

Chapter 447 Didn't You Stop Caring About Me

Cecilia's words ended in a sigh, her spirits low.

Her coldness wasn't cruelty, but the armor forged from enduring repeated disappointments.

Mark had kindled hope in her, only to extinguish it time after time. She no longer dared to love him, opting instead for the safety of mediocrity.

Mark's gaze remained fixed on the road ahead. An empty stomach, neglected during lunch, troubled him, but he was determined not to reveal any frailty before Cecilia.

After a weighty silence, he declared, "I'll take you back to the film set."

"I drove myself," Cecilia countered, reaching for the car door.

In a sudden motion, Mark restrained her. "Don't leave."

Turning, Cecilia met his profound gaze. He appeared composed, betraying no sign of the considerable effort he'd exerted to halt her departure.

After an intense, wordless standoff, Cecilia whispered, "Release me."

Complying, Mark eased his grip.

She alighted from the vehicle hastily, as though pursued.

Once the car door shut, Mark gingerly placed a hand over his abdomen. He remained still for a moment before retrieving a pill from his pocket and downing it with water.

He delayed his return to the company until his discomfort

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Peter, sensing Mark's sour mood, refrained from any provocations. As his workday concluded, he approached Mark, suggesting, "It's time to fetch Edwin. He'd be thrilled if you did."

The mention of Edwin lightened Mark's spirits.

Upon collecting Edwin, the young boy, schoolbag in tow, bounded from the car where Zoey awaited.

"You're all sweaty, boy. Go freshen up. I've made ice cream for you," she directed.

Edwin, cheeks flushed, complied, washing up before settling down with his treat.

Zoey fanned Edwin, her keen eyes flickering between the father and son.

Mark was off; she could tell.

Disheveled, he discarded his coat onto the sofa, seemingly devoid of energy.

Mimicking Mark's tone, Zoey gestured near her ear, "Oh, someone phoned me last night, claiming he wouldn't return home... Needed to 'take care' of Cecilia, he said. Worried I'd fuss over a drunken Cecilia showing up here."

Edwin nearly choked on his ice cream.

Peter, just entering, was seized by laughter.

Zoey shot her son a sardonic glance. "Look at yourself. Is wooing the woman you fancy more challenging than your former job? At least you applied intellect in your professional duties. With Cecilia, it seems you're all talk, no heart. Consider your age, and hers."

In the past, Mark might have mocked himself.

But today, irritation got the better of him; he remained silent

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and retreated upstairs to his study.

Zoey's gaze lingered on Mark's retreating figure.

Drawing close, Peter whispered, "He was rejected. Cecilia paid him no mind."

"I see," Zoey affirmed, nodding. "It's no wonder she ignores him. Does he still consider himself the young, charming man he once was? He's not the only one entitled to cast judgment. Can't he also be on the receiving end?"

Edwin bobbed his head in agreement.

Despite her sharp tongue, Zoey prepared a bowl of wontons and took it to the study later that night.

Mark sat, engulfed by gloom, in his study.

Zoey entered, placing the bowl before him, her voice softening. "Have some. You seem like you haven't had the appetite for anything all day."

Mark whispered a "mom" under his breath.

Sensing his low spirits, she patted his hand, reassuring, "She holds you in her heart, albeit with resentment."

With a rueful smile, Mark acknowledged, "I know."

Zoey gestured to the bowl, philosophizing, "Just like eating preferences vary; some relish coriander, others don't. Love mirrors this. Conflicting desires mean paths not taken together. Recall your treatment abroad. You pushed her away, fearing she wouldn't be able to bear the worst. But did you ever consider her wishes? Her strength? Mark, you possess strength but are often blinded by self-interest."

Mark consumed his dinner in silence, albeit only half.

Zoey playfully swatted him, chiding, "Go apologize to her, now. She's avoided visiting because of your spat."

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Mark unwrapped a mint candy.

Time stretched on before a faint smile emerged...

That night, he dispatched a generous message to Cecilia, wishing her luck on her blind date and offering apologies for the incident the previous night.

Cecilia responded with silence.

Reviewing the message, a wave of embarrassment overcame Mark, prompting him to set his phone aside.

Just as he prepared for sleep, the door creaked; a figure tiptoed in, burrowing under the covers and snuggling into Mark's embrace.

It was Edwin.

In a gentle tone, Mark inquired, "Want to sleep here?"

Without a word, Edwin clasped Mark's waist, seeking comfort.

Silence resumed as Mark stroked his son's hair.

Sometime later, assuming Edwin asleep, Mark was startled when the boy murmured, "Mommy doesn't care for those men."

With a rasp, Mark replied, "I know."

A relieved sigh escaped Edwin before he succumbed to sleep.

Bathed in moonlight, Mark's gaze rested on his son, his thoughts wandering to Olivia and Cecilia.

Yet, resentment lingered.

He refrained from seeking Cecilia out, learning through Edwin of her continued misfortunes in love, which oddly soothed him.

One day, a knock heralded his secretary, who announced with a smile, "Mr. Evans, a Mr. Simon Lewis wishes to speak with you."

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Simon Lewis?

Realization dawned on Mark; Simon was the director of Cecilia's new play. Anticipating a financial appeal, Mark entertained dual motives: a chance to invest and an opportunity to see Cecilia.

Returning Simon's call, he offered cordially, "Please excuse my earlier distraction. How about this? I'll have Cecilia deliver your check soon. Yes, our paths cross frequently."

Post-call, Mark's spirits noticeably lifted.

At twilight, a call from Cecilia came.

"What are you planning, Mark?" she inquired.

Cutting to the chase, Mark proposed, "Join me for dinner. I'll give you the check then."

A pause, and silence ensued.

"If I refuse, you'll make things difficult, won't you?" she challenged, her tone subdued.

"Absolutely," Mark confessed without evasion.

Expecting outrage, he was met instead with acquiescence.

"Fine, I'll dine with you, Mr. Evans," she conceded, her usage of "Mr. Evans" laced with sarcasm.

Mark detected the derision but remained unfazed. His primary concern was his longing for her.

He suggested picking her up, but she preferred to drive independently.

Ultimately, they agreed to meet at their familiar haunt, reserving the usual private dining area.

Mark arrived early, selecting a few dishes, each a favorite of Cecilia's.

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Ten minutes later, Cecilia appeared, her assistant in tow. Mark eyed the assistant, subtly dismissing her.

As the door closed behind the departing assistant, Cecilia remained silent. She sat beside Mark, picking up her fork, and murmured, "I'm famished."

It was seven in the evening, and she hadn't eaten since breakfast.

Mark served her, a rare quiet between them.

The mood was surprisingly pleasant.

Cecilia was sparing with words.

Mark, eating little, studied her profile, and then ventured, "Where's your new beau?"

"He wasn't the one. We've stopped seeing each other," Cecilia responded evenly.

A silent sigh of relief escaped Mark.

He poured her a cup of fine green tea. A kind she didn't mind.

She accepted without objection.

Once she finished eating, Cecilia cut to the chase, saying, "Mr. Evans, our dinner is done. Time for your investment, yes?"

No desire for a spat, Mark handed her the check. Cecilia glanced at it. 80 million dollars.

She expressed her thanks and made to leave, but Mark caught her hand.

Beneath the crystalline luminescence, he gazed into her eyes, his voice earnest. "Cecilia, how long will you stay mad at me?"

Her lips quivered, no words forthcoming.

He released her hand with gentle resignation.

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Frustration gnawing at him, he longed for a smoke.

Finally, he spoke, his voice a calm veneer. "Cecilia, I've wronged you, I know. And I feel your resentment. I've lived these years, risking everything for you, our kids. I've earned your coldness, but I'm aging, Cecilia. I wanna do everything to care for you and our family while I still can. If we prolong this, I fear it'll be too late."

His gaze held her. Her vitality contrasted his concealed fear of aging.

He never dared let her see the insecurity shadowing his pride. The fear that standing next to her, he'd invite judgment, bring her grief.

It wasn't reluctance to chase her, but a cruel race against time.

Cecilia's heart sank.

She wanted to forgive him, to grasp his hand, to say she bore no grudge.

But she couldn't.

She departed in tears, unaware Mark mirrored her sorrow...

Their relationship was a tangle of rights and wrongs, perhaps misguided from the start.

From then on, Mark withdrew.

He ceased his overtures, kept abreast of her life only through snippets. Her career moves, social life, unsuccessful blind dates.

Their paths crossed sporadically, thanks to the kids, with brief, indifferent exchanges.

Mark wasn't sure if it was surrender.

He'd offered happiness; she'd declined, pained by his methods.

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He faded from her world, yet funded almost all of Simon's productions.

Came summer, and Mark's health improved.

Charlie, having visited Mark a few times in Rouemn, had grown close. He invited Mark to the club, where they played cards in a private room.

Inside a private room, Mark and friends were engrossed in a card game.

Charlie, the ever-vigilant host, prohibited smoking. He joked, "Mark's looking better. Must be the lack of female company," earning a glare and a curse from Mark.

Men together could be so unguarded.

Eventually, Charlie's craving for a cigarette led him outside.

By chance, Cecilia was there too, stunning in a dress adorned with pearls, her black hair cascading down her back.

Intent on flirtation, Charlie stopped short upon recognizing her.

Quick to recover, he grinned. "Cecilia, good to see you! Some friends of mine are here. Care to join us?"

Unsuspecting, Cecilia agreed, out of respect for the past.

Charlie's charm was persuasive, his banter keeping her entertained as they walked.

Her lips curved into a slight smile.

Keen on surprising her, Charlie playfully teased as he opened the door. "Guess who's inside? Isn't it your dear Uncle Mark that you've missed so much?"

Cecilia almost chided Charlie.

But retreating would seem petty.

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As the door opened, the room buzzed with energy. Mark was in the midst of a game, Flora leaning close, whispering something.

His smile was carefree, almost roguish.

Cecilia took it all in at a glance, and then turned to leave.

Charlie was frantic, spilling apologies. "Cecilia! No, wait! Oh, damn it, Cecilia, you've got it all wrong about Mark. He's so reserved now; he doesn't even hang out with women. He doesn't have the energy for dalliances."

His voice boomed, catching everyone's attention.

Cecilia quickened her pace, thinking that Mark was nothing but a libertine. It didn't matter who he was with.

She believed it didn't concern her.

She didn't want to even spare him a glance.

Yet, despite her resolve, her eyes welled up involuntarily.

Mark had pursued her relentlessly, had been intimate with her recently, and had even berated her for going on a blind date.

And what was he doing now?

She was merely meeting new people and talking to them, while he was in close quarters with another woman.

Mark's cards clattered to the floor as he sprinted after Cecilia. A flustered Charlie attempted an apology. "I'm sorry, Mark. I meant well, but it just backfired. I never anticipated Flora would be so impulsive."

Mark brushed past Charlie, focused solely on Cecilia.

Flora's complexion shifted between pale and flushed.

They had been friends for years and occasionally joked around like this.

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Flora knew there was no real intimacy between her and Mark.

Realizing Cecilia had misinterpreted the situation, Flora resolved to clarify things on Mark's behalf at a later time.

Mark, meanwhile, hastened to catch up with Cecilia just as she reached the door.

As she was about to open her car door, Mark grasped her arm.

With a determined pull, he drew Cecilia into his embrace.

Cecilia resisted, her fists lightly beating against his chest. "Release me, Mark. Please."

But Mark held on.

Employing all his strength, he enveloped her in his arms.

He sought her gaze, but she evasively turned away. Her voice was a soft plea. "Please, don't create a scene. Release me."

With one hand securing her, Mark used the other to gently tilt her chin.

He compelled her to face him.

His voice was low and raspy, betraying his emotion. "You claimed you didn't want to reconcile, that we were finished. Why, then, do tears fall seeing me with another? Have you not ceased to care, Cecilia?"

"Quit taunting me. I avoid your gaze solely to spare my sight," she countered sharply.

Yet, she averted her eyes, cheeks flushed in mortification.

Despite her bravado, tears coursed down her cheeks.

The exchange, achingly reminiscent of times past, unsettled her.

Despite her reluctance to relent and her inability to break free,

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their confrontation drew attention at the club entrance.

Given her status, she was acutely aware of the public's eyes on them.

Collecting herself, she managed, "There's no point in mutual recriminations. Release me. Return to your companions; they await your presence."

"Is your indifference genuine?" Mark sought confirmation.

Her nod was resolute.

He persisted, "Understand, Flora is married. She holds no special place in my life."

This revelation only heightened Cecilia's distress. Her voice trembling, she asserted, "Your liaisons are not my concern."

With a forceful shove, she freed herself, climbed into her car, and left without a backward glance.

Mark, fraught with worry, rapped gently on the window. "Take care on the road. We'll converse on this anon."

As she drove off, Charlie emerged, just in time to observe her retreat.

He brushed his lips, musing aloud, "Her temper remains as fiery as ever. Mark, is such vivacity common among the youth?"

His smile was laced with suggestive undertones.

Mark's only reaction was a fleeting glance as he produced a lighter from his confines.

He toyed with the device, lost in thought.

Eventually, his words were barely audible. "My affection for her leaves no room for others."

Charlie, somewhat disconcerted, confessed, "Your romantic inclinations are a revelation."

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That night, Mark reached out to Rena. "Cecilia might seek your company. Please, be there for her. Indeed, I'm the cause of her distress."



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