

## A Farewell 261

### Chapter 261

"Ouch!" The subordinate howled in pain as he held his head. Sage seized the chance to sprint out of the abandoned house.

"That filthy bitch! Catch her!" Benjamin, who had pulled himself together, yelled out in pain and resentment. His subordinate immediately ran after Sage.

Sage dared not look back as footsteps closed in on her. She ran as fast as she could into a lonely and dark forest. There were no lights apart from the dim moonlight.

Sage pushed through despite her fear and ran toward the mountain path. The winding path felt surreal under her feet as dizziness crept up on her. She didn't manage to make it far before Benjamin's subordinate grabbed her by her collar.

"Let's see what you can do now!" Panting hard, the man dragged her back to the abandoned house.

Sage felt her senses dulling, perhaps due to the drug. Clinging onto the last shreds of rationality, she resolved not to be hauled back to the house where she'd be subjected to Benjamin's whims. She bit her tongue to keep herself sober. Upon reaching the house's entrance, she unexpectedly kicked the man in the groin, causing him to double over and close his legs in agony.

Sage struggled to break free, but the man seemed outraged. Even though he was in great pain, he managed to grab her ankle.

Because of the light coming from the house, she saw a gaping wound on the man's forehead. Blood trickled from the wound down his brow and cheek. It was a frightening sight to behold.

To free herself from his grasp, she shut her eyes, clenched her jaw, and kicked his head with her free leg. However, the man released her ankle and rolled away to dodge her kick.

Then, he managed to grab her before she could escape and pinned her hands behind her back, forcing her to kneel on the ground.

"You little bitch! You're quite something. I'll teach you a lesson!" Enraged, the man yanked her hair, forcing her to look up at him.

At the same time, Benjamin stumbled out of the house. He seemed to have come around. He snapped, "How dare this bitch lie to me? Tie her on the bed so that she can't escape!"

Sage felt her scalp throbbing from all the hair-pulling. Her body started to give way. Even biting her tongue no longer helped to keep her awake. Everything around her started melting away. "Get her into the house!" Benjamin ordered in a frigid tone, but Sage did not feel fear anymore. She robotically struggled against her captors. But in their eyes, it was nothing but a Hail Mary. Sinking into despair, she collapsed limply to the floor, surrendering to whatever fate awaited her. As she was being tied to the bed, she heard the sounds of someone kicking on the door. A strong, blinding light suddenly illuminated the room, and chaos ensued.

Amid the commotion, she noticed a familiar figure approaching her. She was acutely aware of someone trying to choke her, but it soon stopped and she could breathe again.

Soon, her limbs were untied, and her body fell into a warm embrace. A familiar male voice echoed in her ear. "Sage Joyner, are you alright?"

She looked up in a daze. Her eyes met the concerned look of a man with chiseled features. "Iany?" she murmured hesitantly.

Ian stared at Sage, examining her glazed eyes, unkempt hair, and the marks on her flushed cheek. He also noticed her rosy lips, warm body, and coy voice.

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Sage had clearly gone through a lot of suffering and ingested some illegal drugs.

Ian suppressed the murderous feeling rising within him. He resisted the urge to harm Benjamin right there and then. The audacity of him to even lay a finger on Sage!

"Mr. Holcomb, Benjamin Xenith has disappeared!" Terry reported.

Ian hissed, "Send our men after him! We'll capture him no matter what it takes!" Sage, visibly shaken, sought solace in Ian's embrace.

"Mr. Holcomb, leave this to me. Please send Mrs. Holcomb to the hospital now," Terry suggested.

Without wasting any time, Ian picked up a disoriented Sage and placed her in the car. He rushed her to the nearest hospital.

Fortunately, the doctor's assessment revealed that she suffered no injuries except for the slap mark on her face and some rope abrasions on her wrists. However, she very likely ingested some kind of hallucinogen, judging from the state of her.

The doctor stated, "It's not advisable to get her stomach pumped. That'll only make her suffer needlessly. Patients who have ingested hallucinogens typically do not suffer any long-term effects, so it's best to allow her to recuperate naturally. Since she appears calm now, it's safe for her to rest at home under supervision."

The hospital was too far from Solaris Estate. Hence, Ian booked a room in the hotel next to the hospital for Sage. Staying near the hospital would allow them convenient access in case she felt unwell.

After booking the room, Ian brought Sage up to their room and placed her on the bed. He was about to fetch a wet towel to wipe her clean when she grabbed his waist. She moaned, "Ian, please don't go..."

According to the doctor, hallucinogens would affect the nervous system, leading to confusion of time and space. Hence, he assumed that Sage was suffering just that.

Since she was reluctant to let go of him, he sat beside her on the bed. She immediately wriggled into his arms and pressed her warm cheek against his cool skin.

"Ian, you finally visited me after one year. Have you investigated the case and cleared my name?" Sage mumbled in a low voice. "The people here are hostile. I don't want to stay here any longer. Bring me home now..." Ian couldn't understand her rambling, but he felt sorry for her regardless. Kissing her on the forehead, he said, "Just rest. You're fine now."

When she felt his kiss on her skin, she opened her eyes. As she stared at Ian's handsome face, her glazed eyes twinkled in excitement, and tears rolled down her face. "Ian, you're finally here to see me! You've looked into the case, right? See, I had nothing to do with it!"

Looking sympathetic, he played along, nodding. "Yeah."

Seeing the apologetic look in his eyes, she consoled him, "Ian, everything's fine now if you discovered the truth. I won't blame you for keeping me locked up here..."

As she spoke, she reached out to caress his face. "Since the truth's out, will you finally love me?"

The warmth of her fingertips jolted him. Composing himself, he nodded and said lowly, "Yes."

Hearing that, she collapsed in his embrace and cried her heart out. "Ian, the day I waited for has finally come. I'm so happy. Hug me! Let me know it's not just a dream!"

He hugged her back tightly, his heart aching at the sight of her petite and fragile frame crying in his arms. He couldn't help but whisper in her ear, "Sage, why do you insist on a divorce if you still have feelings for me?"

"A divorce?" She lifted her head. Her eyes, nose, and cheeks were red from her crying. It made her appear more attractive and vulnerable.

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"I don't want to get a divorce!" Tears streamed down her cheeks as she shook her head vigorously. "Ian, you know I didn't do it, so why do you want a divorce..."

Ian fell silent. So, all she heard was the word "divorce". He thought about her determined demeanor and her excitement when she got her hands on the divorce papers in the office the other day, and he couldn't help but cup her face and silence her punitively. "You're the one who wants to get a divorce!"

His words still didn't register with Sage as she touched her lips and gasped bashfully, "I- Ian, you kissed me! You actually kissed me! Do you not hate me anymore?"

"When did I ever say I hated you?"

"Yay!" Sage paid no heed to what he had said. Blushing, she mustered up her courage and kissed him back. "I'm so happy, Ian!"

Sage wouldn't have done this if she was sober. After all, she always got angry when he kissed her in the past. She even slapped him in the face once. Yet, she was excited by his touch and even took the initiative to kiss him back now.

His deepest desires were ignited as Sage nestled into his embrace. Her soft, velvety lips grazed his, and her intoxicating scent filled his senses. He tightened his grip on her waist and asked huskily, "Do you want something that'll make you happier?"

Her cheeks were as red as a tomato, and her eyes sparkled with anticipation. "Yes!"

Ian wasted no time in dipping his head and capturing her lips again. Initially, Sage was a little timid. However, she soon reached out and wrapped her arms around his neck, reciprocating his passion.

He felt the temperature in the room soar as their lips fought for dominance as she melted further into his embrace. Soft, seductive moans escaped her lips as she clung tightly to him.

Ian felt an overwhelming urge to devour Sage whole. Yet, he was fully aware that she would resent him once she regained her senses. Ian reluctantly ended the kiss and pulled away from Sage slightly.

"Ian, why... Are you having second thoughts?" Sage looked at him, her breathing ragged. Tears started to stream down her cheeks again.

He wiped away her tears with his fingertips and answered huskily, "I'm afraid you'll regret it."

"I won't!" Sage hugged him tightly. "I like you, Ian. I want to be with you and do more intimate things..." she confessed bravely, blushing.

His heart pounded like a drum as he looked into her eyes. "Do you know what you're saying?"

"Of course!" Sage pouted. "Ian, we've been married for so long. Do you still not want us to be a real couple?"

Ian brushed his fingertips against her lips and asked in a raspy voice, "Take a good look at me, Sage. Who am I?"

Sage gazed at him. "You're Ian! My husband!"

The word "husband" filled him with a strange sense of satisfaction. His voice dropped lower as he asked, "Are you sure you won't regret this?"

"Of course, I won't!" To prove her point, she leaned in to kiss him passionately again.

Ian didn't hold back anymore when her soft lips touched his. He took the lead and deepened the kiss, pinning Sage down on the bed.

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The unfamiliar yet fervent kiss made her shy and excited at the same time. Ian rubbed her skin gently, sending shivers down her spine. Sage arched her back in response, allowing him easier access.

That night passed in a whirlwind of passion. Sage was a lovesick woman who was lost in her fantasies and convinced that she had finally won her lover's heart. In contrast, Ian, who used to be composed and restrained, was now tirelessly indulging himself in wild abandon.

Neither understood why the other had changed all of a sudden, but neither cared to dwell on it. The couple clung to each other fervently, entwined passionately. It was as if they were determined to unleash all of their passion that night.

Unlike the cool night air outside, the room was hot and stuffy. The passion was so intense that even the moon blushed and hid behind the clouds.

The next day, Sage woke up parched. Instinctively, she reached out to grab a glass of water from the bedside table but found nothing. She also felt immense soreness at the slightest movement.

When Sage opened her eyes, she found herself lying in an unfamiliar bed. Judging by the room's decor, it was a hotel room. All of a sudden, memories of being kidnapped by Benjamin the night before flooded her mind, and she sat up with a start.

The blanket slipped off, revealing her bare shoulders. Sage hastily wrapped herself up and looked around the room warily. There were no cameras or other recording equipment in sight.

Wasn't she in a dilapidated shack on a lonely hill last night? How did she end up in a hotel? Sage doubted that Benjamin and his underlings were kind enough to leave her here.

As she desperately attempted to recall last night's events, she heard the balcony door sliding open. She looked up and saw Ian, who was dressed in a bathrobe and holding his phone. "You're awake?" he

asked.

It wasn't just her imagination. She could tell he was glowing. Sage put two and two together and realized what had happened the night before.

"Are you feeling unwell? H—" Ian asked with concern as he leaned over, but she raised her hand and tried to slap him. Of course, he dodged it effortlessly and grabbed her hand.

His dark gaze landed on her fair shoulders before he said lowly, "I'm surprised you still have the energy to hit me. It seems like I didn't work hard enough last night."

"You shameless jerk!" Sage forcefully withdrew her hand in embarrassment and hid under the covers. "I didn't consent to it!"

Ian appeared to have expected her reaction as he promptly unlocked his phone and played an audio clip. Sage frowned as she listened to Ian's unusually hoarse voice.

"Tell me, Sage, who am I?"

"You're Ian! My husband!" she exclaimed proudly and enthusiastically.

"Are you sure you want me to continue? Are you sure you won't regret it?" His words were laced with restraint and temptation.

"I won't regret it!" Sage breathed out, and her tone was seductive. "Love me, Ian—" The audio was cut off with a whimper as she was bitten hard. Then, it abruptly ended.

Her face turned crimson from the clip. Sage could picture the circumstances under which it was recorded.

Ian was a real jerk. He was aware that she wasn't able to consent, yet he had deliberately recorded this to shut her up!

"Sage, I took you to the hospital last night. I wanted to put you to bed, but you kept holding onto me and wouldn't let go. You begged me to make love to you." Ian's Adam's apple involuntarily bobbed as he swallowed. "I told you. I'm a man, not a saint."

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Sage was aware that the drug Benjamin had given her had a strong hallucinogenic effect. She heard from Tiana that the drug could cause hallucinations, especially if the person had a strong fixation.

Even though she couldn't remember how she got from the hospital to the hotel, she was vaguely aware that she was dreaming. Sage dreamt that she was still in the psychiatric hospital, waiting for Ian to uncover the truth about the arson.

In her dream, he found out the truth and came to see her. He held her and told her he would like her. Sage was so excited that she disregarded her inhibitions and kissed Ian. Then, she expressed her desire to take their relationship to the next step.

In her previous life, she was obsessed with this, and with Ian. Hence, everything that happened last night was the result of her previous life's hopes and dreams.



If it had been just a regular aphrodisiac, she might have desired him physically, but she would've rejected and resisted him mentally. However, her obsession had become all-consuming because of the hallucinogenic drug, and she had become drawn to him both physically and mentally.

Forget it. There was no point in crying over spilled milk. Plus, there was no way for her to regain her innocence now.

Sage couldn't kill herself over something like that. It was just her bad luck that she encountered a scumbag like Benjamin who subjected her to this ordeal.

Even though Ian had taken advantage of her, she couldn't imagine the torment she would face if Benjamin's plan had succeeded. Even though she didn't have much feelings for Ian anymore, she would still rather sleep with him than with Benjamin and his underlings.

At the very least, the silly woman in her dreams was thoroughly satisfied. Sage would just view it as if she had satisfied an obsession from her previous life. She decided not to dwell on it and asked, "Shouldn't Benjamin be charged by now? Why hasn't he been taken in for questioning?"

Ian was a little surprised. After all, he had expected her to dwell on what happened last night and get upset with him, accuse him of something, and demand an explanation. Yet, she moved on so easily.

"Is it something you can't tell me?" Sage was puzzled.

He suppressed his disappointment and answered, "Someone at the orphanage was working with Benjamin and secretly obstructed the police from gathering evidence, allowing Benjamin to get away.

"Terry already sent that person to the police station last night, and he's just informed me that Benjamin confessed that he did it out of spite."

"How'd you know I was kidnapped by Benjamin?" she asked.

Ian explained that he heard from his grandmother that she had returned to the Joyner residence. He tried to call and check on her, but neither she nor the driver were picking up. He then learned from her grandfather that she never got to his place.

Ian sensed that something was wrong and immediately asked someone to locate her. Then, he found out through further investigation that she had been abducted by Benjamin. Following that, he and his men rushed to rescue her.

Even though he played it off casually, Sage knew that it must've taken him a lot of effort. Hence, she sincerely said, "Thank you."

"Who knows what would've happened if he hadn't shown up in time," she brooded. He deserved her gratitude this time.

Ian's dark gaze landed on her. "There's no need to thank me. It's my fault for not fulfilling my duties as your husband. I put you in danger."

"It's not your fault. No one could've seen that coming." Sage continued, "By the way, my grandfather doesn't know what happened last night, right?"

"He doesn't," Ian reassured. "Grandpa thought we had a fight, and that you were mad at me when I called last night to check on you, so he tried to comfort me."

"What about Grandma?" she asked.

Ian shook his head and told her he had already given his grandmother an excuse for her and the driver's absence.

"Her birthday party doesn't start until the afternoon. I just called Grandma and told her we'd be arriving late." He added, "I'll go with you to the police station to give a statement."

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"Okay." Sage was relieved. Thank goodness she didn't make them worry. "Could you have someone bring me a change of clothes please? I'll take a

quick shower before we head to the station to give our statements."

"Don't you have anything else to say about what happened last night?" Ian couldn't help but ask when he noticed how calm and collected she was

after her initial embarrassment.

"What else am I supposed to say?" she asked. "Benjamin is behind bars, and Grandpa and Grandma are none the wiser. Isn't that good news?"

"So all this time you've been kicking up a fuss and insisting on divorce because I haven't consummated our marriage?" he asked lowly.

Sage sneered as she realized that was what he wanted to talk about. "You're reading too much into it. Last night was just an accident. I won't hold

you accountable for taking advantage of me either. After all, you saved me, so I suppose we're even now.

"Let's go to the court tomorrow once Grandma's birthday celebration is over and get that divorce certificate."

"Haven't you had enough of this, Sage Joyner?" Ian roared. "Last night, you couldn't even stand the mere mention of divorce! Why are you acting like

a completely different person after you've woken up?"

Sage scoffed. "Well, you're not wrong. You could think of me as a different person. But this is honestly so strange. Why are you upset when I'm the

one who was taken advantage of?"

"Is that all this is to you?" he asked coldly.

"What else could it be?" she shot back.

Ian gritted his teeth. "Are you saying that no matter who it was last night, you'd still end up getting the short end of the stick?"

"I can't give you an answer to something that didn't happen," she responded bluntly.

Perhaps, even in her hallucinations, she would still be able to tell that it was Ian. Or perhaps she'd mistake just anyone for Ian.

To hell with that! Ian was about to lose it. He felt like nothing more than a dildo. Just then, his phone rang. He excused himself and stepped out onto

the hotel balcony to answer it.

Sage grimaced and noticed a towel at the end of the bed. She took it and wrapped it around herself. She felt her legs go weak, and her thighs ached

when she tried to get out of bed.

That bastard must've been abstinent

Sage had only taken a few steps before she was lifted into the air. She yelped in surprise. Ian had somehow returned to the room and was now lifting

her in his arms.

The bath towel she had wrapped around herself came undone, revealing her long, slender legs. His gaze was burning with desire as he stared at her

legs.

"What are you looking at? Put me down!" she growled, clutching the towel.

His gaze was dark and unfathomable. "At this rate, it'll take you half an hour just to get to the bathroom."

As if he had the right to complain

about her pace! He was the one who

was to blame! Sage was aware that>

gating furiously

"Can you manage on your own, or should I give you a hand?" Ian asked huskily as soon as her feet touched the ground in the bathroom.

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"Get the hell out of here!" Sage snapped.

Ian couldn't tear his gaze away from her flushed face and the tantalizingly pale skin beneath the towel. Her words didn't anger him. Instead, it made

him think about what happened last night.

Ian was consumed by desire when she wrapped her arms around him bashfully last night, her tender bosom swaying before his eyes. He relentlessly

tormented her until she begged for mercy...

Sage noticed his breathing getting heavier as he stared at her legs. Furious, she kicked him and yelled, "I told you to get out!"

Her attempt to kick Ian fell short as he swiftly caught her leg. Her thighs were completely exposed as she was only wrapped in a towel, and her foot

was being held by Ian. She was in an incredibly compromising position. Her face turned crimson as she yelled, "Let go of me!"

He didn't want to let go, but there were more pressing matters to attend to that day, and Sage's body couldn't take any more "rough handling". Hence.

he suppressed his desires.

"Know your limits." Ian took a deep breath before he let go of her leg. He then turned around and left the bathroom.

Sage immediately locked the door and splashed some cold water on her flushed face. She must've been out of her mind. She was well aware that

she was no match for Ian, but she still tried to kick him and ended up in that embarrassing situation.

Sage wanted to slap herself when she thought about the way he had looked at her as he held onto her foot. As the heat on her face subsided, she

raised her head and met her reflection in the bathroom mirror.

Although there were no visible marks on her face, her neck, collarbone, and shoulders were covered in hickeys!

Sage untied her bath towel and noticed that the marks on her body were darker, with teeth marks in certain places.

"Ian Holcomb, you animal!" she couldn't help but yell at the door.

Ian, who was gazing at the dark red stain on the bedsheet inside the hotel room, heard her curses. His eyes darkened as his lust for her grew

stronger. He would've kept going if Sage hadn't resisted.

As Sage stepped out of the shower, she heard Ian's voice from the other side of the door. "Your clothes are here."

She put on a bathrobe and opened the door a crack. Then, she hastily took the clothes and locked the door again.

Ian was furious. He snorted. "Why are you hiding from me? I've seen every inch of your body, Sage."

"Shut up, you jerk!" Sage hurled her bathrobe at the door.

Ian had also changed when she

Sage couldn't help but give him the death stare as she thought about how he had left all sorts of marks all over her body.

"Why are you acting all prissy now when you were all nonchalant just a moment ago?" Ian sneered.

"That's because I didn't know you

His expression hardened. "Are you sure you want to talk about divorce right now?"

Sage paused before continuing, "Let's go to the police station."

"Hold on." Ian stopped her and motioned for her to sit down.

"What are you up to now?" Sage looked at him warily.

He remained silent as he picked up a tube of ointment from the table and gently applied it to her wrist.

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There were red marks on her wrist from being tied up by ropes last night, although they had faded a lot overnight.

Then, she suddenly remembered she had caught a whiff of this scent when she was taking a shower just now. Had Ian used the same ointment on

her wrist last night?

"The hospital's right next door. If you're feeling unwell or are in severe pain, we can head there and get you treated first," Ian offered.

Sage felt her cheeks heat up again. Even though he wasn't specific, both of them understood what he meant.

Frankly, she did feel a little swollen and uncomfortable, and it was a little painful to walk. But she didn't have the nerve to go to the hospital for

something like that.



"I'm perfectly fine!" Sage exclaimed before swinging the door open and walking out. Ian reached out, wrapped his arm around her waist, and led her

out of the hotel when he noticed her awkward gait.

Terry was already waiting for them in the parking lot. He lowered his head when he noticed the hickeys on Sage's neck and Ian's hold on her. "Good

day, Mr. and Mrs. Holcomb," he greeted respectfully.

Terry then pointed to the man who was with him and said, "This is Ralph. He's extremely skilled at combat and driving." The man named Ralph

greeted the couple.

Ian nodded at him. "From now on, Ralph here will be your designated driver, Sage."

Sage looked perplexed. "Why do I need a driver?"

"It's just to make things easier for you. He can double as your bodyguard when you're out and about," Ian explained coolly.

Sage politely declined. "That won't be necessary. What happened last night was just an accident. I don't need a bodyguard or a chauffeur. Even if I

did, I'd find one on my own."

Ian felt his temper flare when he noticed that Sage was attempting to distance herself from him again. Suppressing his anger, he said coldly, "Just

use him for now. We can talk about it when you find someone else."

Sage didn't want to argue with Ian in front of the others. So, she pried his hand off hers and got into the car without another word. The couple headed

to the police station with Ralph behind the wheel and Terry driving closely behind them.

Her handbag and phone had been retrieved by Ian's men and were now back with her. Priscilla's call came through as soon as she powered on her

phone. The former had already heard about what happened last night.

"Benjamin must be out of his mind, Sage. How could he pin all the blame on you and kidnap you? I will not let him get away with this!"

Priscilla said through gritted teeth,

"I can't just ignore what happened to you! You were dragged into this because of me," Priscilla insisted. "I've already let you down once. This time, I'll

make sure he pays for what he did!"

Sage knew that Priscilla

needed to do it for herself, so she

Sage, accompanied by Ian, recounted the events of the previous night. Josephine called and invited them to come over for lunch as soon as they left

the police station. Sage politely declined and said they'd come over after lunch.

"Let's head back to Solaris Estate first. I need to change and put on some makeup," Sage told Ian, who agreed.

On the way back, she suddenly thought of something. Sage asked the driver, "Could you check if there's a drugstore nearby? I need to make a quick

stop."

Ian turned to her and asked, "What's wrong? Let's just go to the hospital."

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"Nothing's wrong. I just want to get some medicine."

"What kind of medication do you need? Let Terry get it and deliver it to the estate."

Her cheeks burned as she cleared her throat. "It's fine. I'll go get it myself."

Ian could roughly guess what she wanted from her reaction. His gaze darkened as he said lowly, "There were condoms in the hotel room."

Sage realized he had taken precautions and was relieved. She couldn't risk another accident after what happened the night before.

His irritation returned as he noticed Sage visibly relaxed. "Didn't you hint to me before that you wanted to have children with me?"

"People's desires change over time. Let's not dwell on the past," she responded coolly. Ian was at a loss for words.

Then, the couple arrived at Solaris Estate. Sage wanted to open the door and get out, but Ian insisted that she stay put. He then opened her door and

carried her out of the car.

"What do you think you're doing?" Sage was surprised.

"You're too slow," he responded.

Sage was rendered speechless. She thought she was pretty strong since she had been able to deal with so many things after what she had been

through.

Wanda was pleasantly surprised when she noticed Ian carrying Sage inside. She hastily gave them some privacy. Sage could only pretend not to

notice as Ian carried her upstairs.

Sage used some foundation to cover up the hickeys on her neck, put on some makeup, and changed into a high-collared dress and a chic jacket.

Sage looked much better despite how minute the changes she had made were.

The couple arrived at Holcomb Manor in the middle of the afternoon. Ian still wanted to carry Sage out of the car, but she stopped him. "I can manage

on my own."

After all, she didn't want to be the center of attention. Plus, with their impending divorce, she wanted to maintain a low profile. Ian pursed his lips and

extended his arm, which Sage did not refuse.

The couple had several of Ian's

After all, Ian was the CEO of Holcomb Corporation. It was only natural for his relatives to come over and say hello.

had also read between the lines,

He reached out and caught her. "Do you feel neglected?"

Sage shook his hand away angrily and responded, "Yes. I can't go on like this for another day!"

"Sage Joyner!" Ian wrapped his arms around her and threatened, "If you don't behave yourself, I'll make sure you miss out on dinner altogether!"

Her cheeks burned in an instant. How could this jerk say such suggestive things in front of his relative? Sure enough, his aunt smiled mischievously.

"I'm so glad you guys are so lovey-dovey!"

"I—" Sage was cut off by a stern voice.

"What are you guys doing?"

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Sage looked up and noticed Leo approaching them. Sage was aware that Leo wasn't fond of her, so she pushed Ian away, straightened up, and

greeted him politely, "Good afternoon, Father."

Leo didn't acknowledge her and scowled at Ian. "Ian, there are so many elders here. This is not the time or place for this."

"Leo, this is just how young couples are. It's no big deal!" Ian's aunt spoke up before Ian could respond.

"Even so, that is so unruly of you! What happened to all those etiquette lessons you had?" Leo chided.

Ian frowned. "There's no rule of etiquette that says you can't hug your wife."

"Ian Holcomb!" Leo's face flushed with anger.

"Oh, come on, Leo. It's supposed to be a joyous occasion. There's no need to get all worked up. Let's just talk this out calmly." She then smacked her

head and said, "The maid brewed me some coffee. I'll go check if it's ready!"

Sage also planned to excuse herself after Ian's aunt left. But before she could, a gentle voice came from behind. "Mr. Leo Holcomb."

Sage turned around to see Ivy. The woman was dressed in a ladylike skirt and was all dolled up. It appeared as if the recent allergic reaction hadn't

affected her much as she still wore a gentle smile on her face.

"Good afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Holcomb," she greeted Ian and Sage.

Ian nodded at Ivy. Sage discreetly clenched her fists as she thought about what had happened in Colville. She wished she could just strangle Ivy righ

then and there!

"Ivy, why are you addressing Ian so formally?" Leo's forehead creased when he heard that. "Aren't you and Ian close?"

"Even if we're close, I need to be mindful. Mr. Holcomb is married. I can't risk upsetting Mrs. Holcomb," Ivy responded gently.

"Would you seriously get upset over something like this? Are you honestly that narrow-minded?" Leo looked at Sage reproachfully.

"This has nothing to do with Sage." Sage was about to speak up, but Ian beat her to it. "It was my idea."

Leo still seemed displeased. "How

Ian responded apathetically, "It's just a title. It hardly counts as distancing."

Sage didn't have to pretend anymore since she was getting divorced soon anyway. "Narrow-minded? I'll show you how narrow-minded I can be!" she

cursed inwardly.

"Excuse me. I'll go check on Grandma. Don't let me keep you guys from catching up." Sage then walked into the manor without sparing Leo another

glance.

"What's up with her attitude?" Leo fumed. "What did I do? How could she disrespect me like this?"

"I'll go check on her," Ian said.

He was about to go after Sage when Leo stopped him. "What's this about a divorce?"

Ian looked at his father and said calmly, "We had a bit of a disagreement. She was just saying that because she's angry."

"I doubt it. She didn't even show me basic respect!"

"Father," Ian said respectfully, "you can't expect people to respect you if you don't respect them first."

Leo's expression hardened. "Are you implying that I didn't respect her? She's my daughter-in-law! Why can't I reprimand her?"