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He picked up the bottle of sulfuric acid, slowly swivelling his head to face me. An eyebrow raised, he asked in an annoyed tone, "Want me to do it for you?"

My face scrunched up out of fear, instinctively taking a step back and increasing the distance between us. "Jared, listen. There's still a way out for you if you stop now."

His lips pulled back in an ugly sneer. "Scared, Scarlett?"

No sh*t, Sherlock. Anyone would be.

He took slow, lazy steps towards me, and I unconsciously kept backing away from him. "Jared, you can't bring back people from the dead, but you can still treasure the living while they're still alive," I tried to convince him.

He merely jeered at me, refusing to listen to anything I said as he twisted open the bottle cap.

Waving the bottle in the air menacingly, he went on to say, "You look so much like Naomi right now. She was this scared and vulnerable when she died, too. I remember thinking: she must have wanted to continue living, but she couldn't find a good reason to do so anymore. Why couldn't I have been her reason? Why couldn't she have continued living for me?"

I felt my back hit a wall. I'm cornered.

Delighted by my new predicament, a wide grin spread across his face as he splashed the contents of the bottle in my direction.

I reflexively reached up and tried to cover my face with my hands, but only managed to block some of the liquid.

In the blink of an eye, I was aggressively pulled into someone's embrace at the exact moment that I heard the blood-curdling sound of something dissolving, as well as caught a whiff of the rancid odor of rotting flesh.

A man's voice hissed into my ear in pain as a group of people suddenly barged into the building.

When I'd finally snapped awake from my daze, I realized that it was Ashton. He'd used his own body to shield me from the sulfuric acid.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could somewhat see that all the blood was drained from Jared's face as he stared at Ashton, dumbfounded while Ashton's men wrestled him to the ground.

I tried to open my mouth to speak, but no words came out.

Ashton instantly fell to his knees in front of me. There was a constant ringing in my brain as I stood there blankly, watching someone else carry Ashton away.

At the hospital, I silently watched the doctors and nurses as they moved around me. It was only then that my brain finally registered that my face hurt slightly, and I realized that the sulfuric acid must have burnt some parts of my skin off.

“The burn area isn’t large. Your right eye is hurt, but the cornea isn’t damaged, so you don’t have to worry about blindness,” a doctor told me as he bandaged up my wounds.

I contemplated his words for a while. I now knew that my face and right eye hadn’t managed to escape Jared’s fury unscathed.

But why didn’t I feel any pain at all in the beginning? Maybe it all happened too fast that my brain wasn’t able to register it.

The doctor left as a nurse came in to help with my IV injection. After pressing lightly all over my hand and not finding any prominent veins, she glanced up at me. “Please hold your hand in a fist.”

I did as I was told. She carefully inspected the back of my hand and then picked up the needle, setting it upon a certain spot on my skin.

I turned away, refusing to watch her actually push the needle into my flesh. My pain tolerance had always been horrible.

“All done,” the nurse helpfully supplied after she was done.

Only then did I sigh in relief, all the muscles in my body relaxing. The spot on the back of my left hand where the IV needle had pierced hurt slightly, and it looked swollen.

I couldn't help but ask, "Did you accidentally pick the wrong vein? It looks like the wound is starting to bleed."

The tube that connected the IV needle to the drip bag was indeed starting to turn from clear to blood-red.

The nurse looked over her shoulder at me and did a double take. When she tried to pull out the IV needle, tiny drops of blood spurted out.

Using a cotton swab and iodophor to clean the wound, she instructed, "Hold this for a minute."

I held the cotton swab in place, internally lamenting about how complicated humans' blood circulatory systems were. All veins had the same purpose of sending blood to different parts of the body but getting them mixed up might potentially cause a health hazard.

The spot on the back of my left hand was no longer bleeding, but a bruise was starting to form, much to my dismay.

As I chucked the cotton swab into the nearby trash can, the nurse also noticed the growing bruise on my left hand. She furrowed her eyebrows slightly and looked apologetic but didn't say anything.

She took my hand in hers and inspected it closely, searching for another more suitable spot to insert the IV needle.

I couldn't help but pity myself whenever I looked at the tiny lump on my left hand. "Maybe we could try my right hand?"

I would've hated it if the nurse somehow accidentally inserted the IV needle into the wrong vein on my left hand again, creating yet another bruise there.

Nodding, she lowered her head and gestured for me to clench my right hand into a fist.

Fortunately, the process was much smoother this time, and nothing happened after the IV needle went in.

The nurse packed her medical tools, staring woefully at the bruise on my left hand. "I'll go get a pack of ice for you."

I nodded. My vision of her was slightly blurry due to one of my eyes being covered by bandages.

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Things always looked a little blurrier when you were staring at them using one eye instead of two.

John stepped into the room and brushed past the nurse, who couldn't help but gaze admiringly at him. A man with his handsome looks was bound to attract female attention wherever he went.

He was probably used to it as well. He walked into the room and gazed down at me, his eyes full of worry. After glancing up and down my body, his eyes settled on the pinpricks of blood on the back of my hand.

“How did you manage to do that to yourself?”

I replied blithely, “My skin is too fair, I suppose. It was very difficult to find the veins.”

John frowned a little but didn’t say anything more. As he continued to gaze at me, he asked, “Well, how do you feel?”

I evaded his question expertly. “Have you found Summer?”

John nodded and replied, “Yes, we’ve already found him. Ashton suspected Kristina all along, but it wasn’t until he found Summer that he realized something was terribly off. That was when he went to look for you in the factory.”

I pursed my lips. Ashton was a very clever man indeed. Also, that taxi driver had disappointed me greatly! I thought he would at least be kind enough to help me call the police.

I couldn’t help but sigh. Strangers weren’t to be trusted, after all.

John looked at me with a strange expression on his face. “Why aren’t you asking me how Ashton is?”

That was a difficult question. How was I supposed to answer that?

Ashton had shielded me from most of the sulfuric acid, so his injuries were probably far worse than mine. However, I was still a little hesitant about asking John about his condition.

I looked up at John and asked morosely, "John, don't you think I'm pretty selfish?"

He knitted his brows together. In a low voice, he replied, "Jared has been planning this for a long time. You're not to blame for this incident, because you couldn't have predicted his actions. It's well within your rights to be mad at Ashton, but Scarlett, you must know that he has put in his best effort for you."

Yes, Ashton had put in his very best effort. He was a human being and not a god, after all. He couldn't have known that Jared was hiding a deep grudge and that after so many years, Jared had finally laid a trap for the both of us.

However, Ashton was the root cause of that grudge in the first place! That was an undeniable fact.

Seeing the complicated emotions swirling in my eyes, John sighed a little, looking very helpless. "Scarlett, if you don't let go of your grudge now, you'll have an even harder time in the future."

I looked up at him and retorted, "What about you, then? Can you disregard Hannah's family background and live happily with her for the rest of your life?"

John fell silent at my question. Looking rather perturbed, he muttered, "We're talking about your situation right now."

I nodded. "Yes, we are talking about me right now. I'm just making you see things from my perspective. Sometimes, it's hard to understand the viewpoint of the other party when you aren't in their shoes. You might even think I'm making a big fuss over nothing. However, if the same thing happens to you, you might be singing a different tune."

John pursed his lips, probably thinking that I was a lost cause. The room descended into an awkward silence.

As the anaesthesia began to wear off, a burning feeling gripped my face. I lay in bed, thinking miserably about how my face would look after the injury started scarring.

Because of my incident, Zachary and Cameron rushed over to the hospital immediately. The moment she saw me, tears fell from Cameron's eyes like a string of broken pearls.

I wasn't in a talking mood, so both of them chose to remain silent as well. Knowing that Ashton had caused my injury indirectly, their faces were clouded over with rage.

However, after they found out that Ashton had taken the splash of sulfuric acid for me, their expressions lightened up a little.

That, however, didn't change the fact that I had been injured anyway. They wanted an explanation for this.

Louis was a very powerful man. If he employed his usual methods of chasing down people, the Crest family would be defenceless regardless of how much influence they commanded in society. After all, they had injured someone.

Hence, Jared had been apprehended for charges of causing intentional hurt before long. Everyone had expected this outcome. The man was now a criminal.

Ashton had been very badly injured by the sulfuric acid, and a large part of his skin had been corroded by the chemical. He had to be kept under strict observation by the hospital at all times.

After spending a few days in the intensive care unit, his condition finally seemed to improve.

When they finally transferred him to a normal ward, he was still confined to his bed. The doctors had already removed the bandages from my face, and my eyes had made a full recovery. However, my face was scarred for life.

The scar was on the left side of my face, right next to my eye. It was a rather small wound that was no larger than the size of my thumb, but it seemed so much more obvious because it was on my face.

Because the scar was so obvious, I had put some silicone tape on it. The nurses had recommended it to me, telling me that it could help improve the appearance of the scar over time.

Since I was still alive, I couldn't let this scar cause too much disruption in my life.

Ashton was still in a coma. The doctors said he needed to rest—he had been very badly injured, so much so that he had damaged some nerves in his brain.

I grabbed a stool and sat down next to him, gazing at his face. Because he had been burnt on his back, he was lying down on his stomach.

Seeing his face, which was still as handsome as ever, I mused that we both made up for the defects in each other's appearance.

After so many years, we could no longer tell whether we were together because of love, or because we owed too much to each other.

Because we owed each other too much, we were bound to each other for life.

Ashton finally woke up at night. The doctor changed his bandages and warned, "You'll be in a great deal of pain when the anaesthesia wears off." He turned to me and continued, "The patient will be bedridden for now. Make sure to change his urine catheter and wipe him down every couple of hours so he doesn't feel too uncomfortable."

I nodded— I already knew what I had to do. This was probably the first time I had been entrusted with taking care of Ashton.

He had always been very healthy in the past. I couldn't recall a time when he was gravely ill.

What a sad life he led. He had lived peacefully for the first half of his life, and now he was in for the trial of his life.

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The doctor left, and the nurse finished changing the bandages on his back. A tube had been inserted into the back of his hand, and the nurse took great care to adjust it. She looked at me and said, "His bandages have to be changed every three hours. Make sure to give us a shout when the time comes."

I nodded and thanked her in a low voice.

A short while after the nurse left, Ashton woke up from his coma. As he lay on his bed, his lips moved a little, his voice sounding too hoarse to be heard.

I got up and poured some water, dunking a straw into the beverage so he could suck the drink up. However, Ashton shook his head, telling me to forget about the straw.

I obeyed. He took a sip from the cup and looked a little better. His lips white as snow, he muttered, "Thank goodness you're fine."

How strange. His first words after he woke up made me shed tears again.

I fought back my tears as I looked at him and said, "You're a jerk, Ashton Fuller."

He grinned back at me. Although he looked very gaunt, his face was still very handsome. "Don't worry, it's just a small injury. I'll get better with some rest."

I glared at him, the lump in my throat growing more painful. "A small injury?" He had nearly lost his life, and still had the audacity to say something so ridiculous! Was he tired of living?

Ashton's lips curved slightly. "I'm thirsty." I wanted to be a cruel wife and make him die of thirst, but one look from him and my heart softened.

As I fed him sips of water, my heart hurt uncontrollably. Unable to hold back my tears anymore, I could only watch as they landed on my hands.

When he saw this, Ashton sighed and said with a smile, “Why are you always crying? Girls shouldn’t cry so much, you know. It makes you look even uglier.”

I glared at him. Sounding even hoarser now, I snapped, “I’m disfigured, anyway. How much uglier could I get? Ashton, I don’t need you to sacrifice yourself for me. I don’t feel thankful for what you did at all.”

He continued to grin at me. “I don’t want your thanks, you foolish girl. Jared’s target was me, and you were innocent. Come to think of it, I was the one who implicated you. I’m to blame for my own injuries—you don’t have to feel bad at all.”

I bowed my head and said in a low voice, “That’s what I think, too.”

He laughed darkly and took my hand. I wanted to pull away from him, but the moment I exerted some force, he let out a growl of pain. Evidently, I had accidentally touched his injury.

Oh, whatever—he could hold my hand if he wanted.

Perhaps it was because of the anaesthesia, but I could feel how cold his hands were. This was the first time I knew his hands could be this cold.

He said, “Scarlett, I’m sorry for letting you down. I never did become that hero in your heart. Somehow, I was never able to protect you every time something happened to you, and I failed again this time. I thought I blocked every drop of that sulfuric acid, but you got injured anyway.”

He lifted his hand, as though to touch the scar on my face. However, he grimaced in pain again as his wound stung, and he quickly wrenched his hand away.

I felt a lump in my throat again as my heart throbbed with pain. I shook my head, looking at him with tears in my eyes. “Ashton, I never wanted a hero to begin with.”

He grinned and pressed my hand against his lips. His lips were icy cold, and I knew the effects of the anaesthesia were beginning to wear off. He was in for a great deal of suffering.

Ashton spoke again. “Four years ago, I accidentally harmed you and the child. Four years later, I accidentally harmed you again. I’m very sorry, and I know you probably hold a grudge against me for that. Actually, I’d prefer that. When you found out that something had happened to Summer, you left without telling me and went to beg Emery and the Stovall family for help. You didn’t consider turning to me during your hour of need, but I can hardly blame you for that. It’s my fault for letting you down again and again and making you lose your trust in me. I’m sorry.”

I opened my mouth to protest his claims, but I realized that what he said was true.

I didn’t know what else to say. After a short pause, I said shortly, “Ashton, stop talking!”

He smiled weakly. “But who cares? I’m willing to wait for you to come to me one day. Until that day, I’ll put in my best effort to ensure that I’ll become a priority to you.”

I used to think I had spent most of my life catering to Ashton’s whims. Now that I thought more deeply about it, however, that was completely untrue.

Truthfully, I had been catering to my own whims all along. I refused to open up my heart to him and forget our complicated history—instead, I got used to burying bitter grudges deep within me and plodding right on.

I was unwilling to open myself up to new people or let go of the lovers I once had in my life.

Hence, our relationship had been a very difficult one indeed.

The anaesthesia seemed to have worn off completely. Ashton was in so much pain that his forehead was practically dripping with sweat. However, there was nothing I could do to alleviate his pain. I wiped his sweat off using a towel, and he smiled bravely up at me, as though I was the one hurting instead of him.

When he saw me squat down next to his bed, he asked, "Scarlett, what are you doing?"

I knew he was trying to talk to me so he could take my attention away from the perturbing task at hand.

I unhooked the urine catheter. After a short pause, I replied, "Changing your urine catheter!"

There was silence on his end, as though my declaration had embarrassed him into submission.

Ashton was a well-respected man, and he probably didn't want anybody to see him at his weakest. I understood how he felt.

I changed his urine catheter without a word. He shut his eyes and leaned back into his bed as though he had fallen asleep.

However, the sweat beading his brows told me that he was still awake. Gingerly, I dabbed away the moisture on his forehead with a towel again.

He grabbed hold of my hand immediately. As we gazed into each other's eyes, I notice the despairing look that haunted his face.

It was best to remain silent at this point in time.

Neither of us said anything. After wiping his sweat away, I leaned closer to him and planted a light kiss on his lips.

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“Ashton, I'm your wife. Don't go thinking that you're making life hard for me, because you're not. We'll both grow sick and die when we're older—that's just life, and I'm just doing what I promised when I married you.”

He gazed at me, his eyes swirling with emotion. After a long while, he finally let go of me.

The doctors said that Ashton could have some liquid food if he wanted. Cameron brought some soup over, and I fed it to him slowly, carefully blowing on every spoonful to make sure it wasn't scalding hot.

He didn't seem very hungry, but every time I brought the spoon to his mouth, he shot me a look and opened his mouth anyway.

Eventually, I managed to get him to finish half the bowl. Cameron sat quietly in a corner, watching us.

After I finished feeding the soup to Ashton, Cameron passed me another bowl of soup, her eyes swimming with bright tears.

She said, "You should have some yourself, too. Don't go starving yourself just because you have to take care of Ashton."

I looked up at her, seeing the look of sadness and heartache in her eyes. Almost subconsciously, I stretched out my hand for the bowl, before realizing that I still had Ashton's unfinished bowl in the other hand.

The effects of the medication began to sink in just after the meal. Ashton finally gave in and fell asleep.

Cameron continued to gaze at me as I forced down a few spoons of the soup. When I put down the bowl, unwilling to eat anymore, she looked sorrowfully at me. "You need to eat more than that if you want to have enough energy to take care of Ashton."

She was right, I supposed. I forced down another few spoons of the soup until I was sure I couldn't eat anymore.

Cameron took the bowls and stood up to leave. She turned to me, still looking rather worried. "Take good care of yourself, alright?"

I looked sharply at her, feeling a little choked up. Before I could stop myself, I blurted out, "What was going through your mind back when you abandoned me all those years ago?"

I asked this question very abruptly. All these years, I had put up a brave front in front of others, asserting that not knowing my birth parents didn't make me worse off than other people. I had no need for them, anyway.

However, whenever I saw other people clinging on to their parents and acting cute, envy coursed through my veins. Afraid that they might notice, I never dared to let my gaze linger for more than a few seconds.

Cameron burst into tears immediately, her body shaking with sobs. Evidently, my question saddened her horribly.

Before she could reply, I continued, "When I was in the third grade, I wrote a composition that won a prize. The title of the composition was 'My Mother'. Grandma was very pleased and asked me to show her my writing, but I refused to do so. I even refused to show it to Macy, who went to school with me back then. I intended to burn that piece of writing as soon as I could, but I couldn't bear to do it in the end."

As Cameron wiped the tears off her face quietly, I sighed. "Actually, you turned out to be completely different from the mother I imagined you to be. When I was a child, I kept wondering how my mother looked like, because I had never seen her before. I thought she would be like Macy's mother. Macy's mother liked nagging at her—she used to stand by Macy's bed and yell at her to wake up, sometimes until Macy got so annoyed that she yelled right back. I also thought my mother would be like my neighbor Wendy's mother—she liked buying Wendy pretty dresses and accessories. I thought long and hard about how you would be like, but when you finally turned up, you were nothing like what I expected. You never gave me the warmth and comfort I craved—instead, you only brought me suffering and pain."

Cameron cried even harder. She was so upset that she could hardly draw breath.

She sobbed, “Scarlett, I’m sorry. I was wrong, alright? Give me another chance. This time, I’ll do my best to become the mother you have always wanted.”

I felt my heart clench painfully. I had longed for my mother day and night as a child. When I finally grew up, however, I realized that some people were better kept in distant, perfect memories.

I passed her a wad of tissues so she could wipe her tears. “I will never forget the sadness I felt when you abandoned me, but I can understand the love you feel towards your own child. Grandma always said that we must have a bit of sunshine in our hearts no matter how dark the road ahead is. However, I couldn’t keep up that optimism all the time. Honestly, neither of you is to blame—the only thing you ever did wrong was to give birth to me. I used to hate the both of you, but I don’t anymore.”

The world was full of imperfections. Cameron and Zachary weren’t wicked people, but neither were they good ones either. As parents, they had done me a great deal of wrong, but they had also done some right by me, too.

I was a pretty lucky person, I supposed. Ashton had finally opened up his heart to me, and my parents weren’t the heartless monsters I had made them out to be. I was very fortunate indeed.

Isabelle’s mother, however, probably struck hatred and dislike into the hearts of everyone unfortunate enough to meet her.

As for Rachel, her life wasn’t a bed of roses either. Like me, she had been abandoned at birth, and now that she was finally striking it out on her own, her parents had returned to pester her.

Life was never perfect. At some point in their lives, everyone would find themselves at their lowest point, and it was up to them whether or not to put their best foot forward and continue plodding on.

Cameron continued, "Scarlett, I know how much you've suffered all these years. From now on, we'll be right beside you. As long as you're willing to accept us into your life again, we'll always be there for you."

I pressed my lips into a thin smile. "Your soup tasted wonderful. Thank you."

She froze for a second before the tears rolled down her cheeks even more fiercely than before.

I sighed silently to myself. This conversation had been a long time coming. I didn't want to become a bitter man like Jared.

Opening up to others didn't mean showing only the best parts of yourself to them. It meant believing in a shared future despite all the hurt you had caused each other.

When Cameron left, it was already past midnight. I didn't feel very sleepy. Since I had to take care of Ashton through the night, I decided that I might as well remain in the same room.

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I dozed off anyway. Suddenly, I felt Ashton stir next to me. When I opened my eyes, I saw him struggling to make his way off the bed.

I sprung out of my bed immediately and ran over to help him, as though in a trance.

He was sweating profusely again, probably because of the injury on his back. Seeing that I was up, he looked at me apologetically and said, "Did I wake you?"

I shook my head, feeling a little sorry for him. As I grabbed hold of his arm, I asked in concern, "Are you alright? The doctor said you aren't allowed to get off the bed yet."

He pursed his lips, his fingers tightening around the handrails of his bed. "I'm going to the toilet."

I froze for a moment before replying, "There's a bedpan!"

"Help me to the bathroom!" he ordered as though he hadn't heard me. His voice was low and full of authority, and for a moment I thought he was back to the cold, distant Ashton again.

He had his pride, I supposed. Knowing that I wouldn't win in an argument, I gave in and helped him off the bed.

He was 180cm tall and looked almost absurd next to me. For some reason, I had a distinct feeling that he was consciously not putting any of his weight on me.

We entered the toilet. Since his arm was still attached to the IV drip, I bent down without a second thought to help him unbuckle his belt.

However, he grabbed hold of my hand almost immediately. Looking a little helpless, he said, "Alright, I can do this myself. Go outside and wait for me."

I felt rather anxious. "How are you going to sit down on the toilet bowl?" The injury was on his back and didn't affect his walking but sitting down would cause his wound to start bleeding again.

He smiled weakly at me and shook his head. "I'll be fine. Be a good girl and wait for me outside."

I looked at him, feeling more worried than ever. Pushing his IV drip aside, I said, "I'll just help you unbuckle your belt. I won't look at you, I promise! I'll help you sit down on the toilet bowl."

"Just listen to me and wait for me outside!" he said, still smiling. A hint of desperation had crept into his voice. "You don't have to worry about me. I'm not a child, you know. I know what I'm capable of. I'll call you if anything happens."

He gazed into my eyes, trying to reassure me with an earnest look on his face. I couldn't help but wonder how there could be such a stubborn person on this planet!

Sighing slightly, I went out of the toilet. I heard the door slide shut behind me.

I pursed my lips in annoyance. Ashton was always so set in his ways.

Because I was so worried about him, I sat outside and waited for a while more. After a long time, I started panicking a little. Turning towards the toilet door, I called loudly, "Ashton, are you alright?"

"I'm fine!" he replied, sounding cool and unbothered.

Around ten minutes later, I heard the toilet flush. I got up and was about to go in to help him. Nonetheless, once I pushed the door open, he was already standing at the door.

Seeing that he was fine, I let out a sigh of relief and helped him back to the bed.

His bandages had to be changed every three hours. The nurse came in shortly afterward with fresh bandages in her hands. This time, she didn't try and hide the wound—instead, she peeled off the bandages and exposed his wound to the cold air.

Seeing the blistering skin on his back, my heart skipped a beat. An involuntary chill ran down my spine.

“We've gotten rid of most of the rotting flesh, and his skin will repair itself eventually. He will need to remain in the hospital for a while more so we can observe his condition. As far as possible, make sure he doesn't make any big movements that might aggravate his condition. That could slow down the rate of his recovery.” After explaining this to us, the doctor removed the last bits of rotting flesh from Ashton's back. He then packed his surgical knife away and let the nurse bandage up the wound.

Seeing the horrible wound on Ashton's back, I shuddered in horror, hardly daring to breathe at all.

The nurse reattached the IV drip to his arm after bandaging his wound. Because of the medication, he fell asleep almost immediately again.

I sat by his bed, unable to fall asleep. His back was going to be scarred for the rest of his life.

After he found Summer, Ashton didn't let her accompany him to the hospital. Instead, he told her to return to K City with John.

Initially, the plan was to take Ashton to a hospital in K City, too. However, after considering the rough journey and the state of his injuries, he decided to stay here and recuperate before returning home.

Zachary and Cameron dropped by practically every day to visit us. Although our interactions were rather awkward, they could be considered cordial.

Cameron set down a bowl of porridge on the table. Seeing how exhausted I looked, she asked hesitantly, "Why don't you return to the hotel and have a good rest? Come back when you get your energy back. Your father and I c-can watch over him tonight."

She sounded very cautious when she said this. I shook my head. "It's alright. There's a bed for me here, anyway. I can sleep here if I need to. The both of you still have other business to attend to in K City, so you should probably leave earlier and settle them."

Cameron shook her head. "It's alright. I'm getting on in age, so I've already assigned most of my work to Nick. No hurry."

I didn't try to argue with her again. After all, it was true that I hadn't slept well last night. In fact, I was practically sleep-walking now.

Besides, I was in a food coma after lunch. Ashton nodded off slowly, while Zachary and Cameron sat quietly in a corner and watched over us.

It was way too quiet in the room. Slowly but surely, I drifted off to sleep.

Because I hadn't gotten much sleep the night before, I slept very soundly now. Halfway through my nap, I sensed a nurse walking into the room to change Ashton's bandages. I

tried to open my eyes, but my eyelids were simply too heavy—I promptly fell asleep again.

I slept all the way till noon. When I woke up, Ashton was reading a book. Zachary had disappeared from the room, while Cameron was slumped over a table, sound asleep.

Seeing that I was awake, Ashton set down his book and stuffed some tissue into my hands.

I gaped at him, unable to understand what his gesture meant. He finally smiled and said warmly, “Wipe your saliva off your face!”

My face flushed with embarrassment.

I wrenched the tissues from him and hastily wiped my chin. Pursing my lips, I sat up straight and asked, “Is it noon already?”