

## Chapter 461 Absence Makes The Heart Grow Fonder

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After he spoke, Mark reached out to hold Cecilia's hand.

Cecilia pulled away.

"I don't want to go," she murmured, her voice taking on a gentle lilt.

Mark found the lilt endearing.

He met her gaze, and his voice hushed so others wouldn't hear. "Why the drama? You'll feel left out if I don't introduce you. Yet, if I do, you'll be all awkward."

Leaning on the door, Cecilia distractedly toyed with her nails.

"You shouldn't have agreed to sit next to her."

Previously, Cecilia didn't complain about Flora. After all, Flora and Charlie were Mark's buddies too. Mark never liked ruining the mood.

But this time, someone else had invited Elaine.

And Elaine, to Cecilia's dismay, had taken a seat right beside Mark.

Feeling slighted, Cecilia believed she should show Mark a hint of her displeasure.

Mark was well-acquainted with Cecilia's moods. He found them more charming than irritating.

With a gentle yet firm grip, he took her hand. "Come with me," he urged softly, "An important business associate is here. Let's greet them before we leave."

Before she could protest, he guided her along.

In the midst of their walk, Mark gave in to an impulse.

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He pulled her close, pressing her against the wall, and their lips met for a lingering moment.

When they parted, their breathing uneven, he leaned in, his forehead touching hers, whispering, "You're even more adorable when you are grumpy."

Feeling her cheeks warm, Cecilia lightly nudged him. "Keep it together; we're in public."

With a grin, Mark straightened up, leading her onward.

Soon, they reached the box.

Mark's demeanor shifted, making him seem almost a different person as he began speaking with a newfound grace.

"I intended to share a few more drinks with you, but my wife just returned from overseas. She came to collect me; we have some matters to sort out at home. My apologies."

An uncomfortable hush spread across the room.

Elaine's face drained of color.

The individual who'd invited Elaine appeared worried, assuming Mark was referring to Cecilia as his wife.

From behind Mark, a statuesque, striking woman emerged.

She was indeed the eldest daughter of the influential Fowler family.

Most present had, at some point or another, sought the Fowler family's assistance. They promptly stood, greeting her warmly, "Miss Fowler."

Someone remarked, "It's Mrs. Evens. Mr. Evans just mentioned she's his wife."

Mark gave a knowing smile.

Addressing the room, he said, "I'll leave Peter to keep you company in my stead. Unfortunately, I need to make my exit."

No one had the audacity to protest Mark's exit, though they exchanged light banter.

But then, a defiant voice chimed in, "Mr. Evans, if you're leaving early, shouldn't you at least down three drinks as penalty?"

A hush settled over the room.

All eyes fixed on Elaine, whose demeanor oozed confidence.

She obviously did it out of her jealousy of Cecilia. The evening had been going smoothly until Cecilia's arrival, which meant Elaine missed out on quality time with Mark.

The tension was palpable.

Cecilia gently moved Mark aside and stepped forward.

Elaine's face hinted at anxiety, but she stood her ground, believing she held the upper hand over Cecilia.

After all, Elaine received professional training as an actress, while Cecilia started as a nobody.

Besides, being a decade younger than Cecilia, Elaine was convinced of her allure, especially since she had confirmed Mark's single status.

Cecilia approached Mark's seat, gracefully lifted the goblet he used, and took a whiff.

It was just water.

She tilted her head back, consuming its contents.

The onlookers, puzzled by her actions, turned to Peter for clarity. He seemed poised to intervene until a subtle glance from Mark halted him.

Cecilia set down the goblet and reached for a bottle of strong alcoholic drinks.

A stunning 20-carat ruby shimmered on her finger as she poured a generous amount into a glass.

Elaine remarked with a hint of mockery, "Miss Fowler, quite the direct approach. Planning to down three glasses on Mr. Evans's behalf?"

Cecilia scanned the room, replying with a soft chuckle, "Who mentioned I'd

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be the one drinking?

Mark doesn't indulge. I noticed some folks stepping in for him earlier. So, the person who took his place will drink what I pour."

Elaine's confidence wavered.

She'd been the one drinking for Mark, trying to impress.

Although Mark had seen her, he hadn't intervened.

Tension filled the room.

The man accompanying Elaine tried to mediate. "Miss Fowler, please—"

But Cecilia countered, "Wasn't this her idea?"

She glanced around the room, smiling, "Or does anyone want to see me finish these three glasses?"

No one dared challenge Cecilia, leaving Elaine cornered.

The man turned to Elaine, trying to keep his composure. "Elaine, you acted without thinking. It's your turn to drink up for Mr. Evans."

Eyes teary, Elaine protested, "Why should I?"

Cecilia set the glass down, asserting, "Because I am a Fowler."

Without another word, she exited, the remnants of the drink swaying in the glass.

Mark chuckled softly. "Pardon me."

"Mr. Evans." Elaine's voice halted him.

Pausing, Mark responded coolly, "Miss Shaw, one important lesson in life is to learn one's limits."

He departed soon after, leaving a hushed room behind.

A voice broke the silence. "Just one drink should suffice."

But the liquor, a reminder of Cecilia's bold move, tasted especially sharp.

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Mark, sensing her genuine discomfort, quickly released and began to massage her leg.

After a moment, Mark leaned in, planting a gentle kiss, "Better now?"

Cecilia responded with silence, her annoyance palpable.

Mark brushed her cheek softly. "You were incredible back there. You've grown into such a strong woman. I feel like you could guard me now."

Cecilia frowned at his jest.

Was he having too much fun at her expense?

Without a word, Mark unbuckled and swapped seats with her.

After he'd been driving for a bit, Cecilia finally broke her reflective silence.

"Where are we headed?"

Gripping the steering wheel, Mark calmly inquired, "Where would you like to go?"

A month without him made her realize that her time shouldn't be wasted on someone like Elaine.

If Mark was being unfaithful, he had options other than Elaine.

Cecilia mused aloud, "It's been days since I last saw Edwin and Olivia."

"How about we pick them up and head to your apartment?" Mark suggested.

Though the house on Gamous Road was convenient for them, it wasn't spacious enough for the kids. In contrast, Cecilia's apartment provided ample space for everyone.

She agreed.

Between her lingering jet lag and today's unexpected confrontation with Elaine, Cecilia was mentally exhausted and soon fell asleep.

When she awoke, they were at the Fowler residence.

Mark had fetched the kids and swapped vehicles for a black Land Rover.

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As they began their drive, Cecilia sensed Mark's increasing familiarity with her personal space.

He moved with such ease, as if her home was his.

With Olivia and Edwin seated at the back, Cecilia took the front passenger seat.

Olivia beckoned for Cecilia's attention, but Mark interjected softly, "Wait till we're home, Olivia."

The little girl settled back in her seat, momentarily appeased.

By the time they reached Cecilia's apartment, it was late, but she felt rejuvenated after a quick nap.

Once the kids were tucked in, she found Mark sorting through her luggage in the master bedroom.

She felt a pang of embarrassment as he lifted an intimate piece of her clothing.

She approached him, gently taking it from him.

"Let me handle that," she murmured.

Mark pulled her into an embrace, their noses brushing. "Feeling shy?" he teased.

She feigned indifference. "Not in the slightest."

But Mark grinned, reminding her of their shared intimacies.

Cecilia interrupted him with a playful glance, not letting him finish.

Mark paused, appreciating the depth of their connection.

It wasn't just physical. He genuinely cherished her as an individual.

Feeling the gravity of the moment, he tenderly kissed her.

The ambiance of the night added to the intensity of their connection.

Cecilia reciprocated, emotions evident in the way she met his lips.

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"Rest now."

Despite the lingering summer heat, Cecilia felt comfortable nestled against him, her steady breath signaling her relaxation.

When Mark thought she was deep in slumber, he quietly got up, intending to check on Olivia. But Cecilia's voice, still filled with drowsiness, halted him. "Stay— I need you here."

Mark could only smile and reassure her.

The soft moonlight painted the room in a silvery glow, and Mark couldn't help but marvel at the sight of Cecilia.

There was a newfound depth in their relationship, a stability born out of growth and understanding.

Reflecting on their journey, he realized that a younger Cecilia might not have given him a second chance.

By early morning, while Cecilia continued her restful slumber, Mark quietly checked on Edwin, ensuring the child was comfortably tucked in.

Afterward, he prepared warm milk and a cookie for Olivia.

Olivia, radiant and lively, was a joy for Mark, especially since he hadn't seen her for a few days.

Olivia carefully balanced the milk in one hand and the cookie in the other, savoring each bite.

Occasionally, she'd close her eyes, pausing between bites, taking a moment of pure bliss.

Her delicate skin and long eyelashes emphasized her angelic look.

Mark, being her father, watched her with sheer admiration and love, captivated by her every move.

However, sleepiness soon overtook her as she finished her milk, and the remaining cookie tumbled from her hand.

Gently cradling her, Mark comforted the drowsy child.

Wrapped securely in her father's embrace, Olivia drifted off to sleep.



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Mark leaned down, planting a soft kiss on Olivia's forehead.

As Cecilia emerged from the bathroom, he looked up. "How long will it be until you have to get back to work?"



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