Chapter 1161 He Knew His Pain

The sharp look in Samuel's eyes had vanished as they slowly began to lose focus. For what seemed like forever, he just stood there and stared blankly into space. It was as though nothing else in the world mattered to him anymore.

"How did this happen, Mr. Bowers? Ms. Nichols was just fine a few days ago, wasn't she?" Emma sobbed. "Yeah, you're right... She was just fine..." Samuel mumbled absent-mindedly.

His heart had died along with her, leaving him feeling empty and aimless all of a sudden. Unsure of what she could do to help, Emma could only stand there and wipe her tears in silence.

After taking some time to pull himself together, Samuel picked up Natalie's "body" and carried it into his bedroom on the second floor.

The bedroom contained both of their belongings, all of which remained the way they were before.

Samuel then slowly unzipped the body bag and carried Natalie's corpse out of it.

It had been quite some time since they retrieved her body from the mortuary fridge, and yet, it was still cold to the touch.

The coldness of her skin sent shivers down his spine, and his arms were trembling as he put her down on the bed. At that very moment, the tough front Samuel was trying to put up had broken, and his tears came flowing out uncontrollably.

I'm willing to go as far as sacrificing my life for her, and yet, she died while I'm still alive... Maybe I should join her in death... No, I can't die just yet! Natalie's

death is too suspicious! There are tons of mysteries behind it that I need to uncover! I need to know why Dream was attacked and why Natalie committed suicide to escape punishment. Yandel says it's pointless to investigate all of that because she's already dead, but I don't think I can bring myself to face her in death if I don't!

Samuel retrieved Natalie's favorite clothes from the closet and began removing her prison uniform.

After undoing all the buttons and slipping the clothes off her, Samuel felt as though his heart had stopped when he saw Natalie's naked corpse lying before him.

A sharp pain tore through his chest, and he bit down on his lips so hard that they turned blue.

Oh, Natalie...

His tears flowed down his cheeks and fell upon her face.

Samuel then quickly put her clothes back into the closet and retrieved a set that she rarely wore.

He had just finished getting her into those clothes when someone banged aggressively on the bedroom door.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Samuel walked up to the door and opened it, only to see Jerome panting heavily as he tried to catch his breath.

Unlike his usual sharp appearance, he looked extremely disheveled, with his uniform all wrinkled up. His eyes were so dull that one could easily mistake him for a zombie.

"Where's Natalie?" he asked anxiously after a long pause.

Jerome had yet to cry, but he had a look of overwhelming sadness in his eyes.

"She's in there," Samuel replied while pointing at the bed.

Jerome's legs were shaky as he slowly made his way into the room and walked up to Natalie. It wasn't until he reached her bed that his legs gave out from under him, and he knelt on the ground with a loud thud.

That was when his tears started flowing.

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry... It's my fault for being too weak to protect you. I knew about you being locked up in prison, and yet, I couldn't do anything but watch... I thought my position in the military would allow me to protect you better, but it was completely useless!"

As Samuel was still standing there, Jerome knew the timing of his "confession" was a little inappropriate, but he couldn't care less about it at that point.

The love of his life was dead, so there was no point in keeping his feelings hidden any longer.

Samuel's lips moved slightly, but he didn't say a single word in response.

Chapter 1162 Give Me Back My Mommy

Jerome's heart was completely broken as he knelt beside Natalie's corpse and cried for a really long time. Not only was his love unreciprocated, but he also lost the woman he loved in such a tragic way.

He had already given up on trying to win her over. All he wanted was to protect her from the side, but even that was no longer possible. Being his rival in love, Samuel was able to understand the pain of losing Natalie.

As such, he decided to let Jerome spend some time with her before processing her corpse. The five kids came home from school later that night.

The looks on their faces changed the moment they saw Natalie's portrait and her corpse in the living room. There were also bouquets of flowers on the side.

What? How is this possible? Why have we come back from school to this? Emma wiped her tears as she greeted them, "W-Welcome home..."

"Why is Mommy lying there?" Franklin asked with a frown. Emma, who was barely able to keep her emotions in check, broke down in tears when she heard that. "Mr. Franklin, your mother is gone..."

Although the kids had no idea where one would go after death, they knew for a fact that death was a permanent thing.

Clayton grabbed Emma's arm and shook it as he said, "Stop crying, Mrs. Bunton! This isn't April Fool's Day, so you mustn't make such nasty jokes! We'll get really angry if you lie to us!"

Emma was so conflicted that she didn't know what else to say to them.

Realizing that they wouldn't be able to get any more information out of Emma, Sophia and Yumi decided to approach Samuel instead.

Sophia tugged at the hem of Samuel's shirt as she said, "I don't believe what Mrs. Bunton said because she's quite old. You promised us that you would bring Mommy home safely..."

Yumi nodded profusely as she added, "Yeah! Mommy is really amazing! She's the best mommy in the world! You're amazing too, Daddy! You wouldn't let anything bad happen to Mommy, right?"

The rest of the kids shifted their gaze toward Samuel upon hearing that. They were all hoping that he would tell them they were right, that Natalie was still alive.

It's true that Mommy is lying here and all, but there must be more to it! There's no way Mommy would just die like this! It's just not possible!

Faced with the pure and innocent look in their eyes, Samuel slowly bent over and said solemnly, "I'm sorry; I failed to keep my promise. I wasn't able to protect your mommy, and I will never get the chance to do so ever again. You should all pay your last respects to her..."

Those words struck the kids like a bolt from the blue.

What? If Daddy is telling us that Mommy is dead, then there truly is no hope left!

Sophia clenched her fists and slammed them repeatedly against Samuel's chest with all her might.

"You liar! You promised us you would get Mommy home safely! How could you break your promise to us? Is it because we're kids? Is that why you think you can just break your promise?" she shouted while wailing uncontrollably.

The other four, too, had their tears rolling down their cheeks.

Mommy is gone forever... We'll never get to see our amazing mommy ever again...

Sophia was still hitting Samuel as she continued, "Give me back my mommy! I haven't even spent a year with her! She hasn't taught me medicine! Give her back, you liar!"

Chapter 1163 Motherless Kids

Like a cub that had lost its mother, Sophia kept hitting and biting Samuel all over. Her emotional outburst prompted the other four to break down in tears as well.

Franklin, Xavian, Clayton, and Yumi all began wailing at the top of their voices. "You meanie! How could you not keep your promise?"

"Give Mommy back! We want Mommy back!" "I don't like this! I don't want Mommy to die!" Instead of explaining anything to the kids, Samuel simply stood there and repeatedly apologized, "I'm sorry... It's all my fault..."

Of course, the kids didn't actually hate Samuel. They just couldn't accept the fact that Natalie had died. Jerome's heart ached as he stood there and watched from the side.

Emma spent the most time around the kids, so seeing them cry their hearts out like this brought her to tears as well. Ms. Nichols' death was so sudden... These poor kids lost their mother at such a young age...

Just like that, the five kids knelt before Natalie's corpse and cried until they were exhausted.

Even then, they continued to kneel and refused to get up. While they were too young to understand what paying their last respects meant, they wanted to burn Natalie's appearance into their memories as much as possible. Meanwhile, at the Leitz residence, Helma had just received word about Natalie dying in prison.

Shock filled Helma's eyes when she first heard about the news. Once the shock wore off, however, she let out a disdainful chuckle and muttered, "Heh… I can't believe this woman actually broke under the intense interrogation and bit her own tongue to kill herself! And here I thought she would surprise me with some trump card up her sleeve… Tsk, tsk, tsk… This is such a disappointing ending!"

Of course, disdain wasn't the only emotion she displayed.

Helma was also gleeful that Natalie's life ended in tragedy.

Oh, Natalie... Did you really think you could succeed in life after humiliating me at the banquet? Look at where that has gotten you now!

With a smug grin on her face, she went downstairs to have the cooks whip up a seafood stew. Upon reaching the living room, however, she saw Geert sitting on the couch with a gloomy frown on his face.

Confused as to why he was acting that way, Helma called out to him, "Father?"

As Geert did not respond to her the first time, Helma called out to him again.

That was when he turned around and asked, "Did you hear about what happened?"

"Yes, Father. I have."

"That was your doing, wasn't it?" he yelled with a look of disgust on his face.

"What did I do, Father? That woman bit her tongue because she couldn't stand the interrogation! I had nothing to do with that! Why are you so concerned about her? If you're feeling lonely because of Mother's absence, I could try to get you connected with young women!" Helma retorted.

Geert got up from the couch, walked up to Helma, and grabbed her by the throat.

"Father, what are you—"

"Your mother is not someone who can be easily replaced!" Geert yelled furiously while glaring daggers at Helma.

"Ugh…"

Helma could only struggle helplessly while gasping for air.

She couldn't accept the fact that her father was choking her with enough force to kill her.

Chapter 1164 Two Voices

Helma's eyes went wide as she stared at Geert in disbelief. He is my father, and yet, he is strangling me because of that woman? Helma's face was red as she gasped, "I-I can't breathe... I'm going to die..."

The suffocation was becoming too much for Helma to handle, and she felt like she was truly going to die. Not only were Geert's eyes bloodshot, but his body was also exuding a terrifying bloodlust that Helma had never seen before.

Her father was a gentle and loving man, so she knew he wasn't his usual self. "Stop it, Father... Let go of me..." Helma mumbled weakly in her state of fear and panic.

Geert shot her a disdainful glare as he shouted, "Shut up! You are unworthy of calling me 'Father'!"

Helma could clearly feel the oxygen level in her lungs depleting with each passing second. Her eyes slowly lost focus as her consciousness started fading away.

"Argh! Stop it! Stop it right now!" Geert started yelling all of a sudden. He then raised his left hand and tried to pry the fingers of his right hand off Helma's throat.

Had someone else walked in on them, they would probably have freaked out after seeing that.

It was as though Geert's left hand was trying to stop his right hand.

As both hands belonged to the same person, they were more or less equal in strength.

After about ten seconds of struggling, both of Geert's hands released their grip on Helma's throat.

He then crouched down and wrapped both of his hands around his head.

Although Helma was free from his suffocating grip, she was in so much shock that she slumped to the floor and went limp. While she was completely oblivious to Geert's twisted expression and convulsing body, he, too, couldn't be bothered to pay attention to her.

Pain tore through his entire body, and he felt as though two forces were ripping him apart from the inside.

"Get away from me! Get away from me!" Geert screamed at the top of his voice as he ran back into his bedroom.

Not wanting anyone else to see him like this, Geert locked the bedroom door and went into his bathroom.

There was a huge mirror hanging on the wall.

As Geert gazed into it, he saw a partially unfamiliar look in his eyes.

He then turned on the tap and filled the bathroom with the sound of running water, but anyone listening closely outside the door could still hear two distinct voices conversing with each other.

"You're crazy! You almost made me kill my daughter!"

Geert's reflection in the mirror snapped back at him angrily, "That's your daughter, not mine! I wanted to keep Natalie alive because I still have use for her, but Helma went against my wishes and got Natalie killed in secret!"

"No, it couldn't have been Helma! She may hate Natalie, but she doesn't have what it takes to kill her! You can't blame Natalie's death on her!"

"So what if I am blaming her, huh?"

"Helma would've died if I didn't stop you in time! She's your daughter too, you know?"

"As I said, she isn't my daughter! You and I may share the same body, but we are two different individuals! I'm not as cowardly as you are!"

"You... Shut up!" Geert yelled as he grabbed a glass from the sink and smashed it against the mirror.

The mirror shattered into dozens of pieces that covered the bathroom floor.

It wasn't until then that the voice Geert was talking to disappeared.

His chest was heaving as he gripped the edges of the bathroom sink.

While he couldn't care less about Natalie's well-being, he didn't want anyone to find out about his secret.

Unbeknownst to everyone, there had always been a second person inside his body.

Chapter 1165 I Have Returned

It was a secret that Geert had been keeping all this while. For many years, he did his best to stop that other soul from taking over his body. However, the results of his efforts diminished over time. More often than not, he wouldn't even know about that soul taking over until he regained control of his body.

While Geert would have no recollection of what that soul did, he did have a rough idea somehow. To make matters worse, he knew little to nothing about that soul, even though it seemed to know him fully.

"Argh! I'm the owner of this body, not you! Don't even think about taking control over me! I won't let you 'kill' me!" Geert yelled furiously while staring at the pieces of broken glass on the floor.

The broken pieces of the mirror reflected his rageful expression. Suddenly, Geert felt a headache so intense that it caused his legs to give out beneath him.

Geert instantly fell on his knees and cut himself up on the broken glass, staining the bathroom floor red with his blood. His eyes were bloodshot as he roared in pain like a rabid beast, "Arghhhhh!"

The cuts on his knees got deeper as he struggled in pain, causing more blood to flow out of them.

After what seemed like forever, Geert was finally able to calm down and steady his breathing. However, he looked like a completely different person when he got back on his feet.

There was a vicious and disdainful look in his eyes as he glanced at the broken glass on the floor. As if he didn't feel any pain whatsoever, he casually tilted his head sideways and cracked his neck.

After that, he turned on the tap and washed his hands clean before giving Allen a call.

"Hello, Mr. Leitz."

"It's me. I have returned, Allen," King said coldly.

The man on the phone fell silent for a brief moment before saying respectfully, "How may I be of assistance, King?"

"How did Natalie die?"

"I began investigating her death as soon as I received word about it. Apparently, she didn't kill herself by biting her tongue. Instead, she was brutally tortured and succumbed to her injuries."

"What? Brutally tortured? By whom?" King asked furiously.

"By Lady Cynthia. She ordered her men to make Natalie suffer as much as possible, but they accidentally tortured her to death. His Majesty accused her of instigating members of the royal family and had her removed from the palace, so she can never return to it ever again," Allen replied honestly.

"Cynthia is still as petty as ever, I see. As for Mikhail, he claims to like Natalie a lot but allows his fears to prevent him from saving her!"

Although Allen couldn't see King's expression through the call, he could clearly feel the latter's rage.

"King..."

"I want you to kill Cynthia, Allen."

"I'm on it."

"Wait!" King called out to him again.

"Anything else, King?" Allen asked.

"Make sure she suffers plenty before dying. I want her to be given the exact same tortures she inflicted on Natalie. She had the audacity to kill someone I wouldn't even lay a finger on, so I need to punish her severely," King replied.

"Understood, King," Allen replied with a nod before hanging up.

King tightened his grip on the phone as he stared at the black screen.

Although Yara and Natalie both looked like her when she was younger, Natalie is the one who resembles her in terms of personality. That's why I could use Yara like a tool in Chanaea while letting Natalie off the hook even though she keeps foiling my plans. I thought I could clip Natalie's wings and have her submit to me this time, but Cynthia just had to ruin everything with her selfish and petty acts!

Chapter 1166 Will Not Hold Back

It was a secret in the royal household that Cynthia got kicked out of Luna Palace. However, she passed away suddenly and unexpectedly a few days later.

There was a rumor that Cynthia, who used to be the dignified chief concubine of Loang, died a horrible death. Reputedly, her body was completely rotten, and even the person who collected her corpse found it terrifying to look at. However, no one witnessed it firsthand, so the rumor eventually died down.

While Cynthia publicly participated in charitable efforts, she also secretly committed numerous nefarious acts. Hence, it could be her enemies who took revenge on her after she was stripped of her title of chief concubine.

Everyone had different opinions regarding her death. However, no one knew that the actual cause of Cynthia's downfall and suffering was a young woman. Natalie was dead. Following the customs, Samuel made arrangements for her to get cremated and picked a cemetery to place her remains.

Before Natalie's body was pushed into the cremation chamber, Yandel stopped the funeral home's staff and roared, "You're not allowed to cremate her! Without my permission, no one is allowed to burn Boss' body! Stop right now!"

Unshaven, Yandel looked disheveled. In just a short period, he lost a significant amount of weight, making him appear gaunt and skeletal. However, his eyes were blazing when he stopped the funeral home's staff from taking further action.

"Uh..." The staff member seemed taken aback to have his path blocked by Yandel. He stopped pushing the body covered in flowers and appeared uncertain of what to do next. Samuel glanced at Yandel and ordered the staff in a deep voice, "Ignore him and continue cremating the body!" The staff nodded profusely and continued with his work.

At that sight, Yandel marched over to Samuel and grabbed him by the collar. "Samuel Bowers, what are you doing? Did you perform an autopsy on Boss' body? Have you seriously given up on finding out the truth behind her death?" he bellowed.

Samuel removed Yandel's hands from his collar.

"We both know that her death is highly suspicious. Do you really think an autopsy will change anything?" His voice was hoarse as he continued, "Stop torturing her! You won't let me hold a funeral for her or cremate her body merely because you refuse to accept that she's dead!"

His words went through Yandel's heart like a dagger. "Samuel, are you sure you love her?"

"I don't need to explain my feelings to you," Samuel said, his eyes boring into Yandel's. "There's a limit to my patience, and I have plenty of work to do, so I don't want to waste time debating the answer to a meaningless question."

Yandel had to admit that Samuel's words made sense. Indeed, he's f\*cking right. How f\*cking excellent this is! But, Boss is dead... She can never appear before us anymore. How can Samuel be so calm and rational when I'm still wallowing in grief... Does he have too strong of a mentality? Or is her death not a concern to him?

Frowning, he said mockingly, "If Boss could see how you looked right now, she would be extremely disappointed in you! She loved you so much that she was willing to risk her life for you, but you treated her—"

Before Yandel could finish his last sentence, Samuel raised an arm and threw a hard punch at his cheek.

"Hey!"

By the time Yandel realized what had happened, his cheek was throbbing with pain, and the back of his jaw felt like it had been dislocated.

"Samuel, you—"

Samuel gave him a cold glare and cut him off by enunciating, "Yandel, you can insult me all you want except for my love for Natalie. I love her as much as she loved me. However, I've already mentioned that I have more important matters to attend to. You are Natalie's most trusted subordinate, so I didn't wish to hurt you. But if you cross the line again, I won't hold back anymore."

Chapter 1167 The Ashes Are Not Hers

While Yandel and Samuel were embroiled in a heated argument, Natalie's body had been pushed into the cremation chamber. The staff pressed a button, and her body was burned at an extreme temperature.

Blood trickled down the corner of Yandel's lips. His cheek was red and swollen, but he appeared to feel no pain. Dropping to his knees, he pressed his forehead and chest against the floor, weeping as he said goodbye to Natalie for the final time.

"Rest in peace, Boss." The sight of Yandel despairingly paying his last respects to Natalie made Samuel's heart clench. Even so, all he did was ball his fists instead of helping the kneeling man up.

"Yandel, she left Dream Corporation behind, so you must take up the responsibility of managing it now that she's no longer here."

After saying that sentence, Samuel turned away and left the funeral home without sparing Yandel another glance. When Billy saw Samuel walking out, he asked worriedly, "Mr. Bowers, I saw Mr. Moss walking into the funeral home earlier. Did he hurt you?"

Samuel replied flatly, "No, he isn't as strong as me. If I don't hold back, he will only suffer if he tries to attack me."

"That's true." "The ashes will be ready for collection in half an hour," Samuel said, looking at Billy. "Stay here and collect the ashes when it's time."

That instruction stunned the latter so much that he stared at his employer incredulously. "W-Won't you be collecting Mrs. Bowers' ashes personally?" Billy asked in disbelief.

He had seen firsthand how important Natalie was to Samuel, as they had been through a lot together.

Mr. Bowers had pulled himself together, and I understand that he is doing this for the sake of the future. However, Mrs. Bowers' body has just been cremated, and he is already asking me to collect her ashes. Isn't this blatant disrespect to the late Mrs. Bowers?

Samuel did not answer Billy's question immediately. Due to the lack of response, Billy's sentiment toward his employer turned one hundred and eighty degrees. Could it be that Mr. Bowers' feelings for Mrs. Bowers are gone with the wind following her death? That's too heartless!

As that thought crossed his mind, he could not help but look down on Samuel. Billy was a sincere and honest man, so he did not try to mask his emotions, expressing them clearly on his face. Naturally, his reaction did not go unnoticed by Samuel.

"Billy, are you doubting my decision?" the latter asked in a low voice, his gaze cold.

"I wouldn't dare," Billy admitted honestly, for he was not one to hold his tongue. "Mr. Bowers, I don't have the right to doubt your decision, but I feel like you're severely disrespecting Mrs. Bowers. Even though she has passed away, she previously sneaked into a dangerous place alone to get a cure for you, and she almost died from it. Yet, you're doing this to her after her passing."

Suddenly, Samuel came closer to Billy and narrowed his eyes.

"Do you dare to say that again?"

"Yes!" Billy steeled himself to say the following words. "Mrs. Bowers treated you well, so I won't hesitate to speak my mind. I'll repeat it as many times as you like!"

Samuel patted his shoulder, sneering. "You don't have to give me a ride. I'll drive myself. Use your time at the funeral home to figure out why I asked you to collect the ashes on my behalf."

After getting the keys, he drove away, leaving a befuddled Billy behind.

Why did Mr. Bowers ask me to collect Mrs. Bowers' ashes on his behalf instead of doing it himself? He loved her dearly. Back when she went missing, he spent days on the river without resting. Yet, he won't even collect her ashes on his own now.

At first, Billy was utterly bewildered.

However, he had a lightbulb moment all of a sudden, and he finally realized what was happening.

"No wonder. No wonder... So that's why..."

The only reason is that Mr. Bowers has long figured out that the ashes aren't Mrs. Bowers'!

Chapter 1168 Threat

Natalie lay in bed weakly. Next to her was a young lady called Betty, who prostrated herself on the ground while holding a tray of food.

Despite her posture, Natalie averted her gaze elsewhere coldly, not bothering to spare her a glance. Timidly, Betty said, "Madam, you haven't eaten in two days... If this continues, your health will suffer. If Master blames me for this, I..."

Truth be told, she was not trying to gain Natalie's sympathy, for her master indeed gave her that warning before leaving. Her life would be in danger if she failed to take good care of the woman before her.

For the past few days, Betty had done her best to take care of Natalie, but the latter had barely eaten anything. In fact, Natalie's last meal was a bowl of plain oatmeal porridge from two days ago.

Hearing her plea, Natalie finally showed some reaction, tilting her head slowly to look at her. With her brows furrowed, she corrected Betty by saying, "Don't call me 'Madam,' for I'm not his woman. Besides, I told you that I won't eat unless Bastien comes to see me."

Her voice was weak. Despite exerting all her strength to speak, she only managed to breathe those two sentences. As Natalie seemed to be getting weaker, Betty got so anxious that she began to weep.

"I don't know when Master will be here... Please, eat something! If you want to see Master or leave this place, you'll have to be strong enough to do that..."

Natalie wanted to live on, but she had to say that the young lady before her was too naive. Even if she did eat on time and recover quickly, Bastien would still figure out a way to threaten and force her to act against her wishes.

Thus, it was better for her to take the opposite approach. In any case, he would never let her die, so she should buy as much time as possible.

After all, she firmly believed that Samuel would never give up on her. Afraid of getting punished, Betty remained in a kneeling position in front of Natalie.

After a seemingly long while, footsteps finally sounded outside the bedroom. The person did not bother knocking on the door and entered the bedroom directly.

It was Bastien, clad in a shirt. Initially, there was a quirk in his mouth when he entered the room, but the sight of Natalie's weak and fragile appearance wiped the smile off his face. What replaced his joy was an expression of pure malice.

Storming over to Betty, he demanded, "How did you take care of her? How dare you ignore my order?"

Betty dared not say anything in response. All she could do was press her forehead closer to the ground, trembling in fear.

Natalie glanced at Bastien and said icily, "She did try to feed me, but I refused to eat. This has nothing to do with her."

He could tell she showed mercy to the maid even though she had cut ties with him. At that discovery, he took the bowl and spoon from Betty and declared, "If you finish this, I won't punish her. In fact, I'll even reward her. But if you refuse to eat, I'll order someone to chop off her right hand. It's your choice, Natalie."

As it concerned a young lady's right hand, Natalie could not help but feel that Bastien was more crazed than she initially expected.

His gentleness was fake. In reality, beneath his mild-mannered facade lived a crazy man.

Hearing Bastien's threat, Betty started groveling at Natalie's feet.

She slammed her forehead against the ground repeatedly. Each thud seemed to reverberate in Natalie's heart.

Natalie knew Bastien was using Betty's life to threaten her.

Closing her eyes, she made up her mind without hesitation. "Give it to me. I'll eat it."

Bastien was a madman. If it were just between her and him, she would never have caved in, but things were different since an innocent being was involved. There was no way she could disregard human lives as he did.

The second those words fell from Natalie's lips, Betty stopped pounding her head against the ground, but she still could not stop weeping.

Bastien quirked his lips. "That's more like it, Natalie!"

Chapter 1169 He Does Not Recognize You

Bastien then dismissed Betty with a wave. Initially, he wanted to feed Natalie, but she rejected him. "I can do it myself—" However, he refused to give her a chance to say no.

"Listen to me," Bastien said slowly. "You're too weak to hold the bowl, so don't bother wasting your time. Natalie, you can never be rid of me. If you'd like to know how Samuel is doing recently, I can tell you, but you must finish the oatmeal porridge and the other dish first."

Even the mere mention of Samuel's name was enough to bring a sparkle to Natalie's eyes. Indeed, she was dying to know how he was faring of late.

During one's darkest moments, one would usually be reminded of the dearest people in one's life. Besides the five children, the first person that appeared in Natalie's mind was Samuel.

Even if the news about him would come from Bastien, she still longed to know every little detail about Samuel. "Okay."

That time around, Bastien did not even need to threaten her, for she agreed to eat without hesitation. With that, Bastien knew Natalie had agreed to his condition.

While he hoped for her to give in to him, he could not help but feel unhappy when he realized she could become so obedient and docile for Samuel's sake.

It doesn't matter. Samuel can have Natalie temporarily, but he won't be able to keep her forever. She'll eventually be mine. If ten years isn't long enough, I can wait twenty, thirty, or forty years. I'm confident of making her forget about Samuel completely. With that, I'll be the only man she loves from then on. Bastien raised his hand to feed the oatmeal porridge to Natalie. Her face was devoid of expression as she ate the food like a robot.

Even though she did not hate being with him, that was all there was to it. She did not harbor any other feelings toward him. All she wanted was to finish the meal as soon as possible to learn about Samuel's recent situation.

After finishing all the food, Natalie asked eagerly, "How is he doing?" Naturally, she was referring to Samuel. Instead of answering her question, Bastien picked up a silk handkerchief and gently wiped the corner of her lips. "Calm down."

Hearing that, Natalie knitted her brows. Don't tell me he lied to me. He used Samuel to deceive me into finishing the bowl of oatmeal porridge.

Soon, Bastien placed the bowl and handkerchief on the table. Boring his eyes into hers, he said, "Natalie, stop being stubborn. Everyone has accepted that you committed suicide out of guilt."

Despite being mentally prepared for it, Natalie was still shocked to hear it from him with her own ears.

That's impossible! Samuel will never claim a body that isn't mine! Even if plastic surgery were performed on the corpse, he shouldn't be tricked so easily!

She was consumed with agony.

When she was not paying attention, Bastien seized the opportunity to place his hand on her cheek gently. "Natalie, look. That man claimed to love you but still failed to recognize you. He did suspect that the corpse wore a hyper-realistic mask, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't remove the mask. You have no idea how much effort I spent making that woman into a replica of you. She was operated on many times and treated with a lot of medicine to remove the scars. Well, I admit that if you were not known to be 'dead,' Samuel might have been able to tell you two apart based on your gaze, but he can never do that with a corpse. The reality is that he mistook the body for you, crying for a long time while hugging the body."

As Natalie listened to his recount, she felt as though her heart was being twisted by invisible strings, leaving her breathless.

Chapter 1170 Bring You Home

"That's not possible!" Natalie seemed to be replying to Bastien, but it felt like she was trying to convince herself instead. Being held captive by him with such a method rendered her tantamount to being his puppet. The only way she could threaten him was to go on a hunger strike, which was foolish beyond words. Unlike her, he had plenty of ways to force her to comply with his wishes.

She had been waiting for Samuel to save her as he was the only one she could trust. Seeing that Natalie refused to believe the truth, Bastien moved his hand downward and forcefully gripped her chin.

"Natalie, why won't you forget about Samuel? How am I inferior to him? I'm willing to give you everything—my heart and the noblest status in the country!" he questioned.

Tears welled up in Natalie's eyes as she stared at him with reddened eyes. "But... I don't love you..." she said. Natalie did not need Bastien to treat her well.

It did not matter to her whether or not he treated her well. All she knew was that she never harbored romantic feelings toward Bastien, unlike the deep love she had for Samuel.

Even though she still did not hate Bastien then, she did not like him romantically. In fact, she was confident that her feelings would never change over the course of time. Bastien's felt his heart turning cold when he heard her words. She hurt me time and again...

Needless to say, he was hurt, and the pain he felt prompted him to tighten his grip on her chin.

"You'd better stop having unrealistic thoughts about Samuel! He is trying to turn the case around for you by attacking the Leitz family, but he will never come to save you since he thinks you're dead. In terms of wits and strategies, he's no match for me." "Bastien, you..."

Menace was seen all over Bastien's face as he smirked. Then, he pulled out a hyper-realistic mask from his pocket and threw it beside Natalie.

"You have one month to recover completely. One month later, I will hold a wedding ceremony at Luna Palace to marry you officially. This is the hyper-realistic mask I had someone create for you specifically. Once you wear it, you will be my Lune. To the public, you'll be known as Lunetta Lovas. No one will know your true identity. If you refuse to cooperate, I won't show mercy to that maid, your five kids, and even Samuel!"

Natalie shot a glance at the hyper-realistic mask and muttered, "Bastien, don't you have any other methods besides threatening me?"

"I see no need to change my method as long as threatening works." Bastien released her chin and stood up slowly. "Of course, when you fall in love with me and are willing to stay by my side, I won't have to do this anymore."

With that, he left the weak Natalie behind. As she toyed with the hyper-realistic mask, an endless sense of irony filled her heart. Lune?

In Loang, the moon symbolized nobility, auspiciousness, and good fortune. Only daughters of royal officials were allowed to have names related to the moon.

Bastien clearly went to great lengths to ensure that he could legally keep me by his side. I do not doubt that he has a way of making me recover fully within a month. What should I do about the wedding ceremony? Do I really have no choice but to marry him?

Death was like putting out the lamp. Everyone grieved over Natalie's death, but no matter how reluctant they were to part from her, life still had to go on.

Further investigation into the psychotropic drug trafficking case revealed that it was a setup. The authorities arrested a scapegoat and proved that Natalie and Dream Corporation were innocent. On the surface, it seemed like everything had been completely covered up.

The matter ended on a good note. After all, justice was served, and the misunderstanding was resolved. Alas, the dead could not come back to life.

On the day of the funeral, everyone saw Samuel standing in the rain, staring unblinkingly at the photo of the woman on the tombstone. It was pouring, but he did not seem to realize it.

The crowd assumed he was grieving over the death of his late wife and did not disturb him.

As Samuel looked at the photo of the woman on the tombstone, he whispered, "Nat, where are you? Hold on for a while more. You must wait for me! Don't worry; I won't go back on my word. I will bring you home, no matter what!"