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"What's the matter?" Natalie asked while yawning. She sat up and opened her eyes, settling her blurry gaze on the floor.

Joyce was sat before the television, feet tapping anxiously against the ground. "Everyone online is attacking you right now!"

"Attacking me?" Natalie was fully awake now. Her eyebrows scrunched closer into a frown.

"Yeah, I just found out."

Joyce continued, "Your scumbag of a dad held a press conference. He said that you got extremely jealous that Jasmine was previously engaged to Mr. Shane, because you liked him too. So, you brought up the whole plagiarism thing to destroy Jasmine's reputation. Your dad also said that you were the reason they broke off their engagement."

"What?" Natalie's lips parted slightly in shock.

It wasn't hard for Joyce to imagine her reaction. Joyce sighed and said, "Go watch it for yourself. The press conference was at seven this morning. Even though it's over now, you can stream the recordings online."

"Okay, I'll watch it right away."

Natalie hung up. She tapped on the browser and searched for the recordings Joyce mentioned.

The video popped up within seconds.

Natalie clicked on it. The recording showed Harrison in front of the camera. His face burned red with fury as he condemned Natalie for coming in between Jasmine and Shane. He said that Natalie swayed Shane's feelings for Jasmine, that she also convinced Shane to cancel his engagement with Jasmine.

Underneath the ten-minute-long video were ruthless comments made by netizens. Their words held more malice compared to Harrison's.

Natalie scrolled down and saw only a sea of slandering comments against her.

I should have guessed it. No wonder Jasmine got along well with everyone else during the competition, but not Natalie. Not only did Natalie seduce her fiancé, but she also caused him to call off their engagement! I'd hate her too if I were in Jasmine's shoes.

Yeah! I can't believe I worshipped her and thought she has a rare talent for design... What's so good about talent if she's a horrible person and steals someone else's man? Seeing her face makes me uncomfortable... She looks like a scheming vixen!

They share the same family name, but Natalie is more foul-hearted than Jasmine. Although Jasmine was wrong for plagiarizing, Natalie shouldn't have exposed her on the spot like that. She clearly wants to obliterate Jasmine's career in the fashion industry by ensuring that Jasmine's reputation is irreparable. How awful!

Seeing such harsh comments, Natalie's body shook with anger.

She bit the insides of her cheeks. Closed the webpage, she returned to her call history and dialed Harrison's number.

It was as if Harrison had anticipated her to contact him. He answered as soon as their call connected.

In the Smith family's villa, he lounged on the luxurious, cushioned sofa. He held a cigar in one hand and his phone in the other as he spoke calmly, "Hello?"

"What are you up to, Harrison Smith?" Natalie clutched white-knuckled on her phone and yelled. She didn't even bother to address him as "dad".

Despite being called by his name, Harrison wasn't upset. He chuckled amusedly, "You forced my hand, Nat. I had no other choice. You refused to withdraw charges against Susan and against Jas too. I wanted to ask you nicely, but I knew you'd never agree to it, so..."

"So you held a press conference. You spread lies that I broke Jasmine and Mr. Shane up. All to turn the public against me so that I'd be forced to withdraw my lawsuit. Isn't that right?"

Natalie interrupted and her eyes had reddened out of anger. She had already figured out his motives.

Harrison flicked the ashes off his cigar. "Yes, Nat. I assume you're contacting me because you saw the hateful comments online? How about this. As long as you agree to withdraw charges and falsify your testimony to Jas' benefit, or if you opt to be absent from court altogether, then I'll help suppress these online hate discussions against you."

Natalie scoffed loudly. She was rather amused as she responded sarcastically, "I wasn't born yesterday. Did you really think you can fix such huge damages to my brand with so little effort?"

What you put on the internet stays there forever. People will never forget this scandal.

Even if Harrison suppresses everything, so what then? Her reputation had sunk to the bottom of the ocean. People already have the impression that she's a shameless mistress who broke up a couple.

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"So you're not going to do it?" Harrison exhaled a puff of smoke.

"That's right, I'm not!" Natalie shut her eyes, forcing the anger back inwards. All that was left was deep disappointment in her voice. "I need to know, Harrison. Do you even see me as your daughter?"

Harrison's age-riddled face twitched. "Of course, I do, but there's a difference between close and estranged daughters. I know you probably hate me, and I know that you'll never listen to what I tell you to do. So I can only sacrifice you in order to protect Jas."

Hearing this, Natalie snorted ironically.

Harrison frowned. His voice deepened upsettingly, "Don't blame me. But for the sake of us being father and daughter, I'll give you another chance to think carefully about your answer. I'll call you later tonight to ask you again."

He hung up after saying that.

A fit of fiery anger consumed Natalie as she threw her phone onto the bed. It took a while before she could calm down.

When she did, the doorbell rang.

Natalie sucked in a deep breath and patted her face, recomposing herself. Then, she climbed out of bed and headed for the door.

Shane stood outside with his head slightly lowered to look at her. Seeing her red and swollen eyes, he knew.

She must've found out about what's happening online.

"Can I come in?" Shane asked, a soft tone slipped from his thin lips.

Natalie hummed whilst nodding. She stepped aside sluggishly and said, "Come on in."

Shane stepped over the threshold, following her into the living room.

Seeing the bouquet of roses on her coffee table, his lips curved upwards. He sat down and asked, "How are you planning to deal with the hateful comments online?"

Natalie poured him a cup of water. "I don't know yet."

"If that's the case, then let me handle it." Shane reached over to pick up the cup.

His bluntness astounded her, making her eyes widen. "Let you handle it?"

This is my problem.

Why does he want to involve himself?

It felt like Shane had immediately read her mind. He drank a sip of water, then placed the cup down calmly. "The whole thing concerns me too. Harrison mentioned my name while he tainted your reputation. He used me to achieve his goal of ruining you. There's absolutely no way that I'll allow him to use me like that."

"I suppose that's true." Natalie nodded.

Harrison spread those rumors with the aim of getting me to compromise.

But he has never considered the impact on Shane to be dragged into such a scandal. Now, it's clear as day that Shane is not only unwilling, but he's also furious!

"As for why Harrison wanted to ruin you, I figured it has something to do with Jasmine and her mother." Shane boldly met her gaze.

Natalie hummed in agreement. "You guessed it right. He wants me to withdraw my lawsuit against Susan, and give false testimony for Jasmine's sake. But he knew I wouldn't agree, so he pulled this trick. He messed with my online reputation to force me into complying. If I agree to his conditions, he says he'll help suppress the online hate."

She fiddled with her cup as she spoke about this. A self-deprecating smile spread across her face. "How pitiful, right? That this monster is actually my biological father."

Shane pursed his lips. "A man like Harrison is unworthy of being your father, don't pay him any more attention."

"Never again. I won't care about him anymore. His actions today have made me lose all respect and concern for him as a daughter," Natalie said with a blank face. She placed her cup onto the table with a heavy hand, making it clunk loudly.

Shane sensed the weight of her words—she actually meant what she said. He nodded approvingly at her.

"Mr. Shane!" Natalie clenched her fists. She looked at him and continued, "I just thought of how we can deal with this matter! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, I'll give them a taste of their own medicine! But I'll need your cooperation."

"Go on." Shane crossed his legs and leaned in closer.

Natalie looked at him with steely eyes. She explained the full details of her plan.

After listening to the plan, he raised his chin to meet her focused gaze. "I understand and I'll cooperate with you."

"Good. Thank you, Mr. Shane." Natalie grinned gratefully.

Shane waved at her, saying, "It's nothing. I'm not doing it to help you entirely; I'm also doing it to clear my name."

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After all, this incident had affected him too.

Many online commenters called him a jerk. However, because of his prestigious identity, their comments were less vicious.

"Mommy, what time is it now?" Connor suddenly asked while yawning. He came out of his room in his pajamas.

After checking the time on her phone, Natalie shot up from her chair. "Oh my god, it's almost nine o'clock! We're gonna be late for school. Baby, go wake your sister."

She had been so furious at Harrison the whole morning that she forgot to wake her kids up. Connor rubbed his eyes and mumbled, "Okay." He spun around and went back into the room.

Shane stood up too. He said, "I'll send Sharon to school in a bit. It's not convenient for you to go outside now. They are a lot of people who recognize you."

Natalie lowered her head, nodding slightly to accept his offer. "Alright then. Thank you, Mr. Shane."

Indeed, almost everyone recognized her now that she was being reprimanded online.

If another parent, who had watched the competition, recognized her while she dropped Sharon off at school, they might tell the other kids to ostracize Sharon. Worrying thoughts plagued her mind. This wouldn't be good for Sharon in school.

"It's not a problem." Shane waved at her, signaling that she didn't need to thank him.

Then, a thought crossed his mind. He looked at Natalie and asked, "You guys haven't had breakfast yet, right?"

Natalie shook her head. "Nope."

Shane raised his chin as if he were pondering something important. "Give me a minute."

After saying that, he darted for the hallway outside her door.

Natalie blinked in surprise.

Is he going out to buy us breakfast?

This made Natalie run outside in hopes of stopping him.

Just as she caught up to him, he entered into his own apartment that was opposite hers.

Natalie felt odd about going in there, so she waited outside for him.

Shane came back with a paper bag after roughly two minutes. When he saw her standing in the hallway, he couldn't help but raise a brow. "You waited for me here?"

"Yeah." Natalie skewed her lips. "I wanted to tell you that we have sandwiches, and that we could heat them up. But you left before I could tell you not to worry about our breakfast."

Hearing this, the joy that swelled in Shane's heart dissipated immediately. He handed over the bag with a darkened expression. "Sandwiches are not good for children's digestion, have this instead. Mrs. Wilson made this earlier in the morning."

"But—" Natalie's lips parted then closed. She wanted to say more, but Shane interrupted her.

He said, "It's getting late. By the time you're done reheating breakfast, it'll be too late for Sharon to go to school."

Natalie kept quiet after hearing that. Some time passed before she finally sighed, "Okay. Thanks again, Mr. Shane."

Coming to a compromise, she reached out and accepted the paper bag from him.

Shane's taut expression softened at this. He hummed in approval before they headed back into her apartment.

After breakfast, Shane and Sharon departed while Natalie stayed in the apartment to accompany Connor. It also gave her time to catch up on the online hate situation.

The online discussions were becoming more and more violent. Many accounts were still egging the scandal on, spreading nasty rumors as if the scandal was real.

Many netizens were confused with what was the truth. And since Natalie hadn't made a public statement, they believed that she really interfered with Shane and Jasmine's relationship, causing them to call off their engagement. This made them scorn her even more.

In an instant, Natalie bore the notorious title of "vile woman".

Even Connor knew about it. After using his hacking skills, he found out that his grandfather had caused the online controversy against his mommy. This ignited the hatred in him for his grandfather that he had only met once.

"Mommy," Connor held a printed-out list and entered Natalie's study.

Natalie was no longer browsing online. Since those comments made her so upset, she figured she might as well ignore them. She sat down at her desk and penciled a blueprint.

The blueprints she had drawn up were not the usual womenswear designs that she excelled at. Instead, it was a neat and chipper menswear suit.

She had promised to design something as repayment for Shane some time ago. However, the competition had occupied her time completely. So, she couldn't start on the blueprints. Since she didn't have to go to work today and was no longer in a competition, she finally had the time to sketch up a design.

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"What's the matter, baby?" Natalie asked endearingly. Her gaze rose to meet her son who had walked in.

"This is for you." Connor approached and passed her the list in his hand.

"What's this?" Natalie bent over to get a better look at the list. There were various online usernames, and some even looked familiar. Then, it hit her—these are the accounts that egged the scandal!

Natalie suddenly understood his intentions. She placed the list onto her desk, then focused on her son. "Baby, did you give this to Mommy because you want me to press charges against them?"

Connor nodded. "I heard that as long as a hate comment is liked or reposted more than five hundred times, then you can file a case. Mommy, you can't let them get away with scolding you like this."

At the sight of her son's anger and concern for her, a warm feeling blossomed in Natalie's chest.

She stretched out a hand and petted her son's little head. "Okay, thank you, Baby. Mommy won't let you down. I'll make them pay for their actions."

Truthfully, even if her little boy did nothing, she was already planning to hire help in compiling the same list for prosecution. After all, I won't tolerate being scolded for no reason.

But now that her little boy had helped to prepare the list, it saved her time in the prosecuting process.

"Alright, you go ahead and play. Mommy will take care of the rest, so don't worry about it." Natalie's hands gently patted Connor's shoulder.

Connor nodded understandingly. Just as he was about to leave, the doorbell rang.

Natalie stood up and brought him along to open the door.

Outside, Joyce held Stanley's hand, supporting him as they waited.

"Hi, Uncle Stanley and Aunt Joyce," Connor said excitedly. and waved his tiny hand at them.

Natalie was the only one who looked at them in surprise. "Why are you guys here?"

Joyce handed over the snacks she brought to Connor. Then, she responded to Natalie, "The online discussions are blowing up. We got worried about how it is affecting you, so we came to check on you."

"But you can come over on your own, why'd you bring Stanley along? Has he been discharged from the hospital?" Natalie proceeded to eye Stanley from top to bottom.

Stanley smiled softly. "I'm allowed to be out for half a day, don't worry."

"Really?" Natalie's brows twisted into a frown. Some anxiety still lurked in her mind.

Stanley pushed his glasses up his nose. "Yes, really!"

"Alright then, come on in." Natalie loosened her hold on the doorknob. She stepped aside to let them in.

After they entered, Natalie closed the door. She and Connor trailed behind them as they all headed into the living room.

There, Joyce helped Stanley onto the sofa. She noticed the elaborate bouquet of roses on the coffee table and exclaimed, "Nat! Who gave you these flowers?"

Stanley glanced at the roses too. Behind the lenses of his glasses, his eyes darkened.

"They're from Mr. Shane." Connor answered from beside Natalie, beating her to it.

"Mr. Shane?" Joyce raised her eyebrows mischievously.

Stanley's eyes narrowed suddenly.

This little blabbermouth. Natalie squinted her eyes at her son and ushered, "Go back to your room."

The boy stuck his tongue out before scrambling into his room.

Natalie prepared two cups of water and handed them to Joyce and Stanley. After that, she hummed in admittance. "He gifted them to me."

"Why'd he gift you roses out of the blue. Is he courting you?" Joyce asked incredulously after taking a sip of water.

Natalie shook her head. "That's not possible. He just wanted to congratulate me for winning the competition."

"I can understand gifting flowers to congratulate your win, but why roses of all flowers? It's pretty clear what this means..."

"That's enough!" Stanley interrupted Joyce in a deep voice. A stone-cold expression showed on his face as he rebuked, "Nat has explained that he's just congratulating her for winning. Stop making assumptions."

After being lectured, Joyce's lips pursed shut. She stopped talking and even her face that beamed so livelily was replaced with a dull expression.

This bothered Natalie. She disapproved of how harshly Stanley reacted to Joyce's harmless question. She drew her lips in tightly and was about to speak up on the matter.

Suddenly, Stanley's gaze whipped over to her. "How do you plan to solve the online mess, Nat?"

"Yeah, Nat. The internet is getting out of hand. Almost every website you click into has dirt on you. If this continues, I'm worried that those merciless online trolls will stalk you and show up here at your home. They might even harass you too..." Joyce cast a concerned look at Natalie. She couldn't hold back the qualm in her stomach about the whole thing.

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Natalie reached for Joyce's hands and patted them. She reassured Joyce that everything was okay and that she would resolve everything tomorrow.

"You have a plan?" Stanley's glasses glinted in the light.

Natalie nodded sightly. "That's right."

"What's the plan?" Joyce asked, sparkling with curiosity.

A secretive smile curved on Natalie's face. "You'll know tomorrow morning."

Seeing that she refused to spill it, Joyce shared a look with Stanley and didn't dwell on the topic anymore.

Time passed quickly. It was already noon.

Natalie invited the two to stay a bit longer. She planned to serve them lunch before letting them return to the hospital.

Joyce and Stanley had no objections to this, and they both nodded in agreement.

Afterward, Joyce accompanied Natalie to cook in the kitchen whilst Stanley stayed in the living room alone.

He looked at the bouquet of obnoxiously red roses on the coffee table before him. It was as if they scorched like sun rays into his eyes, blinding him. Feeling overwhelmed with a flashing pain, he swiped at the roses.

Kshhhhk!

In the kitchen, Natalie and Joyce heard a glass-shattering noise that sounded like it came from the living room. They immediately dropped the vegetables they were washing.

"What was that?" Joyce questioned as she stared at the kitchen door.

Natalie shook her head. "I don't know, but it sounds like something broke."

"We'd better go check," Joyce stated. She wiped her wet hands on her apron before walking out of the kitchen.

Natalie followed suit and went out with her.

However, as soon as they left the kitchen, they saw Stanley lying on the ground. Around him were shards of various sizes that broke from their glass cups earlier.

The thing that had unfortunately suffered the most were the roses. The bouquet that Shane had given Natalie was currently squashed underneath Stanley's body. The rosebuds were flattened, and their petals scattered all over the floor.

The bouquet was utterly destroyed.

"Stanley, are you okay?" Joyce's expression changed to worry at the sight of him on the ground. She hurried over to help him get up.

Natalie also rushed to his aid.

Together, they moved him back onto the sofa.

Stanley, who had sat down now, looked at Natalie feeling embarrassed. "I'm sorry for causing you trouble, Nat. I've even broken your cups and ruined your flowers..."

Natalie glanced at the rumpled bouquet on the floor. She would be lying if she said it didn't upset her. After all, the roses were a gift from Shane.

But even so, she couldn't blame Stanley. She forced a gentle smile and brushed the accident off. "It's fine. What's done is done. They're just cups and some flowers. What matters is that you're safe. But Stanley, what exactly happened? How did you fall down?"

This caught the attention of Joyce, who was picking up the shards. She paused and looked up at Stanley, wanting to know his answer too.

Stanley chuckled bitterly and said, "I wanted to go to the bathroom but didn't have the strength to get up properly. When I fell, my arm must have accidentally swiped the flowers and cups off the table."

"Oh, I see." Natalie lifted her gaze off the floor and turned towards Joyce, who had cleaned up the shards. "Joyce, why don't you help Stanley to the bathroom while I take these out to the trash?"

"Alright." Joyce nodded and went to support Stanley's arm.

Although Stanley frowned at her touch, he didn't refuse. He allowed her to support him and guide him towards the bathroom.

After a few steps, he halted and turned to look at Natalie, who exited the door with the crushed-up flowers in her arms. His lips arched into a shallow smile after seeing that.

Joyce noticed this. Her eyes narrowed to slits as if she had discovered something awful.

She waited for Natalie to leave completely before staring at the man in disbelief. "Stanley, did you mess up Nat's flowers on purpose?"

Stanley's eyes flickered, pretending to be confused at her question. He glared at her indifferently before responding, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"You know what I mean." Joyce's hand retracted from supporting his arm. "Stanley! You did it on purpose, didn't you? You were jealous that Nat accepted his flowers, so you ruined them. Nat may not know your true nature, but I grew up with you! I know that you're capable of such despicable acts."

"So what if I did?" Stanley rolled his shoulders back threateningly, withdrawing his arm that was still in midair. "You're going to rat me out to Nat? You'll tell her that I deliberately destroyed those flowers? That I'm actually a mentally unstable psychopath?"