basement. I built all these. Did I do a great job?”

“Great job!” Lilly reassured Edward.

Edward has his ego boosted by Lilly.

Out of the blue, Lilly pointed at the statue located in the middle of the plaza, “Uncle Edward, what is that?”

Edward glanced at the statue and said, “That is a statue of a phoenix, and it is made of stainless steel. Your Uncle Liam designed it.”

Lilly escaped from Edward’s arms and ran towards the statue.

“Don’t run, it is dangerous!” Edward shouted.

“Uncle Edward, do you have a huge hammer? Can you let me see?” Lilly requested.

Edward thought Lilly was genuinely interested in all kinds of tools like him. People used to say that he had a weird hobby. Now that he finally found someone who shared the same interest, he quickly asked a worker to get all kinds of hammers for Lilly.

“Lilly, I can proudly say that I own the most working tools in this country. I have four thousand different hammers!”

Liam rushed to the plaza when he was done with work. He was bewildered when he saw a worker pulling a wagon filled with a variety of hammers to the plaza.

“What are you two doing?”

Lilly raised his head and showed her rosy cheeks, “I’m looking at hammers!” she said excitedly.

Edward squatted in front of Lilly and introduced the tools passionately.

“This is a wooden hammer, and it is used for hammering nails. Whereas this is a stone hammer...this is a flat hammer.”

All the hammers which the worker took were baby-sized so Lilly could hold them.

Liam was speechless.

Lilly was rummaging through the hammers to find the perfect one.

Pablo floated beside Lilly and ordered, “Tulip, take that and crush this statue!”

“But It looks too heavy...”

Pablo smirked, “How do you know it’s heavy when you haven’t tried?”

Seeing that Lilly was touching a big hammer, Edward said excitedly, “This is awesome! It can be used to demolish walls. Its handle is soft so it can bend, and such design is to prevent...”

“Yes, just do it!” Pablo ordered.

“Uncle Edward, please let me borrow your hammer!”

Liam and Edward expected that she could not lift the hammer as they forgot about the incident where she bent the iron railings with her bare hands.

Soon, Lilly swung the big hammer violently and smashed it on the statue repeatedly.

“Bang!”

The bottom part of the statue broke and revealed a big hole. Something mysterious fell from it, followed by a cloud of dust.

Liam and Edward could not believe what they saw.

Chapter 33 Hidden Inside The Statue

A skeleton hand fell out from the destroyed statue; it was holding something wrapped in paper.

Liam quickly held Lilly and covered her eyes from the eerie scene. Edward was stunned for a moment before collecting himself, “Liam, I think you should bring Lilly home first.”

“I want to stay here!” Lilly protested, but to no avail. “Lilly, I am sorry but you cannot stay here,” said Liam. Without a moment of hesitation, he picked her up and rushed home.

“Now Lilly, why don’t you go home and play with Granny? Let Uncle Edward and I deal with the statue,” Liam continued, “Remember, if anyone asks, tell them it was Uncle Edward who destroyed the statue accidentally.”

“Why?” Lilly was perplexed. “It wasn’t Uncle Edward. Why do I have to lie?” Liam frowned and said, “Just listen to me for once, okay?” Lilly shrugged, “Fine.”

Liam brought Lilly home and left immediately after. While Bettany was away preparing food, Lilly asked Pablo, “Master, why do I have to lie about destroying the statue? Lying is bad.”

Without glancing up from the book he was reading, Pablo replied nonchalantly, “Have you heard of a white lie? Lying is not always bad. Your uncles are merely trying to protect you by asking you to lie. If people find out about your extraordinary strength, they’re going to cut you open.”

“No,” Lilly was frightened, “Please don’t let them cut me open!” I am no food! Why would anyone want to cut me open?

Bettany seemed amused. “Don’t be silly! No one is cutting you open,” she said, handing an apple to Lilly, “Here, eat an apple and everything is going to be alright.”

Lilly took the apple and looked at Pablo, puzzled. Pablo took out the jar of souls and summoned a female spirit. He asked the spirit, “Why is your hand hidden inside the statue?”

Pablo had not realized the spirit had a severed hand because she had kept the full information of how she had died from him. Now it was clear she was trying to gather her severed hand, so her soul could rest in peace.

“I was holding my money when I was killed, and my hand got separated from my body.” She answered sadly, “I could not rest in peace without my hand. I have been wandering the mortal realm for the past five years, trying to retrieve my hand.”

Pablo glanced at her, “You knew it wasn’t just salt, didn’t you?” The spirit was dumbfounded. Pablo continued, “You knew, yet you did it anyway for money. You got what you deserved.”

He had no idea how her severed hand got inside the statue, but if the cops found the hand and the bag of money, they would trace the fingerprints to Winona in no time.

Lilly was not interested in their conversation. She tore a piece from her apple and gave it to Polly. Polly happily gobbled the piece of apple. As both finished the apple, Bettany stood up to get a pie for them. Lilly smiled, “Thank you, Granny!”

Once Bettany was away, Lilly threw the apple core to Polly and said playfully, “Eat this shit, Polly!” The parrot refused and repeated after her, “Eat this shit!”

Pablo was amused. Lilly had changed a lot, and she seemed happy now. He did not realize Winona had stepped into the house.

“No swearing in the house, Lilly,” Winona was annoyed. Polly threw the apple core to her feet, and she was furious. Lilly’s face fell, “I am sorry, Aunt Winona.”

“You bring nothing but bad luck,” Winona glared at her. This little shit had destroyed her relationship with Liam, and now everyone wanted Liam to divorce her.

Grandma used to say the same thing to Lilly. Lilly had no courage then to protest, but now she felt she should say something. “No, you are wrong. You have bad luck because your shadow is slanted. I have nothing to do with anyone’s bad luck.”

Whenever Grandpa, Grandma or Daddy had bad luck, their shadows were slanted. Lilly knew it was the truth, but Winona didn’t seem pleased. Winona threw her bag with a loud thud, “This is unacceptable! You should never talk to me like this.”

Does this little shit think she has the right to lecture me? How dare she! Winona pointed a finger at Lilly, “Have you not learned your manners? How dare you talk back to me like this! I am doing all this for your own good, don’t you see it?”

Lilly bit her lip and shook her head. “No, you are not. You are just doing this for your own good.”

Winona was outraged. She glanced around to confirm Hugh and Bettany weren’t here before punishing Lilly. She knew Bettany had a doctor’s appointment today.

“Get up,” Winona ordered Lilly. Lilly refused to obey. Winona looked terrifying, and Lilly would be a fool to stand still for her to punish her.

Lilly took Polly and bolted out of the room. Winona screamed, “Stop running!” Lilly ignored her and ran toward the kitchen.

Winona knew it was not worth her effort to chase after Lilly, but she was so angry she felt like exploding. She needed a way to release her anger.

“Don’t be stupid, Lilly,” Winona said loudly, “I will find you sooner or later. You could never run away from me.” She would make sure Lilly knew not to disrespect her anymore.

Chapter 34 Throw Winona Out

“Please allow me to help with the pie, Mrs. Crawford,” Margaret looked concerned.

Bettany shook her head, “It is the least I could do for Lilly.”

Bettany had always wanted to make Jean’s favorite food after she got better, but Jean never did. Now with Jean’s daughter here, Bettany felt she needed to do her best to take care of Lilly.

Margaret sighed. Bettany was about to bring out the pie when Lilly rushed into the kitchen. “Granny!” Lilly ran toward Bettany.

“What’s the matter?” Bettany asked. Before Lilly could reply, Winona’s voice rang through the kitchen, “Lilly! Where do you think you are going?”

Bettany frowned. Winona stepped into the kitchen and was surprised to find Bettany there. She looked at Bettany, wide-eyed. “Bettany! You are here.”

“Where would I be?” Bettany scowled at her, “What are you trying to do behind my back?”

“I am not doing anything behind your back,” Winona panicked, “I was simply asking Lilly to pick up the apple core she threw on the floor, but she used foul language at me.”

“I did not think it was appropriate, so I wanted to explain why to her. That was when she ran away to the kitchen,” Winona continued.

“Bullshit!” Bettany threw her oven mitts at Winona, fuming, “Get lost! I don’t want to see you here.” She did not believe a word Winona said, and she had no doubt if she hadn’t been here, Winona would have had the nerve to hit Lilly.

Winona was furious. Lilly knew Bettany was in the kitchen, and she made Winona follow her to the kitchen. What a scheming little bitch! Winona tried again, “Bettany, it is not right to spoil Lilly. She should learn right from wrong at this age already.”

Lilly bit her lip and looked at Bettany and Winona. “I don’t think I have said anything wrong. Aunt Winona said I brought bad luck to her, but it was her slanted shadow that brought her bad luck. I told her the fact, and she wanted to punish me for it.”

Bettany’s face fell. She turned toward Margaret, “Gather Winona’s stuff and throw them out! She does not belong to our family anymore.”

Winona could not believe it. “Whatever! Let Lilly do and say whatever she wants! She will never learn and she will always be a spoiled brat.” She stomped out of the kitchen and went straight to her bedroom.

Winona locked the door behind her. Nobody can make me leave! It was clear as day the little shit deliberately said those things to turn Bettany against Winona, but everyone just let Lilly do and say whatever she wanted.

At the same time, Bettany was infuriated. “What a bitch! She wouldn’t allow us to lecture her kids, and yet she had the nerve to lecture my Lilly.”

Margaret coughed and reminded Bettany of Lilly being in the same room. Lilly gently touched Bettany’s back and said, “It’s okay, Granny. Please don’t get angry.”

Lilly felt sorry for upsetting her Granny. She promised Mommy she would make Granny happy, but she had failed.

Bettany sighed and decided she would deal with Winona after this. She brought Lilly pie and then waited until Lilly fell asleep before going after Winona.

“Where is Winona?” She asked Margaret. Margaret answered, “She has gone out to fetch her children, Mrs. Crawford.” Winona had sneaked out when Bettany waited for Lilly to fall asleep.

“Have you gathered all her stuff?” Bettany asked. Margaret nodded, “Yes, I have.”

Before Bettany could order Margaret to throw all Winona's stuff out, Hannah was heard crying at the entrance of the mansion. "No! I don't want to!"

Zachary entered the house, annoyed. He greeted Bettany hastily and got into his room. Margaret quickly wheeled Bettany to the entrance to see what was happening.

Winona was seen trying to comfort Hannah at the entrance. On their way back, out of fear of being chased out of the Crawford family, Winona asked Hannah to give Bettany a massage and to give one of her toys to Lilly.

Sure enough, the request upset Hannah, and she threw tantrums as Winona had expected. It was the best way to distract Bettany. Winona pretended to comfort Hannah, "It's okay, Hannah. Please don't cry and make me sad." However, Hannah cried even louder.

Bettany saw the two at the entrance and was irritated. It was not the first time Hannah tried to get what she wanted by crying and throwing tantrums. This would not work today.

"Stand there and cry all you want," Bettany frowned at Hannah and ordered Margaret to bring a bucket, "Do not stop crying until your tears fill up the bucket."

Hannah was startled and stopped crying for a brief moment. Winona pulled her aside and confronted Bettany, "What are you doing, Bettany? You are scaring Hannah!"

With her mother's support, Hannah continued to cry and throw tantrums. Bettany seemed unfazed. She decided she had to teach them a lesson today, and nobody could stop her.

"Margaret, throw all her stuff out," ordered Bettany. Margaret quickly brought all Winona's stuff to the entrance and threw them out on the streets.

Winona was dumbfounded. She did not believe Bettany would do this to her in front of her children. She had always used Hannah and Zachary to distract everyone whenever she got into trouble, and it had always worked.

"I understand you are angry, Bettany," Winona tried to calm Bettany down, "However, it is not good to do this in front of the kids."

"You don't belong here anymore," said Bettany coldly, "Get out of here now!" Winona's face fell.

Bettany ordered for guards to throw Bettany out. Winona was flustered, “My Hannah! Fine, I will leave, but I will take Hannah with me!”

“I am sorry, but you are not allowed to bring anyone else with you,” said one of the guards before pushing her out on the streets and locking the gates.

The guard was hired by Anthony, and he only took orders from Bettany now. The guard who Stephen and Debbie hired earlier had been fired by Anthony.

Winona was boiling with anger. Lilly had caused all this trouble! Lilly must have told Bettany unpleasant things about her behind her back.

Chapter 35 The Crawfords Owe It To Her

Hannah, meanwhile, was so frightened that she stopped crying. Her cries tapered off into hiccups and soft sobs.

Bettany’s temper flared. Her countenance took on an arctic chill. “You like crying, don’t you? Do as you like! You’re not allowed to stop until you fill this bucket!”

The girl, sure enough, burst into full-blown wailing after receiving the scare.

She had cried at first to cause a scene, but now she was downright howling.

Her tears were genuine this time.

The child held the bucket in her hands and kept crying. Each tear fell into the container.

Mrs. Bettany Levine, the Madam of the Crawford household, was, however, an obstinate woman. She silently watched on as the younger cried.

The elder had a childish streak to her. You want to act out? So can I. Both were now stuck in a stalemate until Hannah grew exhausted from her endless whines.

Hannah was too afraid to stop. She proceeded to cry even harder when she finally noticed her tears wouldn’t even fill half a cup.

She choked up as she continued sobbing, “I can’t anymore, Granny. I’m thirsty... I want water...”

Margaret could barely hold in her laughter.

Bettany was as angry as she was amused. “Are you going to keep crying?”

Hannah sniffled and shook her head. Her eyes were bloodshot.

Bettany grunted and went back inside.

Margaret hurriedly approached the child. “Let’s go back inside, Little Miss! Have a glass of water.”

Hannah had cried her eyes red. No one had ever treated her this way.

Her mother would always meet her demands whenever she turned on the waterworks.

She was slowly coming to understand her tears weren’t everything. They meant nothing before her grandmother.

Margaret guided the child to the first floor and sat her down to get her to drink water.

No one else had come home. Her mother had also been driven away. It seemed she was the only one left in the huge manor. Hannah suddenly felt fearful, flustered, and confused.

It was as if the world had left her behind...

Just as she grew helpless, a small figure sprinted down the stairs.

Lilly Hatcher handed her a lollipop. “For you, Hannah.”

She took notice of Hannah crying into a bucket out in the garden after she had woken up.

Hannah sniffled and turned her face away. “I don’t want your candy!”

Lilly didn’t hesitate to stuff the lollipop back into her pocket. “Okay. If you say so.”

“...”

Lilly asked out of curiosity, “Is your bucket full now, Hannah?”

The moment she was reminded of the matter at hand, she had the feeling she wouldn’t be able to fill the bucket even if she were to cry herself blind. She pinched her lips tight as fresh tears began to fall.

Lilly hurried away to fetch the bucket.

“You can do it, Hannah! There’s still so much of the bucket left to fill!”

Hannah protested as she continued to cry. “H-Hold it better! Don’t let my tears fall to the floor...”

Both were sweating profusely. The bucket was only so slightly wet yet Hannah had no more tears to cry.

Lilly immediately brought the cup of water on the table over. “There’s no more water in your eyes, Hannah! Drink more.”

The girl gulped down the cup and tried again but no more tears formed.

Lilly poured her another glass. “Here’s more.”

Hannah ended up drinking four whole cups of water, leaving her bloated.

She tried for a long while. Her voice grew hoarse but the bucket was yet to fill.

Lilly was sympathetic to her plight. “What to do? It’s still not full. Is Granny not gonna give you supper...?”

“Uwahh...”

Lilly’s eyes glinted in the light as she held up the bucket once more.

That was when Anthony returned with Drake and Josh. The absurd sight of Hannah crying with Lilly holding up a basin was what greeted them.

Lilly was still cheering Hannah on. “You can do it! Believe in yourself!”

Anthony frowned and asked, “What’s going on here?”

Lilly immediately explained, “Granny made Hannah cry a bucket full, Uncle Anthony. She’s not allowed to stop until it’s filled. We’re working hard!”

“... ”

Hannah looked at Anthony but found herself with no tears left to squeeze out.

She was tired. This was her first time experiencing just how tiring crying could be. I won't cry again.

Hannah asked pitifully, "I won't cry again, Uncle. Please ask Granny to allow me to change to a smaller bucket."

Lilly vigorously shook her head. "No buckets. Ask Granny for a cup instead, Uncle Anthony..."

The child shook the basin. She had a feeling even a cup wouldn't work.

Hannah always cried, and yet even she couldn't fill the bucket.

"..."

Josh, who was good at Math, stuffed his hands into his pockets and spoke up.

"A normal person only produces five ounces of tears when they cry. A washbasin can fill about a quart. You would be spending the next 2,000 days crying. These are the numbers without factoring in the rate of evaporation. Even five years' worth of your tears wouldn't be near enough to fill that."

Hannah wept. "What should I do? I can't cry anymore!"

Lilly thought about it. "Try again when you wake up tomorrow."

Five years didn't seem like a long time!

It would go by in a jiffy.

Lilly tried to comfort Hannah.

Anthony pursed his lips. There was an unconscious tinge of laughter in his features. Children were so naive and laughable.

"Go and play. I'll speak to Granny."

Lilly nodded and dragged Hannah upstairs. "Let's go."

She was afraid their grandmother would insist.

Both Drake and Josh were rendered speechless. Hannah was an idiot, and so was Lilly.

Granny demanded her cry a bucket, and she listened?

How were they supposed to declare to outsiders that she was their sister?

Both boys, one with a bag in hand and the other with his hands stuck in his pockets, calmly returned to their rooms.

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Winona, meanwhile, was furiously lugging her suitcase back to her family home.

Hannah's grandmother was astonished to see her with multiple bags. "What's going on?"

Winona pushed the door open, threw everything on the ground, and finally exploded.

She began to shriek. "That damn hag kicked me out!"

The old woman was taken aback by the news and gasped, "Why did she kick you out?"

"Why else do you think? She accuses me of not knowing how to care for children and insists on having Liam divorce me."

She vented about everything that had happened.

The elderly woman was livid. She began her own spat with arms akimbo, "What is wrong with that woman? So what if you don't know how to do it? Does she know just because she's a grandmother?!"

"She even kicked you out right in front of your own daughter. What kind of lasting harm will that cause?! She's crazy!"

"Relationships in the modern world are no longer hedged on the affinity between mother and daughter-in-law! That's a bygone era! A mother-in-law must know how to set boundaries with her son and daughter-in-law! She's just a shit-stirrer if she interferes in domestic affairs that are not of her concern!"

Both mother and daughter went back and forth.

It was as if the Crawfords owed them something...

Chapter 36 Beg Me, Crawfords

Winona finally calmed down after venting her frustrations.

It was dark out by then and yet, no one had even contacted her, leaving her restless.

“I should go home! I... I’ll beg her. I’ll do anything for Hannah.”

Winona, after all, was still afraid of being driven away.

The elderly woman, Helen Jones, glared at her. “Why should you be the one to beg?! You’ve always been too kind. That’s why everyone picks on you!”

She pulled out her phone and finally contacted a servant from the Crawford manor after dallying around and inquiring about Hannah’s fit earlier in the day.

Hannah’s grandmother said as a matter of factly, “Look! Hannah’s crying because you aren’t there with her! Don’t worry, they won’t be able to handle her! You should wait for them to come and beg you!”

Winona hesitated. “That’s impossible...”

The elder folded her arms. “What is? What child can be away from their mother? You’ve never left Hannah’s side ever since she was born. She’s definitely going to cause trouble at bedtime tonight.”

They had no idea that even Winona cannot coax her daughter when she acted up.

Even the mother had a hard time. What more the Crawfords?

“Be good. Listen to me. Do you think they don’t know where you are?”

Winona couldn’t make up her mind, but Helen had a point.

It was true that no one could handle Hannah whenever she cried. The Crawfords wouldn’t possibly allow her to cause a fuss at night, would they?

Even if she managed to fall asleep, what would happen the next day?

Hannah was also incredibly grumpy in the morning. Even the slightest disagreement would have her smashing everything in sight. No one but her knew how to coax the child.

Zachary was also there.

Zachary seemed easier to handle compared to Hannah at first glance, but he was the worst of the two. He loved to play games. Whoever tried to lecture him about it would get a phone angrily thrown at them. He was as stubborn as a mule.

Winona felt relieved after thinking about it.

She decided to take a gamble. Watch and see. They'll see that they can't do without me. They can't make me divorce Liam.

**

Without her mother by her side, Hannah did get teary-eyed that night.

She, however, learned not to fuss after the incident with the unfillable bucket.

Margaret felt sorry for her. "Sleep, Little Miss! Tomorrow will be a better day."

The girl clutched at her quilt with tears streaming down her face...

"Get out! I don't want you!" She choked out.

"Little Miss..."

Hannah suddenly grabbed a pillow and threw it at the woman's face. "Go away!"

I don't want Margaret! I want Mommy!

Hannah wasn't outright wailing anymore but her bad temper remained. She haphazardly swept everything off the table with a resounding clatter.

Margaret had no choice but to leave. "Ring the bell if you need anything."

She ran into Bettany outside with Lilly by her side dressed in pajamas.

Bettany asked, "She's throwing a tantrum?"

"She's doing much better. Please don't be angry with her. She's just a child..."

Bettany hummed.

It was exactly because she was a child that she had to be disciplined.

Were they expecting her to suddenly come to understand how to be a sensible person when she reached adulthood?

Impossible.

Lilly hugged her rabbit toy and knocked on the door.

She started with a childish voice. “Hannah, are you scared to sleep alone at night?”

She poked her head in and whispered, “There are ghosts at night! Aren’t you scared? Can I stay with you?”

Hannah glared at the younger girl as if she were an enemy.

She was definitely saying that on purpose.

“I don’t want you here! Get out!” Hannah slammed the door.

Lilly blinked innocently.

She was telling the truth! There really was a ghost.

Perhaps slamming the door in her face hadn’t been enough, she opened the door once more to smash a glass cup.

Bettany coldly ushered, “Come, Lilly. Don’t bother with her.”

She stank of a pampered brat.

Lilly had no choice but to return to her room with her rabbit toy in hand. “Good night, Grandma!”

Bettany nodded. “Good night.”

Lilly was such a good girl... One worried others with her unruliness and the other so well-behaved.

How could she possibly choose one or the other when they were both precious to her? That sentiment fueled her hope to see Hannah better.

Bettany sighed. “Was I too strict with her?”

Lilly hesitated for a moment, then stood on her toes and patted the elder woman’s head.

“Don’t worry, Granny. Everything will get better!”

Her childish voice and serious expression were an attempt at play-acting an adult.

Bettany couldn’t help but laugh as her turbulent emotions calmed.

**

Back in Lilly’s room.

Pablo Belmont started, “Come, Tulip, I’ll teach you about spells. You know spells, don’t you? The kind where you can throw out a fireball?”

Lilly looked skeptical. “I’m a kid, master. You shouldn’t lie to a kid.”

How can a human being possibly throw out fireballs?

She was three, nearly four, and already knew plenty!

His lips quirked up upon noticing her skepticism. “You don’t believe me... Well, awakening one’s third eye is one thing. There is no shortage of gifted individuals. After all, the third eye is something that everyone has.”

“But spells are different. It requires theory to practice. Some practitioners cannot light a single spark and can only rely on charms for fire. It’s only natural that you don’t believe it can happen.”

“Ah, you’re definitely one of those who are going to fail to do it, Tulip!”

Lilly frowned. “If you’re trying to egg me on, Master, it’s not working.”

“... ”

She’s obviously four. Why is she such a difficult child?

Lilly stared right through him. “Why don’t you do it, Master? I’ll believe you if you show me.”

The corners of his lips twitched in response. “I might be good at what I do but this damn...”

The child finally understood what he meant. “Oh, so you’re saying you can’t do it either.”

He massaged his forehead. “Hey now. What are you trying to imply here? You’re saying I can’t do it?”

He shot her a glare. “I’m just trying to look out for you in case you get scared. It’s a powerful spell. What if I end up burning all your hair? You’ll be bald.”

Lilly continued, “But...”

“Enough! Stop asking so many questions, kid! Come, say the incantation with me. %\$^&#... Do you understand?”

“?”

Can you say it slower this time...?

**

Hannah, on the other hand, hugged her quilt tightly as she secretly sobbed.

She was tired of crying after today but having calmed down, all she felt was aggravation.

She quickly got up to get a cup when she found tears running down her cheeks...

A sudden gust of wind suddenly threw open the window.

Hannah jumped from fright and turned to look.

She rubbed her eyes. There was a white shadow...?

Trembling, she tossed the cup aside and climbed back under the covers!

There was only the sound of her own breathing in the quilt, but for some reason, she felt as if someone was with her.

Something tugged at her foot.

With a scream, she got up and ran toward the door, wailing, “Mommy...”

Behind her, a white shadow slowly approached her...

Chapter 37 Malignant Spirit And The Crying Ghost

Hannah had no courage to face what was behind her and remained plastered onto the door as she tried to force it open to no avail.

It felt as though she could hear someone weeping behind her, and yet nothing was there when she turned around.

She was scared silly. What could a child like her understand? She didn’t hesitate to dive under the bed to hide.

It was quiet outside.

That was when she noticed a pair of feet pattering about her room before stopping in front of her...

The child stilled her breaths and covered her pinched lips.

The ‘person’ seemed to hear it. She slowly bent over with one hand propped up on the bed, causing a creak to reverberate around the room.

It noticed her.

That was when the door to her room was thrown open. Lilly’s voice rang loud and clear. “%\$^&#!”

Hannah had no idea what she was saying.

All she saw was a ball of fire slamming into the figure!

A shrill scream sounded, and the pair of feet that were so firmly planted to the ground lifted as it tried to make its escape.

Lilly chased after her with a determined expression. The fireball whirled in her hand before being pelted at the ghost.

Pablo narrowed his eyes. “That’s a malignant spirit...”

Ghosts were divided into classes.

Wandering spirits were the ones who roamed the world of the living. They don’t do anything but wander.

Wandering spirits were typically souls who died of illnesses, car accidents, or old age and failed to reach the gates of heaven.

Souls who died an unnatural death and carry great resentment are aptly named resentful spirits.

They were often aggressive. When time and place aligned, it could manifest and take lives.

Malignant spirits were the most vicious and ranked above resentful spirits. They died tragic and abnormal deaths. They carried a paranoid obsession and were capable of absorbing negative energy to ‘upgrade’ themselves and attach themselves to the living.

Just like how unlucky ghosts could attach themselves to a human and cause severe bad luck or even accidental death as a result.

Malignant spirits were unable to accept their deaths and wandered in search of hosts to live again.

Lilly failed to suppress the evil and allowed the female spirit to escape.

Before the female spirit ran away, she turned and glared viciously at Lilly before disappearing into the night in a blink of an eye.

Lilly turned to ask, “What’s a malignant spirit, Master?”

Pablo took his time to explain the intricacies to her and at the end said, “There are many kinds of malignant spirits. At the end of the day, they’re all made up of various negative emotions that stem from love, hate, greed, anger, and ignorance. Examples can range from crying ghosts, cowardly ghosts, petty ghosts, and perverted ghosts...”

Lilly pointed out the window. “What kind of ghost was that?”

He narrowed his eyes. “A crying ghost.”

Lilly blinked and turned to look at Hannah.

It seemed she had an epiphany!

“Was the crying ghost here because Hannah likes crying?”

Pablo praised her, “That’s right. Extremely gluttonous people tend to attract gluttonous ghosts. Crybabies tend to attract crying ghosts.”

Lilly nodded in understanding.

She did say children shouldn’t cry for no reason.

Hannah was completely out of it.

She couldn’t hear what Lilly was saying even though the younger girl had turned around to speak to her. When calm finally washed over her, she stood up and stumbled toward Lilly.

“Okay. Don’t be scared. I chased the ghost away.”

Hannah suddenly threw herself onto Lilly and burst into a fresh wave of tears.

She was so scared,

Lilly announcing her arrival with a fireball reminded her of the superhero Ultraman.

Ultraman was exactly like that in the animated cartoons her brother watched.

She cried till she was out of breath and refused to let go of Lilly.

Lilly patted her. “Cry it out. You’re a good girl!”

She was a child herself, and yet she was placating another.

That was when she seemed to recall something. “Wait for me, Hannah! I’ll get you a cup!”

She hadn't yet forgotten her task to collect tears!

Lilly's feet thumped with every step as she hurried to get a cup. Hannah was choking and hiccuping as she called out, "H-Hurry up!"

Only two drops were left by the time the cup reached her...

The two girls shared a look.

Lilly hesitated, "Why don't you...try to cry harder?"

Hannah pouted and tried again while she was still emotional.

Pablo, who watched from the sidelines, was at a loss for words.

In the end, she got tired from crying. Even Lilly was yawning. Both were clearly exhausted.

"You should lie down and cry instead, Hannah! You won't be so tired then."

"Mnn..."

Both collapsed on the bed. Lilly fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. She still had the cup in hand even in her sleep.

As for Hannah, her exhaustion from endlessly crying also had her asleep in seconds.

**

The next day.

Bettany was speaking to Margaret. "You should wake Hannah up in a while. She will only be allowed to sleep till 9 from today on."

Hannah always slept past 11. Oversleeping was a norm for her.

Margaret grew worried. "Hannah has an awful temper in the morning, Mrs. Crawford. Should we call for Mrs. Winona to return?"

Only a few people could coax Hannah whenever she caused a fuss.

Waking her up was a different story...

Bettany placidly replied, “She has a temper? She hasn’t seen mine.”

Margaret had nothing to say to that.

Bettany left for the elevator in her electric wheelchair and stopped outside Lilly’s room. She gently knocked on the door. “Are you awake, Lilly?”

She had figured out a pattern with Lilly after having the girl by her side for the past few days. She always woke up at nine.

She gently opened the door with a smile on her face to greet the child.

That was when her face sank!

“Someone! Come quick!” She panicked. “Lilly is missing!”

Polly, who was dozing off, scrambled into action and shrieked at the top of its lungs. “It’s a kidnapping. Someone kidnapped a child!”

Anthony was in his study with Hugh to discuss a few things as it was a Saturday morning.

Both immediately sped out the door when they heard Bettany’s calls.

The woman approached them in her wheelchair. Her countenance spelled anxiety. “Lilly is missing! The parrot said there had been a kidnapping!”

Polly cocked its head.

It was as if the parrot was wondering when it had said that.

Anthony went into Lilly’s room to find that the girl was indeed nowhere to be found.

He immediately ordered the manor’s staff. “Check the surveillance cameras, Jack!”

“As for the rest of you, search the manor!”

“Ask the maids who got up early to see if they heard anything, Margaret!”

Anthony’s expression turned cold. He was ready to call 911.

That was when they heard a soft voice. “What are you looking for, Uncle Anthony?”

Lilly was hugging her rabbit toy as she rubbed her eyes and yawned.

Hannah followed close behind with swollen eyes. She barely looked awake.

Everyone was rendered speechless.

Why was Lilly in Hannah's room?

Why was Hannah here too? She wasn't even throwing her morning temper tantrums...

**

Winona, meanwhile, was having breakfast with Helen.

She would occasionally check for the time to see how long it was going to take for Hannah to wake up.

She was definitely going to be an unruly child again.

The Crawfords must be exhausted after last night. Were they finally going to call her home?

Chapter 38 Hannah's Change Of Heart

Winona kept checking her phone and waited till it was nearly 11.
Hannah should be awake by now.

Helen didn't seem worried. "Wait and see! Someone will call in ten minutes and ask you to return."

"What if they don't?"

The elderly woman shook her head. "That's not possible. They will, at most, try to act as if nothing is wrong. There's no doubt that they will call."

Winona waited until noon, and yet there was still no news from the Crawfords.

She couldn't stay and do nothing anymore. "No, I have to go check on her!"

Helen tried to stop her to no avail. Why is my daughter so impatient?!

What child could bear to leave her mother's side? What was the hurry?

**

Back at the Crawford manor.

Lilly was drawing with Hannah.

"For you." Lilly handed Hannah a piece of paper.

Hannah harrumphed. "I don't want yours."

Despite her barbed words, she still accepted the paper.

Lilly was confused. "I thought you didn't want it."

Hannah stiffly muttered, "Mine isn't white enough. I'll use yours instead!"

"..."

Both of them drew something. "I'm going to show everyone my art!"

She then went searching for Hugh.

Hugh took off his reading glasses and asked, "What did you draw today?"

Lilly showed it off. "Look, Grandpa! It's an egg."

The elderly man couldn't help but laugh. "And you, Hannah?"

Hannah felt depressed at the sight of her cousin and her grandfather getting along so well. Does Grandpa not like me?

Her eyes couldn't help but light up when he asked.

Hannah cheerfully answered, "It's a hen!"

He raised a brow as he studied her artwork. Her art skills weren't bad in the slightest.

It might not be as dynamic as Lilly's artwork, but it was filled with childlike wonder.

Lilly used her grandfather's phone and took a picture of both hers and Hannah's drawings before sending it to Lawrence Lambert.

She hit the voice record button and started, "My cousin and I drew these, old friend."

Lawrence was quick to send a voice message in response. "You two draw well! Do you mind if I post these on Twitter?"

Lilly turned to ask Hannah and joyfully gave him the go-ahead after getting Hannah's consent.

Lawrence soon had both photos posted on his social media.

Hannah couldn't read well, but the light in her eyes grew brighter when she was shown the post.

Is this what being praised is like?

Only Mommy praises me and tells me I do a good job.

I can still get attention even if I don't cry...

Hannah looked at Lilly as she thought about it.

Grandma and Mommy say Lilly is a bad girl who schemes and is here to rob me of my things.

But, she's not like that at all...

Without her mother's company and no one willing to play with her that afternoon, she went seeking out Lilly.

Both girls were now armed with small buckets and catching fish in a shallow pond in the garden.

Winona had returned earlier but was once again turned away before she had even set foot inside.

There was no way she was willing to leave without seeing her daughter. That was why she blindly wandered about outside the Crawford manor.

The manor wasn't completely enclosed. Certain areas were surrounded by high walls while others were surrounded by the lake as its natural barrier.

The manor and the back mountain were only separated by iron railings that integrated themselves with the very earth.

It was through the iron railing that Winona noticed her daughter from a distance, and found her playing with Lilly!

The sight left her discomfited. My daughter is a good girl. What if she becomes a rebellious child after hanging around Lilly?!

"Hannah!" Winona called out from the top of her lungs. "Over here, sweetheart!"

Lilly was catching fish with Hannah when she suddenly heard Winona's voice.

She looked up to see the woman on the other side of the iron railings.

Hannah began to look around. "Huh? Is that Mommy's voice...?"

Lilly immediately covered her ears. "No, you didn't hear a thing."

She took Hannah's hand and ran back inside with the buckets. "Hurry up, there's a monster behind you."

Hannah immediately called to mind the image of the 'person' from the night before.

She sprinted off into the safety of the manor without looking back.

Winona was at a loss for words.

Of course, it's because of Lilly!

Ever since she entered the Crawford household, Hannah had been constantly criticized by everyone around her.

Here she was leading Hannah astray!

She was livid. As her aunt, she absolutely despised the child!

**

Zachary, Drake, and Josh returned from their remedial lessons that evening.

All eight Crawford sons were present as it was a weekend.

Grandpa Hugh nudged Lilly, “Isn’t it boring being home all day? Let’s go camping at the wetlands park tomorrow.”

Lilly tilted her questioningly as she bit down on her fork. “What is camping, Grandpa?”

She wasn’t quite sure what the term ‘camping’ meant as she had never been exposed to it.

Gilbert grinned and explained, “Camping means going out into the wild and living outside.”

Lilly was confused. “But we have a house? Is it no good?”

Zachary snickered. “You bumpkin!”

He tossed his cutleries aside and walked away with his hands in his pockets. “I’m done! I’m not going camping tomorrow either.”

What’s so great about camping?

I could just be playing games at home instead!

Hugh grew stern. “What nonsense? Sit down!”

Zachary pulled a face. “Oh, the king speaks! Time to run!”

Anthony slammed down his utensils. “Zachary Crawford!”

Zachary fell silent. He was more than a little scared of his uncle but remained uncooperative.

He turned and fled up the stairs.

The event left Hugh with a massive headache.

Neither of Liam’s children was easy to deal with.

**

Tina, meanwhile, noticed Mr. Lambert had posted on Twitter.

This time, both Lilly's and Hannah's artworks were present.

She felt dissatisfied with it. Lilly's artwork was average at best and was barely comparable to Cheryl's own.

And, what was Hannah trying to draw? Is that supposed to be a hen? It looks nothing like it!

It was simply a bunch of messy lines with no aesthetic to be found.

She was indignant. "What the hell is this?! The Crawfords are crazy. Sure they can spend all they want to promote Lilly. But, Hannah? How do you even promote that?"

"Selfish! Their artwork is so painfully average. What's the point?"

Cheryl murmured dejectedly, "Was it because I said something bad, Mommy...?"

She was still haunted by the memory of having her lies exposed.

The derisive and skeptical looks had thoroughly traumatized her.

Lilly had also robbed her of her rightful place. Even the two women who drove past said she wasn't qualified to be Mr. Lambert's student.

Cheryl never let it go and only grew increasingly resentful over time...

Tina could only attempt to console her daughter. "Don't think too much about it. It's not your fault."

Seeing her daughter so dejected, she began to think about activities they could do together. "You don't have to attend extracurriculars tomorrow. You can come camping with Mommy!"

The young girl's dour mood was gone in an instant. "Really?"

Tina was an extremely strict mother that had started her daughter in classes from the moment she turned two.

Her schedule was full every weekend. She would instill a habit in her daughter to read even during her free time.

Cheryl's entire life revolved around going to school and then to remedial classes and reading.

The thought of camping perked her up!

Chapter 39 Love For Hammers

That weekend at the Stonethorn Wetland Park.

Stonethorn Wetland Park was located on the outskirts of Shercaster City and roughly took a five-hour drive, but the Crawfords decided to fly there by helicopter, shortening their travel time to an hour.

The wetland park overlooked a lush forest landscape. Their chosen campsite was the meadow right by the turquoise lake.

“Wow! It's so pretty!” Lilly marveled.

Polly was perched on her shoulder and shrieking, “Wowow! So pretty!”

Hugh and Anthony were greatly amused.

Bettany watched all eight of her sons pitching tents and fetching water. It was an inexplicably warm and beautiful sight.

She couldn't help sighing. If it weren't for Lilly's return, the Crawfords might never have been able to reunite.

She smiled contentedly at Lilly from her wheelchair.

Lilly was chasing after a butterfly with the parrot following close behind her on its feet and squawking.

Hannah wasn't quite willing to follow along at first, but her laughter grew louder the longer she chased after Lilly. Their laughter reverberated throughout the grassy plains.

Lilly suddenly ran back with a purple clover in her hand.

“For you, Grandma! It’s a flower that grants wishes!”

Drake and Josh, the two little boys weren’t very close to Lilly and Hannah. Zachary, meanwhile, was slacking off on the air mattress with his legs crossed and scoffed. “Childish.”

Edward and Liam, meanwhile, were putting down the tent stakes. Said stakes were hard to hold despite having been already inserted into the ground.

“Where’s my hammer?” Edward asked.

Liam was taken aback. “You’re probably the only person I’ve met who carries a toolbox around for a camping trip.”

That was when Lilly darted over with a toolbox. “Hammers are right here!”

Edward’s toolbox was far from small. It was half the girl’s size.

The child was desperately trying to keep the toolbox high in the air to not drag it across the ground.

Her actions seemed strenuous, but she remained highly energetic.

Edward was quick to speak up. “Give it to me. I can do it myself.”

Lilly waved him off. “It’s okay. I can do it!”

She opened the toolbox and her eyes lit up at the row of hammers.

Edward bent down. “What do you think? My set of hammers are pretty cool, aren’t they?”

The girl nodded vigorously. “Yeah! It’s super cool!”

The man was happy to hear. “Do you like it?”

She bobbed her head up and down. “Yeah! I like it!”

Gilbert, who stood a short distance away, twitched. My adorable niece has been led astray!

Such a petite girl liked hammers?

Liam didn't hesitate to kick Edward.

Lilly had long since picked up a mallet and asked, "What needs hammering? I'll help you, Uncle Liam!"

The frank Liam answered her, "Here. Just hammer down the stake."

"Okay!"

The child swung down the mallet far thicker than her arm. The stake was hammered halfway into the ground with a resounding thwack.

"Bash! Bash!"

Lilly shouted as she struck the stakes.

She was like a happy little carpenter who was quick on her feet, speeding from one end to the next.

All four corners of the tent were quickly hammered firmly into the ground with her battle cries.

The Crawfords were greatly amused by the sight.

Just as Lilly was putting away the hammer, a car drove up and stopped in front of their campsite.

Tina alighted from the vehicle and exclaimed with pleasant surprise. "You're here too, Mr. Anthony!"

Cheryl poked her head and noticed Drake, who was quietly reading by the lake. Her eyes lit up.

She lifted her skirt and got out of the car in a very ladylike manner and spoke innocently, "Mommy, can we camp here? I want to play with Lilly!"

The girl's mother was stopped before she could even speak.

Anthony spoke in an aloof manner, "There's a lot of us here."

It means you're not welcome.

Tina was left awkwardly hanging but smiled warmly when she found an open space a short distance away. "That's alright. We'll be over there."

They were in the same area anyway. It was simply more convenient for them.

Thomas, Cheryl's father, chuckled, "I'll set up our tent then."

Cheryl pretended not to see the way the adults were looking at her and bounded over to Lilly. "What are you doing, Lilly?"

She was a child five to six years of age yet her staged cuteness felt rather unbearable.

Lilly didn't quite understand her intentions but had a feeling Cheryl was just like her stepmother, Debbie.

Without saying a word, she fiddled with the hammer and shut the toolbox.

Cheryl was stealing glances at Drake by the lake. "Can we go there to play? Let's go."

Lilly took a step back and pouted. "I don't want to play with you."

She then ran away.

Cheryl was shocked and felt resentful!

She was already acting so generously and wasn't even on Lilly's case for robbing her of her spot!

What's wrong with her?!

Cheryl turned her attention to Hannah instead. "Why don't you play with me instead? There are pine trees over there. We might see squirrels!"

Her only impression of Hannah was of the night when she stole Lilly's dress.

This led to her assumption that Hannah hated Lilly. Having Hannah by her side would isolate Lilly!

Let's see what she's going to do this time!

Hannah acting contemptuously toward her, however, was unexpected. “Who said I wanted to play with you? Go away!”

With that, she ran after Lilly.

Cheryl’s eyes reddened.

She rubbed her eyes as she approached the riverbank and sat next to Drake.

“Drake...” She started. “I don’t know what I did wrong. Lilly and Hannah won’t play with me.”

The subject of her affections didn’t look up. “Stay away from me and don’t talk to me.”

The girl was rendered speechless.

She was still a young girl who couldn’t reign in her temper.

There was no hesitation as she asked, “Did Lilly tell you bad things about me? I didn’t do it...”

Her tears fell in rivulets as she spoke.

This was a skill that her mother taught her. Girls had to act weak for others to show mercy.

Drake frowned and put away his book. “If you want to cry so badly, be my guest.”

How annoying. He lost interest and left with his book.

Drake had left for the path that Lilly had traveled down.

She bit her lip. Why was everyone being so unfair toward her?

Why won’t anyone play with her?!

Cheryl had no choice but to head back.

Just as she stepped away from the meadow, Cheryl suddenly found a person hiding in the dense trees and shrieked in terror!

Winona hurriedly gestured for the child to be quiet. “Can you come here for a second, Cheryl?”

Cheryl looked around in apprehension before approaching the woman.

She recognized Winona. Tina had made sure to have the girl get on her good side while at Lilly’s birthday bash.

Winona smiled gently. “I’ve got into a fight with Mrs. Crawford, Cheryl. Can I trouble you to ask Hannah to come here? It’ll be like a spy mission.”

Cheryl nodded. “Okay!”

She immediately went searching for Hannah.

Hannah was a short distance away from Lilly and was “sparring” with Polly.

Cheryl rushed over to whisper words into her ear. Hannah looked around to see that her mother was indeed in the woods waving at her.

Hannah tossed aside her tree branch and rushed over.

Chapter 40 Tearing Hannah Apart

Winona’s eyes brimmed with tears as she saw little Hannah running toward her. She had visited Crawford Mansion today in hopes of seeing Hannah, but the Crawfords had left on a camping trip. Winona recalled a time back when Lilly had yet to appear in the Crawfords’ lives, where she would be hard pressed to find any of the Crawfords together, and now they’re going camping together! If they had been this close last time, perhaps Liam and her would not have grown apart. They would have been closer than ever today. “Mommy!” Hannah’s sweet voice interrupted Winona’s thoughts.

She smiled at the sight of her daughter and extended her arm toward her. “My sweet darling!” she called out. Hannah excitedly ran into her mother’s embrace, having been attached to Winona since she was a baby. Tears began to well in Winona’s eyes once more as she hugged her daughter tight. It had been two days since they last saw each other. Did Hannah miss her as much as she missed her daughter? she wondered.

“Have you been eating well these two days, Hannah? Sleeping well?” Winona asked.

Hannah thought for a moment before shaking her tiny head. "Grandpa and Grandma says I can only eat during lunch and dinner time. After that, there's no more food."

"Not even when you're hungry?" Winona asked in disbelief.

Hannah shook her head again. She had learnt that hard way that there would be no food for her if she threw a tantrum, so she always ate her meals on time nowadays.

"How could she do that to you? You're still a growing child!" Winona's heart ached for her daughter. "It's normal not to feel hungry during mealtimes. They shouldn't starve you! Hannah, let's leave this place. We'll go back to Grandma's house." Winona was both hurt and angry. She was only gone for two days, and they were already mistreating Hannah.

However, Hannah turned to look at the Crawford Mansion behind her before looking at her mother again. "Mommy, I don't want to leave. I want to stay here and play," she told Winona.

Winona's face scrunched up in disbelief. She could not understand why Hannah would want to stay with these people who gave her a hard time at home. She sighed and pulled a sad face. "Hannah, you don't want Mommy anymore?" She tried to guilt-trip her daughter.

As expected, Hannah shook her head vehemently. "I do!!"

"Alright, let's go then. Mommy will take you to the playground!" Winona coaxed her daughter.

To her surprise, Hannah pouted and refused to budge. "I don't want to!" Hannah just wanted to stay here and play. Mommy never lets her do what she wants!

"Come on, Hannah, we can come back here again soon, but we have to go now," Winona tried to persuade her daughter again. She was beginning to feel anxious as she caught sight of Liam and the rest of the Crawfords coming over.

"Noooo, I don't want to go!" Hannah cried. "I don't want to go! I want to play here!"

"Winona, are you done causing enough trouble?" Liam's cold eyes stared at the woman who refused to sign the divorce papers or show up at court. As a result, he could only file for a litigious divorce which would require at least three months of waiting.

Since Winona could not hide from her ex-husband, she decided to face him head-on. “What trouble? I can’t even see my own child now?” she challenged as she held on to Hannah’s hand. “Hannah, if you want to stay here and play, I can stay here with you.”

Hannah struggled to free her hand from her mother’s grasp. “I don’t want to play with Mommy! I want to play with Lilly!!” she wailed.

Winona was stewing in anger as she tried to pull little Hannah toward the lake. Play with Lilly? That kid would only be a bad influence on Hannah! It has only been two days and now her own daughter refuses to go with her! The Crawfords are no better. They must have talked bad about her in front of Hannah so that Hannah would hate her!

“Hannah, Lilly is a bad kid. She came in between your Mommy and Daddy’s relationship and broke us apart. If it was not for her, you’d be the only princess in the Crawford family, just like your Aunt Jean. Everyone loved her and got her everything she wanted!” Winona lectured her daughter. “And your Grandmother, that child abuser! Forget about her when you grow up. You must remember Mommy’s the only person who loves you and will treat you well...”

Hannah sobbed pitifully, scared and shocked by everything that was happening around her. At this moment, a strong, masculine hand reached out to grab her other hand that was not held by Winona. Liam Crawford was a man of few words and spoke more through his actions as he pulled Hannah toward him.

Hannah felt as if she was about to split into half as her parents fought over her. She let out a heart-wrenching wail.

“Let go of her! Hannah is in pain!” Winona yelled, but she pulled Hannah toward her even more desperately. Liam let go of Hannah’s hand all of a sudden, causing Hannah to lose her balance and fall down on the ground.

Very quickly, Anthony Crawford and his brothers came over and surrounded Winona and Hannah. Hugh Crawford pushed Bettany in a wheelchair. All of them looked at Winona with raised eyebrows. How dare she still turn up at our door after being chased out? they wondered.

“Why are you guys still standing there?” Anthony bellowed. “Bring Hannah over here!”

Liam immediately took a step forward again, but Winona held on to Hannah even tighter. “You’ve already taken everything from me. What else do you want? Do you want to push me and Hannah off the ledge?” she cried out.

Liam’s knuckles cracked from him curling his fists tightly, and the green vein in his arm throbbed as Liam tried to control his temper. His phone rang suddenly and he picked up the call as soon as he saw the caller ID.

“Hello, Mr. Crawford! We are 110...” the caller began.

Liam listened to the call, but his stony eyes were still pinned onto Winona.

“Come over now then,” he clipped before ending the call. Winona, who had overheard the brief conversation, had a bad feeling about this.

“Let go of Hannah right now,” Liam ordered, his voice cold and menacing.

Winona weighed her options. As she looked at the lake from afar, an idea sprang to mind. If they were not going to let Hannah go with her, they gave her no other way out. Winona carried Hannah into her arms in one swift move and stood up tall, ignoring a struggling Hannah in her arms.

“It’s you Crawfords who forced me...” she threatened ominously.

Lilly had been hiding behind Bettany all this time, observing the drama quietly. She held on to her little spatula, her eyes full of suspicion and curiosity. Uncle Liam and Aunt Winona always had some black smoke that shrouded their faces sinisterly, but this time it had spread to their bodies. What was this black smoke?

Pablo stood by Lilly’s side, narrowing his eyes. “Hm... so she wants to die together with her daughter, it seems.” He fished a little notebook from his pocket and flipped through it. “It’s not their time to die yet, but there will be some kind of self-punishment involved...” he noted.

That meant Winona was indeed dragging Hannah to the lake with the intention of suicide, or perhaps she was using it as a method to threaten the Crawfords.

Lilly looked more confused than ever. “What is self-punishment, Master?” she asked Pablo.

Pablo closed the book and held it in his palm. The book immediately disappeared into thin air. “It means she’s going to kill herself,” he explained as a matter-of-factly.

A stunned Lily looked at Winona once more. “Aunt Winona is bringing Hannah along to kill herself?!” she asked out loud.

Old Mrs. Crawford was about to have a heart attack. “Someone stop her!!” she shrieked.

Winona’s face ticked. Her plan had been foiled, and foiled by a kid named Lilly Hatcher, no less! She had no choice but to run for the lake immediately, carrying Hannah along with her. However, the Crawford brothers already knew about her plan, and they were much faster and stronger than she was. They easily caught up with her and seized her.

Winona still held onto Hannah by the neck. “Don’t come any closer!” she screamed at them. “Why do you all have to push me into a corner, why?!” she stumbled backward to the roadside, crying her heart out. She felt like the world owed her an apology. All she wanted was to become a dignified Mrs. Crawford. What did she do wrong? The incident six years ago had long passed. Was it truly so unforgivable?

“Beep beep—” the sound of a car honk brought Winona’s attention back to reality. She saw a window of opportunity and grabbed it, rushing toward the car while she was carrying Hannah.

Liam’s heart stopped as he took in the scene in front of him. There was no way he could get to Winona or Hannah in time. Suddenly, a little spatula came flying out of nowhere.

“Thwack!” It was the reverberating sound of the spatula hitting Winona in the back of the head.