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After a while, Audrey approached Shaun again. His hand was resting on the edge of the couch, so she gently turned his hand over and pushed the lollipop she had prepared earlier into his palm. In a solemn tone, she said, "Eat this, Shaun. It'll make the pain go away. Eat it..."

Shaun still did not say a word. However, his eyes gave an almost imperceptible flick toward Audrey after she retracted her hand. There was tenderness in his gaze, just like how he used to look at her.

Soon, the familiar sound of an ambulance's siren cut through the air. It was coming from downstairs. The paramedics rushed up and wheeled Shaun away in a wheelchair.

As soon as they were outside, they bumped into Yuna and James.

Yuna lunged toward Shaun when she spotted him and fell into a half-kneeling position in front of the wheelchair. With tears rolling down her face, she wailed, "My dearest son, what happened? It's all my fault! I didn't take good care of you!"

Sobbing, she forcefully pulled Shaun into her embrace without giving him a chance to say anything.

She put on such a convincing act that if we did not know better, we would have fallen for it.

Instead, we merely watched the scene with indifference.

Emery did not hold back as she said in a tone dripping with sarcasm, "That's right. Hug him harder so that he passes out. It'd be so convenient if he were to die now."

When Yuna heard that, she scrambled to her feet and stood aside, wiping her tears away. "How could you say something so mean? Is it wrong for parents to be heartbroken at their child's pain?"

Emery folded her arms, tapping her fingers against her arm. As sharp-tongued as ever, she replied, "I didn't say that. You don't have to be so sensitive about it if it isn't true."

Emery had always been the best at making snide comebacks. Combined with her fearlessness, Yuna was no match for Emery at all. Emery's aura was so imposing that Yuna was rendered speechless.

Sensing that things were getting out of hand, James hurriedly grabbed Yuna's arm and stepped aside to let the paramedics carry Shaun into the ambulance.

An awkward atmosphere hung in the air after the ambulance left, but since Shaun was the top priority at the moment, we all got into our cars and rushed to the hospital.

By the time the nurse finished tending to Shaun's injuries, he had already fallen asleep. Audrey refused to leave, afraid that she would not see Shaun again if she left. Hence, we stayed and waited in the ward.

Yuna and James pestered the attending doctor, bombarding the doctor with a barrage of questions about Shaun's follow-up treatment. They make it look like Shaun truly is the apple of their eye, but it's probably just an attempt to put on a perfect front.

It was almost dark when Shaun finally woke up. Audrey fed him some chicken soup, and he gradually regained some color in his cheeks.

"Mrs. Fuller... Please take Ms. Audrey home. I'll be fine by myself," Shaun said slowly. It was still difficult for him to speak.

"I'm not going back! I want to stay here with Shaun!" Audrey protested.

Before I could even say anything, Audrey had already thrown a tantrum. She puffed out her cheeks furiously and turned her back to me, sulking.

I haven't even done anything, yet she already thinks of me as her 'enemy.' She's even siding with an outsider instead of her mother

at such a young age. Gosh, what's it going to be like when she grows up?

I could not help but sigh as those thoughts crossed my mind. At that moment, Ashton appeared at the door and walked in with an impassive expression.

"Why are you here?" I asked.

"You were the one who took something of mine with you when you left the house," he replied. By the time he finished his sentence, he had already strode over to the hospital bed.

I was puzzled. "What did I take?"

For convenience's sake, I had only taken a small handbag that could store my phone and bank card.

He answered solemnly, "You took my soul. You were out for so long that I'm feeling rather weak now."

I shot him an exasperated look. Honestly, read the room before you crack a joke like that!

Ashton understood the meaning behind the look I gave him, but he did not respond. He looked around the room and saw Audrey. She was still fuming silently.

"Audrey Stovall, didn't you notice that I've just arrived?" Ashton asked, feigning a stern attitude.

Audrey seemed to be even more infuriated. She replied coldly, "I did, but I'm going to ignore you. You're a liar, Daddy. And so is Mommy!"

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"Nonsense," Ashton snapped. Realizing that he had spoken too harshly, he immediately lowered his voice and asked patiently, "What did we lie to you about?"

“You asked Summer to convince me that Shaun was having the time of his life with his parents, but it isn’t true! He’s not doing well! Look at all his injuries! You don’t care about him at all, just like how you don’t care about me! You’re nothing but liars!”

As Audrey spoke, tears streamed down her cheeks. Her pitiful sobs were both heart-wrenching and amusing.

How could she compare herself to an orphan boy? She’s our flesh and blood! We were protective of her in the past, so she hasn’t experienced much. When she meets anyone that she likes now, she thinks the world of them and cherishes them whole-heartedly. That kind of behavior will only hurt her. However, that’s something we’ll have to worry about later. I can’t deny that we are at fault in the current situation.

Embarrassment flashed in Ashton’s eyes. He turned his gaze toward Shaun and pondered silently for a while. Just as he was about to say something, the door to the ward swung open. Then, Yuna and James walked in, carrying an insulated lunch box.

“Oh, you’re here, Mr. Fuller,” Yuna greeted amiably. Holding up the lunch box, she walked toward Shaun and said, “Shaun, I’ve made you some chicken soup and congee. Why don’t you eat some?”

As she spoke, she placed the lunch box on the table and was about to serve the dishes she had prepared.

“It’s fine. I’ve already eaten,” Shaun refused flatly. There was even a tinge of loathing in his tone.

Yuna stiffened, and the smile froze on her face. It took her a while to return to her senses and compose herself. She continued smiling as she packed up the lunch box and said agreeably, “That’s all right. You can eat it when you get hungry later. Your father bought this insulated lunch box when he was overseas. It can keep the food warm for one whole night, so there’s no rush.”

From the moment Yuna and James entered the ward, Shaun had been frowning. He looked uncomfortable.

From the looks of it, they're responsible for Shaun's injuries.

James seemed to be in a hurry to divert our attention. As Yuna packed away the food, he motioned toward the door. "We're so sorry for causing you so much trouble today. We'll stay and watch over Shaun. It's getting late, so you should go back and rest."

Ashton lowered his gaze and nodded. "It's rather late indeed."

"Ashton..." I began, unable to stop myself. My brows furrowed. He's not really thinking of leaving things like this, is he? Although Shaun doesn't have anything to do with us, we were the ones who brought him out of the orphanage. Whatever it is, we should help him seek redress! It wouldn't hurt us to give them a warning. In fact, it might even make things easier for Shaun. As to what's going to happen after this, we can discuss it when we get back.

Suddenly, Ashton walked over to the couch in the ward and sat down. Crossing his legs, he placed one arm on the armrest and picked up the remote control for the television. "Let's get this over with quickly, then. Joseph, come in!"

The moment he called Joseph's name, Joseph entered the ward and bowed slightly in greeting. Then, he took out his phone and fiddled with something on the television.

After a few seconds, the television screen burst to life, and a clear image popped up.

The person recording walked through the front door and went to the master bedroom. Then, the person opened the doors to the wooden wardrobe swiftly and pushed aside the men's clothes hanging inside. Everyone immediately saw a large, jagged hole in the back. Strangely enough, something shiny covered the part of the wall that should have been exposed.

The person recording shoved the wooden boards out of the way, revealing a secret room concealed behind the wardrobe.

The camera panned over the room, showing an assortment of torture devices made from leather and metal, wooden sticks with chains, and many more.

The video had no audio, but the shrill shrieks of a child in pain reverberated through my mind.

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“The room was specially soundproofed. Our men tested it out. We couldn’t hear anything from outside, not even a grown man’s shouts,” Joseph explained, shooting Yuna and James a withering glare.

Ashton rested his chin on his hand and ran a finger over his lips. Unsmiling and grave, it seemed as if he had returned to his former merciless self.

Meanwhile, James and Yuna clutched each other tightly and trembled in fear. Although we were in an air-conditioned room, they were drenched in sweat.

Emery was enjoying the unexpected turn of events. Fanning the flames, she said coldly, “They’re just wolves in sheep’s clothing. How despicable.”

The suffocating atmosphere soon became too overwhelming for the couple. James grabbed Yuna’s arm, and they fell onto their knees with a thud. At that moment, they wished that a hole would open up in the ground and swallow them whole.

In that silent court of justice, they had already been nailed to the cross to bear their sins.

Everyone held their breaths as they waited for Ashton to speak. Nonetheless, he merely gazed at the couple expressionlessly, sitting still and silent. After a long, awkward pause, he finally turned around and beckoned at Audrey. “Come here.”

Still teary-eyed, Audrey was momentarily stunned. She raised her hand to wipe the tears from her face before walking over to Ashton calmly and stood before him. Only her pouting lips showed that she was still angry.

Look at her blinking her large eyes without a shadow of fear. It really shows that John brought her up.

Ashton reached out and pulled Audrey nearer to him. Rubbing his palm over her small, chubby hand, he looked straight into her eyes with a gentle gaze and asked, "Are you scared?"

Audrey glanced at James and Yuna before turning back to Ashton and shaking her head blankly. "No."

Ashton nodded slightly. After pondering for a moment, he asked, "What if I told you that this couple inflicted those injuries on Shaun? Do you think I should give them a chance to turn over a new leaf?"

I could not help but frown when I heard those words. How can he involve a child in that decision? Isn't that taking it a little too far? The decision to give them a chance or not will drastically impact their lives! But in Audrey's eyes, it's probably no different from playing house. How can she possibly understand the implications of her answer?

As I worried over what to do, Audrey's voice rang out loudly. "No way!"

Her answer was firm and clear as if she had already known what to say for a long time. When she spoke, she seemed calm beyond her years.

Audrey continued, "Uncle John said that we can only give second chances to those closest to us. We can't simply forgive strangers. Otherwise, it could hurt our family and friends. They're bad people. I don't like them, so I don't want to forgive them!"

With John's character, it's indeed likely that he would've said something like that. After escaping from the jaws of death so many times, he has already lost all hope in humanity. Apart from those closest to him, he won't allow anyone to hurt him. He's a clear-headed yet heartless man.

Almost as soon as Audrey spoke, Ashton narrowed his eyes slightly. His eyes gleamed, and he calmly turned toward Joseph with a slight smile. "Did you hear what she said?"

"I did," Joseph replied with a respectful bow. When he straightened up, he shot a glance at the men outside the ward. Several bodyguards in suits came in immediately and forcibly escorted the couple, who were struggling to hold back their sobs, out of the room.

As soon as they left the room, blood-curdling cries filled the hospital's hallways. Gradually, the cries moved further away and grew fainter.

Why did they have to do all that? Moreover, they're highly educated people. For someone of Ashton's age to have tens of billions to his name, it's clear that he's no saint. It doesn't take much to know that. To err is human. It's not a crime for one to possess some peculiar fetish. What's despicable is when one imposes it onto others. After all, there are differences between humans and beasts. Humans should know the limits of their actions. What goes around comes around, so one can't blame the heavens.

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Just as I expected, based on Audrey's calm expression, she had no idea about what would be in store for the couple that had just been taken away.

As a mother, I was happy to a certain extent. However, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong at the sight of my child being so at peace and unruffled.

Ashton couldn't be bothered by what had happened either. After the despicable couple had been brought away, he began coddling his dear daughter. "Can you forgive me now? Daddy just punished the bad guys that hurt Shaun."

"Hmm..." Audrey clamped her tiny mouth shut as her bright eyes started looking around mischievously. Clearly, she was up to no good once again.

Ashton straightened up and frowned slightly. "Do you still have to think about it?"

“Yep!” Audrey yelled out happily. She was obviously in a much better mood now. With a bright smile, she held onto her father’s fingertips with her own small hands as she whined, “Daddy, let’s take Shaun home with us. We can’t just leave him here alone! Pretty please?”

The smile on Ashton’s face dissipated slowly at the sound of Audrey’s request. He glanced over at me helplessly before looking at the child on the hospital bed. Then, he stood up and walked toward him with Audrey in tow, staring down at him from above.

“Why didn’t you call for help?” Ashton asked.

Shaun was silent for a little while before answering hesitatingly, “The people who left me in the past never showed up again.”

It was more than heartbreaking to hear such words coming out of a six-year-old child’s mouth. He was so young, and yet he already knew how fickle relationships could be.

Behind every nonchalant expression lay layers upon layers of pain and bitterness.

No matter how suspicious he had been in the past, I knew this came straight from Shaun’s heart. It was probably because I could resonate with him, having been left behind myself.

I suddenly found myself warming up to Audrey’s suggestion.

After those words left his mouth, the remaining life in him seemed to drain out of his body and left him even weaker than when we first found him. He now seemed like a sack of mere skin and bones. I knew that any consolation would pale in comparison to the pain that he was feeling on the inside. After all, we had no idea what he had experienced. All we could do was sit there quietly and let him know we were there for him.

Ashton finally broke the silence after a long time. “From now on, you will be part of the Fuller family. Mrs. Fuller will be your mother, and our children will be your siblings. Are you willing to accept that?”

Shaun jerked his head up violently. His eyes were shining with indescribable emotions, but most obviously, he was in disbelief.

Before waiting for his reply, Ashton let go of Audrey and walked toward me, slinging an arm around my shoulder. "Still, I'm not the boss of the house. If you want to stay, you'll have to convince Mrs. Fuller over here," he said lightheartedly.

"You!"

He's clearly playing good cop, bad cop! If I were to say no, that would obviously make me the bad cop.

"Mommy, please say yes! Please, pretty please!"

Before I could say anything else, Audrey ran over and started shaking my arm as she pleaded with me.

It wasn't too big of a hassle for us to have a new member joining the family, and I had no reason to say no. Still, I kept feeling like Ashton had just played a trick on me and couldn't put my words together for a long time.

Suddenly, Shaun swung aside the blanket and stood up on shaky legs as he stared at me in determination. "Mrs. Fuller, I want to live. I want to keep living on. Since you were the ones who saved my life, I want to repay both you and Mr. Fuller. Please take me in! I will not disappoint either one of you, and I promise I won't be a burden. Please, I'm begging you!"

As he spoke, he lowered his torso into a deep bow. It was a simple bow, but it was hard to say no to his sincerity.

All he wanted was to keep living, and who was I to say no to giving him a chance to grow up without trouble?

"Yes to everything except the part about you being a bother," I said. "If we're too courteous with each other, we won't really be a family now, will we?"

After deciding to take Shaun in, we checked him out of the hospital that very night and brought him home.

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We sat in three cars on the way back. Ashton and I naturally sat in the same one, and he kept playing with my fingers the whole way home. Somehow, I felt anger rise up in me at his nonchalant demeanor.

I pulled my hand out of his and sat up straight with my hands folded on my lap. I might as well have written the words, 'Don't touch me' in marker pen on my face.

It may be true that he have gotten rid of his prejudices about Shaun, but he also tried to make me look like the bad guy. Solving one did not mean I could forgive the other issue.

Traditionally, women were known to be detailed and have a practically perfect memory, so there was no way he was going to fool me.

Ashton turned around instinctively at my harsh reaction and paused at my impatient expression. He smiled casually. "If you're still angry about me making a decision about Shaun on my own, you can pretty much stop now."

"Really? Go ahead then, what's your excuse?" I said as I folded my arms over my chest. I was interested to see what arguments he had cooked up this time.

He had his own ups and downs when it came to business, but when faced with his wife's temper, he knew exactly what to say and do to get me to forgive him.

"Haven't you realized Audrey's feelings?" Ashton asked me with a hint of a smile hovering on his lips.

"Feelings?" I asked, surprised.

Right as the word left my mouth, I discovered what Ashton was talking about.

Audrey clearly had some different feelings toward Shaun.

I had always been purposely avoiding the topic. For starters, I was under the impression that even though she had been influenced by media from other countries, that didn't mean that she would mature so quickly. Secondly, since we were talking about Shaun right now, there were so many uncertainties that I had to take into account. If I didn't think about it, it wouldn't happen... or so I thought.

To me, a child's idea of love was fickle and unstable. I knew she would eventually change her subject after her feelings reached their peak.

Obviously, the only exception was a kid's love for their parents.

Ashton looked away without answering me. He shifted into a more comfortable position and said casually, "Being a father has taught me a lot of things, and I've been thinking about a lot more things as well. Audrey's only six, but I've already thought about her marrying out of the family, of how she might meet a*sholes in the future. I haven't been able to relax since thinking about the things she could go through. That's why, when Shaun started becoming the target of her affection, I wasn't willing to give him a chance even though he saved her. Even if I became the bad guy, I didn't want to let anyone hurt my daughter."

I felt like laughing as I wondered when Ashton had suddenly become such a sentimental person.

Still, I did relate with him when it came to worrying about Audrey.

"Then why did you change your mind, Mr. Fuller?" I asked jokingly.

Ashton looked at me and took a deep breath, displeasure evident on his face. "Haven't we settled everything by now? You've been calling me 'Mr. Fuller' for a few days now. Is it really appropriate?"

"Why wouldn't it be?" I shrugged with an innocent look on my face.

It had always been rather fun to mock Ashton a little from time to time. Appropriate or not, I felt like I should have been allowed to have some fun once in a while.

“So you’re saying I can stop calling you ‘honey’ and start calling you ‘Ms. Stovall’ then?” Ashton shot back huffily.

“Hmm...” I hummed, genuinely thinking about it. It sounded rather interesting, so I nodded. “Sure!”

Ashton fell back into his seat as he pinched his brow and unbuttoned the first button on his shirt. He then began taking big breaths as he pretended to feel faint.

I couldn’t believe how much of a jokester Ashton was becoming, what with the whole childish act even at his age. I burst out laughing and said, “What? Are you feeling sick?”

Ashton shook his head around, looking a bit helpless. “Oh, definitely. I think it’s pretty bad, too.”

For some reason, his simple joke scared me badly. My smile immediately froze on my face.

The car fell into an awkward silence and Ashton realized soon enough. He opened his eyes and turned toward me. At the sight of my pale face, he placed a hand over mine and said seriously, “I’m just kidding. Don’t take that seriously. I’m as fit as a fiddle. I haven’t paid you back for all I’ve done, remember? I’ll be fine.”