

## Chapter 465 Not A Topic For Casual Banter

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Cecilia read Elaine's emotions like an open book.

Rena must have sprung into action.

Cecilia, once inside the car, quickly checked Twitter and wasn't surprised by the currently hottest topic--"New Actress' Past Ties with Coal Tycoon Revealed."

She tapped the link; it led to a suggestive article with a photo of Elaine and Chandler, their hands intertwined, clearly enjoying each other's company.

Her assistant leaned closer, whispering, "People aren't focusing on you right now. Rumor has it Chandler's wife and her four brothers are in Duefron. She's out for blood."

Confusion clouded Cecilia's eyes. "Huh?"

Her assistant added with a hint of mischief, "Word is Chandler's riches came from his wife."

Cecilia shot Rena a quick message. "You're a lifesaver, Rena."

She turned off her phone's screen and instructed the driver to get moving.

Just then, Elaine rushed over, rapping urgently on the car window.

Cecilia lowered it slightly, raising an eyebrow. "Yes?"

Elaine might have been a lot of things, but she wasn't clueless. She had a hunch that while Cecilia might not be directly responsible, she wasn't entirely innocent either. In a desperate plea, Elaine's voice wavered, "Miss Fowler, can you let this slide?"

Cecilia just stared at her for what seemed like forever.

Then, with a hint of a smile, she said, "It's too late. And you actually asked for it."

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Elaine's past actions, especially when she exposed photos of Edwin and Olivia, made her utterly evil and unforgivable in Cecilia's eyes.

Cecilia wasn't one to hold grudges.

Her marriage with Mark wasn't even official.

And while Elaine's obsession with Mark was her own business, her actions had hurt others.

She had this coming.

As Cecilia's sleek limousine pulled away, Elaine was left, lost in her thoughts.

Her phone buzzed, breaking her daze. Chandler's voice, rough and impatient, echoed, "Elaine, I've done a lot for you. Even got on the wrong side of Mr. Evans for your career, and I'm paying the price. But now, you've angered the Fowlers and dragged me into your mess. My wife? She's not someone you'd want to mess with. If she gets to you, don't say I didn't warn you. Be careful of what you say."

Elaine felt so ashamed; tears welled up in her eyes.

After ending the call, she was readying to leave when her phone was suddenly knocked out of her hand.

A tall woman, heavily made-up and wearing a fur coat despite the warm weather, stood in front of her.

It was evident that she came from the north.

"You're Elaine Shaw, right? Chandler's latest fling?" she sneered.

Elaine tried to find words, but the woman seemed to read her intentions.

"Hit her, especially that pretty face of hers. Maybe then she'll think twice about chasing someone else's husband. Honestly, I feel like I'm doing everyone a favor."

With the command, several men lunged at Elaine, roughly grabbing at her hair.

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The sound of slaps echoed.

Elaine's arms turned an ugly shade of blue as they handled her with zero compassion.

Tossing a wad of \$2000 bills, the woman scoffed, "Get yourself checked in at a hospital. And cut out this whole mistress act. As for Chandler's gifts, keep them. But hear me; if you go near him again, I will skin you alive."

Money littered the floor around Elaine, who was now all too aware of certain boundaries.

A little digging revealed that this attack was orchestrated by Rena.

Elaine knew she should swallow her pride, apologize, and make amends. But bitterness held her back.

All she wanted was a better life and happiness. Was this humiliation her price?

Leaving the hospital, Elaine hesitated, her lips pressed tightly together.

Considering a visit to Rena, she wondered if maybe Rena might show some mercy; however, there would surely be strings attached.

Deciding against it, Elaine kept a low profile.

Within a week, her physical scars began to fade, and so did the rumors.

Yet, she was aware that she had become the butt of jokes among her peers.

She pinned all blame on Cecilia and didn't let go of her infatuation for Mark. As she arrived at Mark's office once again, the receptionist gave her a pitied look. Without even checking with Mark, she said, "Mr. Evans will not be seeing you."

Elaine tried to protest, but was cut off, "Miss Shaw, remember, Mr. Evans has a family to think about."

Just as Elaine was about to voice her anger, a familiar face emerged from the elevator: Peter, one of Mark's associates.

Elaine approached Peter, expressing her desire to meet Mark, believing there had been some misunderstanding about past events.

Peter, who was generally kind to most, held a bad impression about Elaine.

Observing the determined lady before him, he remarked, "Miss Shaw, pressing Mr. Evans incessantly may overwhelm him. While many are unaware of his temperament, I'm all too familiar. His fury can be daunting."

With a touch of regret, Elaine responded, "That wasn't my intention."

Peter thought that Elaine was in over her head.

Suddenly, a vehicle halted nearby, and a woman, appearing to be a housemaid, approached.

Handing over a wooden lunchbox to Peter, she swiftly moved on.

Peter, acknowledging the delivery, ascended the stairs.

Having witnessed this, Elaine surmised that the meal was intended for Mark, prompting her to dash outside.

She momentarily stopped the housemaid, who brought the meals.

Due to Mark's fragile health, he was particular about his diet, avoiding processed foods. Zoey, concerned for his well-being, prepared fresh meals for him daily, entrusting the housemaid with their delivery.

Seeing an opportunity, Elaine discreetly offered the housemaid a hefty sum from her purse, amounting to approximately five thousand dollars.

She proposed a monthly stipend of the same amount to the housemaid, eliciting palpable excitement from her.

The housemaid thought that merely bringing food to Mark in exchange for the money was a reasonable deal, confident in her discretion.

Meanwhile, Peter entered a room upstairs, where Mark was engrossed in paperwork.

The gentle sunlight filtering through the blinds illuminated his serene demeanor.

Setting the lunchbox on a tea table, Peter unveiled the meal, commenting with a warm smile, "Your mother painstakingly prepared these four dishes and a soup since dawn. Her love for you is evident."

Mark, without lifting his gaze from the documents, replied, "It would be best if the servant handled the cooking. She doesn't have to do this herself."

A smile graced Peter's face once more.

Subsequently, Mark inquired about the status of the branch company in Czanch and a project there that was facing some challenges.

Peter quickly updated, "The person overseeing locally has proven quite challenging. Nevertheless, I've managed to facilitate some solutions."

Mark nodded in approval, concluding his reading by signing the document.

He joined for lunch, savoring each dish Zoey prepared.

Every dish was light, catering to his dietary needs, yet delicious in every bite.

As Mark indulged in the food, a wave of nostalgia and softness enveloped him.

He contemplated moving back to Czanch once the Duefron company was stable, envisioning reuniting with Cecilia and their children.

Meanwhile, Peter consumed his meal, thoughts drifting towards the visitor earlier.

He remarked, "Miss Shaw was here. It seemed she wanted to apologize to you, but I turned her away."

Mark almost forgot about her.

The mere mention of Elaine momentarily clouded Mark's demeanor. Mark confessed, "I prefer Elaine stays away. Cecilia believes there are numerous women like Elaine and argues it's futile to address each one."

Peter quipped with a grin, "Cecilia seems quite gracious nowadays."

Mark shot a pointed look at Peter, commenting, "Gracious? It's evident my allure isn't what it once was. In the past, her jealousy would flare at the slightest provocation. Now, she even interacts with Elaine in the same film set."

Amused, Peter added, "And don't forget, Cecilia and Flora remain close."

Mark's expression turned sour.

Placing his spoon down firmly, he uttered, "Peter, that's a topic I'd rather not discuss."

Mark whispered more to himself than anyone, "I haven't interacted with Flora in ages."

Seeing Mark's evident discomfort, Peter tried to lighten the mood by serving Mark more food, jesting, "I'm aware of that. You've become quite reserved lately."

Mark begrudgingly accepted Peter's offering...

The subsequent day, as lunchtime approached, Mark and Peter sat together.

Peter unveiled the lunchbox, beaming, "Seems Mrs. Evans has prepared something else today."

Mark surveyed the dishes and noted some distinct variations.

The presence of lean meat dishes was conspicuous.

Taking a bite, he frowned, remarking, "This wasn't prepared by my mother today. Perhaps she took a day off and let the servant handle it. The meat is overly chewy and undercooked."

Ever the flatterer, Peter grinned, replying, "Your palate is truly impeccable. I doubt even the renowned food critics on air could rival you."

The duo conversed with ease.

Mark, being both talented and a charmer, quipped, "My taste buds discern more than just food. They've also won over many women, including difficult ones like Cecilia."

Engrossed in their banter, neither noticed the figures by the door.

Cecilia, along with Mark's female secretary, had overheard.

The blood drained from Cecilia's face, a mixture of embarrassment and irritation evident.

The secretary, equally flustered by the situation, swiftly made her exit.

Cecilia, though intending to leave unnoticed, caught the eyes of the two men.

Peter, realizing the gravity of the situation, attempted to defuse it, saying, "Mr. Evans is just naturally charming, always full of sweet nothings..."

In her younger days, Cecilia would warmly address Mark as 'Uncle Mark' and do wild things with him.

But hearing Mark discuss intimate matters so nonchalantly, a wave of discomfort and indignation washed over her.

Without a word, she turned and departed.

Mark's demeanor shifted from composed to anxious.



Gently covering her, Mark took a moment to observe her.

They hadn't seen each other for days.

Overcome by the urge to be close, he settled beside her, drawing her into a protective embrace.

Dusk had settled when Mark stirred.

Noticing the unusual warmth emanating from Cecilia, he swiftly felt her forehead.

To his dismay, she was feverish.

Guilt clouded his thoughts, attributing her state to the day's earlier events.

After a quick temperature check, confirming her fever at 38°C, he promptly summoned a private physician.

Upon examining Cecilia, the doctor administered a shot to combat the fever. Assessing her overall condition, he remarked, "She seems fatigued. Best let her rest."

As Mark escorted the doctor out, the latter cast an appreciative glance back, commenting, "Is this the Cecilia that Charlie mentioned? She's quite the beauty."

Slightly agitated, Mark curtly signaled for the doctor's exit.

Undeterred, the doctor jovially remarked on the ambiance, hinting at Mark's supposed romantic side.

Eventually, Mark's firm stance ushered the doctor away.

Returning to the room, Mark seated himself at the bed's edge, attentively observing Cecilia.

He felt the urge to be productive, prompting him to prepare a meal in the kitchen. He meticulously cooked some light soup and a few side dishes, catering to someone with a fever.

Once done, he resumed his position by Cecilia's side, patiently waiting for her to awaken.

By the time Cecilia's eyes fluttered open, the clock indicated it was nearing midnight.

She felt distinctly unwell, a cold perspiration drenching her back.

Concern evident in his eyes, Mark gently inquired, "How are you feeling?"

Weak and overwhelmed, Cecilia merely gazed at him.

Silence engulfed the room.

Their thoughts lingered on Mark's earlier words, the tension palpable. Mustering strength, Cecilia finally voiced her desire to shower.

Mark, wary of her fever, suggested a more cautious approach. "You shouldn't shower right now. Let me help you freshen up with a damp towel."

However, Cecilia was insistent, rising to retrieve her pajamas from the cloakroom.

Opting not to lock the door as she showered, the ambient sounds from the bathroom were audible in the bedroom where Mark patiently waited.

Upon the cessation of running water, indicating the end of her shower, Mark entered. He approached just as Cecilia was about to towel off.

Wordlessly, he took the towel from her grasp, tending to her with gentle motions.

He ventured cautiously, "Are you upset?"

She didn't respond verbally but reached out for a second towel, a move halted by Mark.

Gently, he enveloped her with a dry towel, cradling her from behind.

Softly, he whispered reassurances into her ear, hoping to bridge the widening rift.

Cecilia pivoted to face him, avoiding the sensitive topic, she remarked, "I'm hungry."

Understanding the need for a temporary truce, Mark let her dress before they sat down for a meal.

The atmosphere was thick with unsaid words until Cecilia, gathering her courage, addressed the heart of the matter.

"Mark," she began, "your words earlier hurt. While Peter may be a



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confidant, our personal life is not a topic for casual banter."

Her voice conveyed the depth of her embarrassment, now knowing how to face Peter in the future.

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