

## Billionaire's Ex-wife : Craving You Chapter 41

### Chapter 41

HAZEL

(PRESENT TIME)

I just learnt from Agatha that David found out about my dinner plans with Ravel and headed to New York to meet me.

As I returned home after the eventful dinner with Ravel, I found myself feeling emotionally drained and conflicted. It had been a rollercoaster of emotions, and I knew that I needed some time to process everything that had transpired. However, my plans to have a moment of quiet reflection were soon interrupted as David stormed into the living room with an angry expression on his face.

"Hazel, we need to talk," he said sternly, his frustration evident.

I braced myself for what I knew would be a heated conversation. "David, L." I began, but he cut me off before I could explain.

"I can't believe you went on a date with Ravel," he said, his voice seething with anger. "After everything that's happened between you two, how could you?"

I sighed, trying to find the right words to explain myself. "David, it wasn't a date" I said, hoping to clarify the situation. "We just met for dinner to talk." He shook his head, clearly not buying my explanation. "It doesn't matter if it was a date or not," he retorted. "You know how I feel about him, and you still went behind my back"

"I didn't go behind your back," I protested, feeling the weight of guilt and frustration. "I wanted to talk to him about the statement that was released, and I thought it would be better to meet face to face"

David paced back and forth, his anger not subsiding, "I can't believe you're defending him," he said bitterly. "After all the pain he caused you, you're still giving him the benefit of the doubt"

"It's not about defending him," I said, my voice firm. "It's about finding closure and understanding what happened.

"You should have talked to me about it," he said, his voice softer but still filled with disappointment. "We're supposed to be in this together, Hazel."

"David, I understand your concern, but it's essential that we clarify something" I said, my voice steady. "We're not officially dating yet, so you shouldn't speak to me like that."

He looked taken aback by my words, realizing that he had crossed a line.

"You're right," he admitted, his expression softening. "I shouldn't have acted like that, and I apologize.

I appreciated his apology and knew that he was genuinely trying to understand the complexity of our relationship. We had been spending time

together, but we hadn't officially defined our status.

However, David wasn't done with his concerns. "But there's something you need to remember too," he said, his tone more serious. "You're keeping Daisy a secret from Ravel, and if you keep getting close to him, he's bound to find out eventually."

"David, I understand your worries about Daisy, and I want you to know that I'm being careful," I reassured him. "I won't let Ravel find out about her unless I'm ready to tell him."

David nodded, but his concern still lingered in his eyes. "I just don't want you to get hurt," he said, his voice softening.

"I appreciate that," I replied, grateful for his genuine concern. "And I promise you, I won't do anything that could jeopardize our relationship or put Daisy at risk."

David reached for my hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. "I trust you, Hazel," he said, a hint of a smile returning to his lips. "I just want us to be open and honest with each other."

"Hazel, I need to know what it will take for you to accept me as your boyfriend," he said, his voice sincere and heartfelt.

I looked at him, touched by his vulnerability and honesty. "David, it's not about accepting you or not," I replied gently. "It's about us taking things one step at a time, considering our feelings and the complexities of our past"

He nodded, taking my hand in his. "I understand, but I want to be more than just someone you're spending time with," he said earnestly. "I love you, Hazel, and I want to be your boyfriend. I want to be there for you and take care of you, even if I'm not as rich as Ravel."

I was moved by his declaration of love and his determination to be a part of my life. "David, you mean a lot to me," I said, my voice soft. "But it's not about your financial status. It's about our connection and understanding each other on a deeper level."

He smiled, his eyes filled with warmth. "I promise to do everything I can to make you happy," he said. "I may not have Ravel's wealth, but I have a lot of love to give, and I'll always be there for you."

"David, I care about you deeply," I said, looking into his eyes. "But I need more time to process everything, to heal from the past, and to be sure about what I want."

He nodded, understanding my need for space and time. "I want you to be sure too," he said softly. "I don't want to rush you into anything."

"I appreciate that," I replied, feeling grateful for his understanding. "I've been through a lot with Ravel, and I need to be sure that I'm ready for a new relationship."

David reached for my hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. "I'll wait for you,"

he said, his voice filled with sincerity. "I believe in us, and I'm willing to be patient."

I smiled, touched by his willingness to give me the time and space I needed. "Thank you," I said, feeling a sense of relief. "Your patience means a lot to me."

He leaned in and kissed my forehead. "I want you to be happy, Hazel," he said softly. "And if that means taking things slowly, then I'm willing to do that."

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### HAZEL

#### (PRESENT TIME)

Daisy's school finally went on a well-deserved break, and I can't express enough how thankful I am for this timing. It's like Fate itself is aligning things for my benefit. This weekend, Ravel, the renowned artist, is landing in Seattle for his upcoming show next week, and coincidentally, Daisy's school break starts this very weekend.

I'm taking her away from this environment for the whole week.

In her adorable baby voice, Daisy asked the sweetest question, "Are we going to see grandma?"

Gazing at her through the rearview mirror, I couldn't help but smile warmly.

"Yes, darling, we're heading to see grandma Monica." Her joyful squeal filled the car, and I couldn't help but chuckle. It's heartwarming to see how much David's mom adores Daisy, and the feeling is absolutely mutual.

I sang along with Daisy to the children's rhyme, her adorable baby voice and babble almost sending me into fits of laughter. Driving down a familiar route, we finally arrived at Monica's place. As if she knew we were coming, Monica stood on the porch with a beaming smile.

After switching off the engine, Monica wasted no time. She opened the door, helped Daisy out of her baby seat, and showered her with hugs and kisses.

Daisy responded with giggles, clearly delighted to see her grandma. "I've missed you so much, pumpkin," Monica exclaimed lovingly.

With a warm smile, I parked the car and approached them, eagerly anticipating my own welcome hug. "I've missed you too, Monica," I said sincerely, feeling the affection between us.

Monica patted my back affectionately while balancing Daisy on her arm. Her playful gaze shifted to Robertson, who was busy taking Daisy's bag inside the house. "Is he staying with us too?" she inquired curiously.

"Yes, he is." I reassured Monica, acknowledging that I don't usually have security around, but it's essential for my daughter's safety. Robertson acts like Daisy's constant companion, and I trust him implicitly. "Don't worry, he blends in seamlessly."

Monica waved off my explanation, inviting us inside with the promise of catching up and a late lunch she had prepared. However, I had to be honest, “I’m sorry, Monica, but I have to head back to the city.” Her face fell, prompting me to embrace her gently. “I promise, I’ll make a conscious effort to visit more often,” especially now that Daisy is here for the week, She frowned, expressing her skepticism. “You always say that,” Monica argued, a hint of a pout on her face. “You promise to visit, but you never do.” Her disappointment was evident, and I knew I had to make a genuine effort to change that perception.

“I really mean it this time,” I assured Monica with sincerity as Daisy wriggled out of her arms and ran to Robertson, who lifted her up playfully. “I have to leave now if I want to make it to the office on time for my meeting.”

Understanding my responsibilities, Monica nodded with a glint of empathy in her eyes. “You work just as hard as David does,” she acknowledged. Not quite sure how to respond to that comparison, I simply smiled, kissed Daisy goodbye, and drove away. One of the reasons I haven’t been spending much time with Monica is her persistent desire to convince me to date David.

Changing the car’s music to something more classical, I made my way back to the office. However, upon my arrival, I noticed that most of the staff were already wrapping up for the day. Deciding to finish up a few things, I stepped into my office to make the most of the remaining time.

Agatha greeted me as she entered my office a few minutes after me. “Are you working overtime today?” she inquired curiously.

“I didn’t come to the office this morning, so I thought I might as well get some work done tonight,” I replied, realizing I should have grabbed some coffee on my way in. “Is David still around?”

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“No, he left about an hour ago,” Agatha informed me, setting a box on my table. Intrigued, I raised an eyebrow, wondering who the box was from. “It’s from Mr. Southwark’s office,” she explained, “an exclusive invitation for the exhibition.”

Opening the box, I blinked rapidly as I peered inside. “Ravel sent me an invitation,” I said in disbelief. Agatha nodded and pointed to another larger box on my sofa, which I hadn’t even noticed until then. “The invitation came with both boxes,” she added, leaving me pleasantly surprised by the gesture.

As I slowly approached the larger box on the sofa, a hunch told me what it might contain. Undoing the ribbon, I opened it to find the latest Versace dress collection inside. My eyes locked on the striking red dress, and I couldn’t help but lift it up in awe. Suppressing my excitement, I asked Agatha when it had arrived.

“Mr. Southwark dropped it off himself around noon,” she informed me. “I

wanted to call you, but he seemed to be in a hurry.”

“Oh...” I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of disappointment that I had missed meeting him. “That’s alright,” I replied, trying to brush it off. Placing the dress back into the box, I instructed Agatha to send the boxes to my car trunk.

Handing her the car key, I said, “Once you’re done, you’re free to leave.”

With a subtle nod, she effortlessly lifted the box, her eyes reflecting a mix of uncertainty and determination. “Are you planning to attend the event? I need to know, so I can make sure your schedule is free.”.

I found no compelling reason not to attend, despite the memories of our last dinner together that ended on a sour note. I knew it was time to let go of animosity and move forward. Our marriage had faltered, but that didn’t necessitate a perpetual state of enmity.

“Yes,” I replied, the words leaving my lips with newfound clarity, “I’ll be attending the event.”

Agatha acknowledged my response with a knowing nod. “In that case, I’ll have to inform David as well, so he can make arrangements.”

“No need to involve David,” I said firmly.

Perplexed, Agatha tilted her head inquisitively. “Why not?”

“Because I’ll be attending the event alone.”

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### RAVEL

#### (PRESENT TIME)

As I stepped foot in Seattle, my heart couldn’t help but be consumed by thoughts of Hazel. With the upcoming exhibition in mind, I was inspired to find the perfect dress for her. Craftily, I decided to send it along with an invitation to the event, creating the perfect excuse to surprise her.

Anxious to witness her reaction, I hurriedly made my way to her office upon arrival. However, a part of me was relieved to learn that she wasn’t there at that moment. I knew Hazel well enough to anticipate her potential rejection, and I didn’t want to risk experiencing it firsthand. I politely declined the suggestion to wait for her from her secretary, fearing the disappointment she might express.

In the midst of my thoughts, both Raymond and Rose unexpectedly entered my hotel suite, almost in perfect unison. Raymond, being the first to break the silence. “Elenor is scheduled to arrive in Seattle on Thursday, just in time for the event on Saturday.”

Raising an amused eyebrow, I couldn’t help but find it amusing that Raymond felt the need to update me about my own sister’s arrival. “Well, it’s good to know, but I’m more concerned about the security arrangements for the event,” I reminded him.

He quickly acknowledged my point, settling comfortably on the sofa. “No worries, I’ve already arranged for twenty security personnel. You’ll be able to meet them on Thursday,” he assured me.

Shifting my attention to Rose, I was eager to know why she was in my suite. Without hesitation, she responded to my unspoken question, “I just came back from the venue, and all the extra lighting has been taken care of.” Her reassuring words eased my mind, knowing that everything was coming together smoothly for the event.

That’s good. “I want everything to be perfect.” I remarked, recalling the impact of the recent emergency conference on the – invitee response rate. “And please, make sure to number the seats for the event,” I reminded Rose.

After she left, I was about to immerse myself in my work again when Raymond’s snickering caught my attention. Intrigued, I couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow inquisitively.

His laughter continued, and he finally looked up from his phone. “Mrs. Anne has been trying to reach you,” he said, and I blinked, realizing that I had intentionally ignored her calls. “She’s curious about the hotel you’re staying at so she can book a suite there too,” he explained.

I stared at him with intense determination, a warning burning in my eyes. “Don’t you even think about it.” He merely chuckled, carelessly tossing his phone onto the sofa. “I’m sure she’s just staying here to make sure Hazel doesn’t come over.”

He tried to suppress a smile, biting his lower lip. “Knowing your mother, she’ll undoubtedly find out which hotel you’re staying at. Da mn, he was right. “So, did you meet her?”

I played innocent, feigning ignorance. “Meet who?”

Raymond rolled his eyes, his confidence unwavering. “Come on, I’m your personal security. I always know where you are.” My lips remained tightly sealed. “I saw you pick up a dress from a Versace store, and I know you visited Hazel’s art gallery. All I want to know is if you met her.”

“No, I didn’t,” I replied flatly, my focus returning to the laptop. “And for future reference, when I tell you not to follow me, make da mn sure your foolish self isn’t tailing me.”

He argued, “I can’t guarantee that, sir. It’s my duty to keep you safe, and that’s what I’m trying to do. Besides, you have an enemy, in case you haven’t noticed.”

The memory was hard to shake off. With a sigh, I eased back on the sofa, my gaze drifting to the glimmering chandelier. “Last week, I invited Hazel to dinner at a restaurant, and she actually showed up.”

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Raymond blinked rapidly, clearly surprised. “Hazel flew all the way from



Seattle to New York just for a dinner date with you.”

I interjected with a hint of pride, “Well, I sent the jet to make it happen.”

Raymond shook his head in disbelief. “I turn away for a moment, and you pull off something as extravagant as sending a jet to fetch Hazel from Seattle.” He knew how I couldn’t resist doing things for her. “But have you considered the risk? What if that bastard finds out? You took a significant gamble.”

Running my fingers through my hair, I attempted to push away thoughts of the awkward attempted kiss from me. “Something did happen at the diner, right?” Raymond’s sudden question snapped my attention back to the present. I lifted my head from the sofa, blinking at him in response. “Of course,” he mumbled under his breath. “What did you do?”

With a hint of embarrassment, I confessed, “I tried to kiss her, and she slapped me.” Raymond burst into laughter, and I couldn’t help but admit, “Yeah, go ahead and laugh, I deserve it.” The more I replayed the moment in my head, the more I realized just how foolish and impulsive my actions were. After our divorce, she offered an olive branch, and I foolishly tried to take it a step further with a kiss.

“No offense, Ravel, but if I were in her shoes, I might have done more than just slap you,” Raymond said, wiping tears from his lashes. “What were you even thinking, man?”

“Fuck if I know,” I admitted, feeling drained and unable to focus on work any longer. I shut down the laptop, kicked off my slippers, and sprawled out on the sofa.

Seeing the seriousness of the situation, Raymond inquired, “Have you talked to her since then?”

I lisped, “Nope.”

“And you don’t think she’ll accept that invitation, do you?”

“I’ll be surprised if she does.” I couldn’t continue like this, it was tearing me apart. “Raymond...”

“Hmm?” he responded, attentive to my distress.

“I’m considering going after Hazel,” I confessed, even without glancing at him, knowing his brows were probably reaching his hairline. “I want my wife back. I want my marriage back.”

“You’ll get all of that back,” he reasoned, “but it’s not the right time for it now.”

I couldn’t care less about the right time anymore. “She’s slipping away from me, Raymond,” I admitted, feeling the weight of the situation. “I saw how repulsed she was when I tried to kiss her. My Hazel is slowly slipping away, and if I don’t act quickly, I’ll lose her forever.”

Raymond brought up an important point, “And what about the video? Have you forgotten about its existence? The very reason you divorced her in the first place?”

"When I married Hazel," I began, my voice h o a r s e with emotion, "I had dreams of building a life with her. I wanted to witness her carrying our children, to have a family together, but circumstances forced me to let her go after just two years of marriage."

Raymond let out a dejected sigh. "So, what's your plan?" he asked, but answered it himself. "To go after her without caring about the consequences."

"I honestly don't know what I'm going to do," I admitted, "but one thing is certain: I can't stay away from her any longer." As my phone chimed on the table, I reached for it and opened the message icon. After reading the text, my brows furrowed into a frown.

Raymond asked, concerned, "What's the problem?"

My jaw clenched in frustration. "The ba stard wants me to bring June to Seattle for the exhibition."

Raymond cursed aloud, understanding the predicament. "So what are you going to do?"

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I sighed heavily, resigned to the decision. What else can I do? I'll send the jet to get her?

Chapter 44

HAZEL

(PRESENT TIME)

As I was preparing for another busy day at work, the sound of the doorbell interrupted my morning routine. Curiosity piqued, I approached the intercom, wondering who would be visiting at such an early hour. To my surprise, it was David, who appeared on the webcam and greeted me with a cheerful wave. After giving him access, I returned to my room to complete my morning routine.

When I finally emerged, David had already made himself comfortable and helped himself to some of the delicious breakfast prepared by my cook. With a playful grin, I couldn't resist teasing him, "Couldn't even wait for me, huh?"

Taking a seat beside him at the dining table, I joined in the mealtime banter. Amidst his laughter, David managed to explain, mouth half full with scrambled eggs, "I couldn't help it, I was starving, and you seemed to be taking forever to get ready."

Rolling my eyes playfully at his feeble excuse, I couldn't resist teasing him back. "What happened to the food at your place?" I asked, knowing well that he hardly ever eats at home, considering he's an excellent cook himself. "Did you lose all your pots or something?"

David chuckled again, choosing to avoid the topic of his pots. He was well aware that I was onto his culinary habits – it's either my place or takeout for



him. "Why are you here so early then? Did something happen?" I inquired, wondering if there was a particular reason he decided to show up at my doorstep this early in the morning. If something was wrong, he would have just given me a phone call or wait for me at the office.

With a hint of hesitation, he mumbled, "Nothing happened. My car broke down yesterday, and I had to take it to the mechanic. I need a ride to work this morning, so that's why I showed up."

As I blinked rapidly, expecting him to laugh at his own joke, I noticed his serious expression remained unchanged. "You do realize that the distance from your house to mine is almost the same as the distance from your house to the office," I pointed out, finding his excuse rather puzzling. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm okay," he insisted, but his response didn't entirely convince me. "I just wanted to take a ride with you to work this morning, that's all."

Though something seemed off about him, I decided not to pry further for now, respecting his privacy. Changing the topic, I mentioned, "I spoke to Daisy this morning. She seems to enjoy her time whenever she visits your mom."

He nodded absently, acknowledging, "My mother has a way of spoiling kids."

Downing the last of his tea, he took the cup to the sink to wash it off. With a playful smirk, he added, "I bet you scold her more than my mother does."

Indeed, someone has to be the disciplinarian, and I don't mind taking on that role when needed. "She was eager to get off the phone with me." I couldn't even believe it. "She raised you to be a good man, so I'm not worried about the morals she might instill in my daughter in my absence." Returning the cup to the shelf, David turned to me. "If you don't hurry up with the breakfast, we are going to be late for work." He is right. Gulping down my tea, I mirrored his actions before grabbing my purse and my keys. David opted to drive and I agreed, showing to be a passenger princess.

Halfway down the road, David finally spoke up, his voice tinged with frustration, "I heard Southwark arrived in Seattle yesterday." I sensed that this might be what had been bothering him. "Did you meet with him yesterday?"

"I was on the road, going to and fro your mother's place, so of course, I didn't meet him," I replied, trying to remain composed and not sound defensive.

Curiosity got the better of me, and I asked, "Is that the reason why you decided to drive me to work this morning? To make sure I don't run into him or speak to him?"

David glanced at me briefly, and I could see the concern in his eyes. "Did you drive me to work to make sure I don't run into him or speak to him?" I repeated.

His response was sincere and heartwarming. "I drove you to work because I didn't get to see you the whole of yesterday, and

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I missed you,” he said. “I trust you well enough to know that you won’t be going back to your ex-husband, not after what he did to you.”

I looked out the window, “can we not make Ravel our topic of discussion please?” I don’t even understand what I’m doing with Ravel. I should be angry at him for what he did to David’s face, but instead, I went on a dinner date with him and also accepted a dress invitation from him.

“I know I’m not supposed to talk about him, but I ran into him at the gym this morning.”

Surprised by his word, I glanced at him sharply with furrowed brows. “Seattle isn’t that small,” I muttered, finding it suspicious that he coincidentally ran into Ravel at the gym. There are a lot of gym houses in Seattle, why will they use the

same one?

David turned right, “I know it sounds weird and very difficult to believe, but the fact remains that I coincidentally ran into him at the gym, and I think it’s only fair for you to know that he didn’t come to Seattle alone.”

Of course, he didn’t come alone. “this isn’t some sort of vacation, of course, he will come with some of his staff from the company.”

David scoffed. “are you deliberately acting ignorant right now? Are you trying to tell me that you don’t know who I’m referring to?” I know for a fact who he is talking about, but I refused to utter a word. “well if you must know, I’m talking about June, his woman, the same lady he cheated on you with.”

Avoiding David’s knowing gaze, I looked out the window. “you don’t have to be so descriptive about June, I know who she is and what she did.”

He glanced at me again, but I refused to look at him. “I’m not the enemy here, I just felt you should know about this so you don’t get caught by surprise.”

I know David isn’t the enemy, but that didn’t stop me from feeling angry. What right do I even have to be angry? Ravel bluntly told me the day I found them together that he is in love with her.

The more I hang out with him, the more I become the other woman, and that’s something I’ll never allow myself to be. I deserve more than that, and I’m not going to settle for anything less. “I received an invitation to Ravel’s exhibition, do you wanna come?”

“You received an invitation?” he asked, clearly surprised by the news.

“Yes. He sent an invitation to my office yesterday.” And I wasn’t going to extend it to you, but I can’t begin to fathom how I’ll feel when I see Ravel with June and I have no one to turn to. “So are you coming?”

He nodded. “if you are sure you want to go, then I’m definitely going with you.”

He pulled over at the parking lot. “I should get a tux though.”

Suddenly, I’m not looking forward to the exhibition anymore.

## Chapter 45

### JUNE

Once upon a time, I was an unknown individual without a class or a single penny to my name. Now, my life has taken a lavish turn-adorned in exquisite designer attire, and I have the privilege of being associated with Ravel Southwark. There's no turning back for me. The memory of the forgotten woman I once was shall never resurface. I am resolute in this transformation. Ravel has distanced himself from me ever since Hazel finalised their divorce papers. Strangely, his emotional detachment doesn't faze me. As long as he continues to provide financial support, shower me with luxurious clothing, bags, and shoes, and ensures my indulgent getaways, I remain content. Maintaining my prominence on social media is an added bonus that I hold dear.

Despite my apparent indifference towards his actions, there's one aspect I simply won't endure – the role of being the other woman. I've noticed his interactions with his ex-wife, their intimate dinner dates, and his refusal to part with her photographs in the mansion.

I am resolute in preventing any reconciliation between them. I am determined to ensure that he never returns to her. If he wishes to maintain a connection with her, he must formalize his commitment to me through marriage, making her his mistress. This is the sole condition under which I will tolerate their continued association.

Glancing at the time, I directed my attention to Matthew, the security personnel assigned to me in response to the threats from Hazel's online followers after Ravel's press conference. "Has Mrs. Anne arrived and checked in?"

"Yes ma'am." He responded robotically.

I was confident that Ravel would be puzzled about how Anne managed to discover the true hotel he was staying at, considering he had misled the internet into believing he was at the Open-crest hotel. "I'm planning to have a brief conversation with her," I declared, rising from my seat, causing him to adopt an upright stance. "No need to accompany me, Matthew. Just remain where you are."

"Of course, ma'am," he acknowledged, stepping back to grant me passage. With the echoing click of my Louboutin heels against the marble floor, I entered the elevator and ascended to Anne's floor. Upon stepping out of the elevator, the anticipated scene unfolded before me. The corridor was brimming with security personnel who promptly prevented my access to her room.

With my arms crossed, I directed a piercing gaze at the man who appeared to be their leader. "Kindly inform Mrs. Anne that June Silver is present, bearing

an enticing proposition.” My words held a veiled promise of a valuable opportunity.

He scrutinized me briefly, seemingly unsure whether to take me seriously. However, my unyielding demeanor and determination dissuaded him from underestimating me. After speaking into his microphone, a few moments later, I was escorted into Mrs. Anne’s opulent suite.

Why didn’t Ravel provide me with something as lavish as this?

“What do you want June?” Anne inquired as she emerged from the kitchen, wine glass in hand. Even dressed in a simple black dress, she exuded a captivating air of elegance. “Louboutin?” She let out a mocking chuckle. “Is this your attempt at impressing me?”

“I don’t dress to impress anyone,” I replied matter-of-factly, a hint of amusement in my tone. “Except perhaps your son.” Taking a seat on the sofa, I didn’t bother waiting for her invitation, casually crossing my legs.

“I’ve come to personally accept your gratitude,” I stated with a hint of sarcasm, my smile strained but evident.

“Gratitude in person?” She raised a perfectly groomed eyebrow. “Are you under the influence or something?”

Unfazed by the insult, I maintained my smile, though it was now visibly forced.

“I assure you, I’m quite lucid. Thank you for your concern.”

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As she settled into the seat adjacent to mine, she fixed me with a scrutinizing gaze. “If you’re not going to disclose your purpose for being here, I’ll have you escorted out of this suite.”

Inappreciative bit ch. “Can you guess who was behind sending you Ravel’s hotel address?” I inquired, my smile carrying a hint of smugness. “Your team’s efforts to locate him weren’t proving to be successful, so I thought I’d extend a helping hand.”

“And you expect me to be grateful for that?” She scoffed. Her icy gaze traveled down to my shoes. “Wearing heels bought with my son’s money is appreciation enough, wouldn’t you say?”

“I’m not here to engage in verbal sparring with you, Anne,” I retorted dispassionately. “I’m here because something interesting is happening that you might not like.”

Though curiosity danced in her eyes, she made an effort to downplay it.

“There’s nothing you could find interesting that would equally captivate my attention.”

This woman might believe I’m like Hazel, who just endured all her nonsense quietly. I’m unafraid of scandals, so if she annoys me once again, I’ll create one for her. “Ravel is wining and dining Hazel and showering her with gifts.”

Her eyebrows knitted in confusion. "What?"

I thought so bit ch. "It appears he's interested in reconciling with her." And I won't stand for it.

She stared at me for a moment before letting out a soft laugh. "You must think I'm foolish, don't you?" Perhaps a little. "So you're concerned Ravel might kick you to the curb, and you want my assistance to prevent that from happening." "More like I met up with someone with mutual interest." I responded, unfazed by her condescending response. "I'm certain you wouldn't want your son to reconcile with her either."

"And you assume I want my son to be with you?" She shot back.

"I'm well aware you don't," I stated, my indifference evident. "You can dismiss me after we're finished removing Hazel from Ravel's life."

"Do you genuinely believe you're making sense?"

"I am confident I'm making sense," I said, uncrossing my legs and leaning forward. "Instead of facing two women alone, I'm offering to assist you in dealing with Hazel, leaving you with only one adversary."

Her gaze turned contemplative. "Alright." I smiled triumphantly, pleased with her concession. "I'm only accepting this arrangement because it's simpler to remove you from Ravel's life compared to dealing with Hazel."

I furrowed my brows at the slight. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

"Besides the fact that Hazel is financially independent now and not a destitute parasite like you, my son appears to genuinely care for her, something I can't say about you. You lack both the financial means and my son's affection."

F uck you bit ch! Soon enough, I'm going to have both.

## Chapter 46

### HAZEL

The gallery is experiencing a remarkable streak of success. We've efficiently assembled a splendid collection of artwork for our upcoming exhibition, igniting my anticipation for yet another mesmerizing showcase. To commemorate this triumph, I've decided to treat David and Agatha to an exquisite dining experience, accompanied by extending additional bonuses to the dedicated staff. Despite David's offer to chauffeur, I stood firm in driving myself. This evening is dedicated to them, a gesture of appreciation. While David comfortably occupied the passenger seat, Agatha settled graciously in the rear. "Which fine establishment shall we dine at?" I inquired, presenting them the freedom to choose.

Agatha leaned forward, her curiosity evident, and playfully queried, "And who might be taking care of the bill? You, perhaps?"

David let out a chuckle, his amusement evident. "Is it because you're curious about the restaurant you'll pick in case you're told to handle the bill?" he

asked playfully, turning towards Agatha. With a teasing grin, he continued, "Feel free to choose anything you like. Hazel's more than capable of covering the expenses."

Agatha's grin widened in response. She playfully inserted her phone between us, asserting her newfound responsibility. "I've done a bit of browsing and found some appealing options. There's a new place nearby called La Pête, and I believe it's worth a shot."

Curious about David's input, I turned to him. "What's your take?" I inquired, valuing his perspective. "Do you reckon we should give it a try?"

David nodded affirmatively, his enthusiasm palpable. "Absolutely. Exploring new experiences is always a rewarding endeavor," he remarked, extracting his phone as well.

"La Pete, here we go!" With a conveniently short distance to cover, we arrived at the restaurant in under thirty minutes. Upon reaching the entrance, I dropped off David and Agatha to secure a table while I maneuvered the car into a proper parking spot. After shutting off the engine, I alighted and took a few steps towards the establishment. However, my progress was unexpectedly halted as Agatha and David materialized in my line of sight, causing me to pause. "What's the situation?" I inquired, puzzled by the unforeseen turn of events.

Agatha was the first to respond, her tone tinged with disappointment.

"Unfortunately, there are no available tables," she conveyed. A quick glance at David confirmed his agreement with her assessment.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, I suggested, "Have either of you spoken to the manager? Perhaps they could arrange something for us." As I pondered our options, a stroke of luck presented itself in the form of a departing couple.

"Actually," I interjected, a solution in mind, "we could take their table."

"I've had a change of heart about dining here," Agatha murmured, her disappointment palpable. "I suddenly recalled that I've tried their cuisine before, and it left much to be desired. I actually know of another place that would be perfect for our dinner."

A sense of intrigue crept over me as I observed this exchange. My suspicion deepened, and I couldn't help but narrow my eyes suspiciously. "What's really going on here?" I questioned, my curiosity demanding an answer.

David interjected, shedding light on the situation. "She just shared a negative review of this restaurant. There's truly no reason for us to stay here."

As my suspicion escalated, I took a firm stance. "Step aside," I commanded Agatha, my tone resolute. Her nervous glance towards David confirmed my suspicion that there was more to this situation than met the eye. "Agatha,



don't spoil the evening. Move out of my way!"

Reluctantly, Agatha yielded and stepped aside. I deliberately scanned the surroundings, my senses attuned to any unusual cues. My gaze flitted across the available, unoccupied tables, until it settled on the source of their peculiar behavior: Ravel and June were sharing a meal together.

My grip on my purse's strap tightened involuntarily. "Find us a table," I instructed Agatha, my focus still locked onto Ravel's presence. He remained oblivious to my presence, deeply engrossed in his companion's company.

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A gentle voice interrupted my thoughts. "Hazel," David's voice reached my ears, his concern evident. "There are plenty of nt. "There are plenty of other restaurants nearby. We don't have to eat here if it's uncomfortable for you." Finally tearing my gaze away from the scene, I faced David. "Why should I leave? Simply because he's here?" With a determined stride, I left them behind and claimed an unoccupied table. As I set down my purse, David seated himself, his watchful eyes never leaving me. I took a deep breath and resolved, "I'm going to say hello."

In the heat of my emotions, I started towards their table, only to have my intentions thwarted as David swiftly caught my hand, putting a halt to my steps. "What on earth are you thinking?" he exclaimed, his gaze flickering between Ravel and myself. "Why would you want to approach him? Don't be impulsive, Hazel.",

"Perhaps it's time for everyone to see that I've moved on," I retorted, my determination unwavering. Reluctantly, David released his grip on my hand, allowing me to proceed. With purpose, I made my way over to their table. June was engrossed in her phone, while Ravel seemed occupied with his device. However, as I cast my shadow over them, he looked up, his eyes widening in surprise. A fleeting glance at June revealed her obliviousness to my presence. Ravel's voice cut through the tension, carrying a mix of astonishment and curiosity. "What brings you here?" he inquired, his gaze briefly shifting towards June.

I raised an eyebrow as I held my hand up, responding to his rather absurd question. "You know, Ravel, we're in a restaurant. So, what do you think I'm doing here?" I shifted my gaze towards the only person in the room I could never find it in myself to forgive. The one I had treated like a sister, only to have her betray me. "Hey, June. How's life treating you?" After all, you've taken my husband now.

A broad smile stretched across her face. "I'm good, Hazel, as you can see." She reached out to touch Ravel's arm, but he swiftly withdrew. "Did you happen to receive an invitation to the exhibition?" Her grin took on a cunning edge. "Given how much stress my dear Ravel's been under, I hope you

understand if he unintentionally left you off the guest list.”

Ravel’s patience finally snapped. “If you don’t have anything meaningful to contribute, just spare us the chatter.” He shot a pointed glance at her before turning to me. “Are you here by yourself?”

I motioned towards David and Agatha, gesturing their way. “No,” I began, “I just wanted to stop by and say hello. Oh, by the way, the dress is quite charming. But I’d prefer if you didn’t send me gifts, especially dresses.”

With a sigh, his gaze shifted back to my table, and his jaw visibly tensed upon spotting David. “Will you be attending the exhibition?”

I shrugged, a hint of uncertainty in my response. “I’ll have to leave that decision to David.” My reply seemed to furrow his brows. “No worries, Mr. Southwark. I’ll do my best to ensure we make it. A beautiful piece of jewelry is always a delight for a lady, isn’t it?” I managed a forced smile and turned to acknowledge his companion. “Well, I won’t keep you from your phones any longer. If you’ll excuse me.” With that, I turned away and returned to my own table, giving them my back.

David observed me closely as I sat down. I blinked at the rice and salad on the side of my table. David quickly explained its presence. “I took the liberty of ordering for you. It’s one of their specialty, recommended by the chef.”

My appetite seemed to have done down the drain with my mood. I forced a smile for him. “thank you.”

David knows me too well to be able to tell that my mood is ruined. He waved over one of the waiters. “please I’ll like our food to be packaged, we’ll be taking it home.”

Surprised by his word, I glanced at him. “why? Do you have an emergency you need to get back to?”

Smiling warmly at me, he shook his head. “today has been a long day for all of us, I think it’s best if we call it a night.” Agatha nodded at his words.

Feeling apologetic for ruining the dinner plans, I sincerely apologized. “I know you both want to leave so I wouldn’t have to be in the same space with Ravel and his date.”

Agatha leaned forward, placing her elbow on the table. “The exhibition is in two days, you do not have to worry about them, because we don’t want you having black circles from lack of sleep.”

Handling the bill, I grabbed my purse and we all walked out. “what’s your business if I have black eyes?” I questioned Agatha.

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She scoffed. “You need to look prettier than that gold-digging wh ore.” David clearly amused by her words chortled. “Mr. Southwark needs to see what he’s missing out on.”

And everything boils down to Ravel.

Great!

David is right; I'm exhausted from all the work and drama. Ravel has only been here for five days, and I'm already feeling the impact of his presence on my stress level.

I just can't wait for him to go back to New York so I can return to normalcy.

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Chapter 47

HAZEL

(FIVE YEARS AGO)

Things have been crazy with Ravel and his family. He claims everything is okay, but I know better than to believe it. His mother is upset with him for choosing me. According to Elenor's side of the story, Mrs. Anne wants him to marry the daughter of their father's friend, who is also a business mogul. In as much as I respect Mrs. Anne, I still feel she should let her son make his decision; she should let him marry out of love and not money. How much money could she possibly want to have after all the riches and wealth that her husband's family and her family have accumulated over the years?

The Southwarks are known to be generationally rich. Never in human history have they ever been recorded to be poor, so she should let her son breathe? I understand that she is trying to uphold the family's legacy even after her husband's death, but then I equally feel that her children's happiness should also matter.

"Hazel!" Oscar called out from the kitchen hallway. I looked up from the dishes and blinked at him with a slight smile. "Mrs. Southwark is demanding to see you."

My smile dropped instantly. "what did you say?"

"Mrs. Southwark is demanding to see you." He repeated. Dropping the sponge, I pulled off the gloves and apron, wiped my hands, and tried to walk past Oscar but he grabbed my forearm. "what exactly is your deal with that family?" he asked curiously. "I've seen Mr. Ravel drop and pick you up countless times, I've equally seen Elenor Southwark come around to see you and now Mrs. Southwark herself is here demanding to see you."

Arching a brow, I glared at his hand which was holding onto me. "Are you trying to confirm the rumor among the staff?"

He frowned, reluctantly letting me go. "what are you saying? I'm only asking because I'm worried about you. That family – isn't one that you should mess with."

"I've overheard you guys countless times Oscar." I hissed slowly, trying my best not to snap. "I even heard you guys whether I'm dating Ravel or not." bet on

His eyes widened. "you are on a first-name basis with him?" I scoffed at his audacity. "sh it!" he cursed out aloud, "I just lost hundred dollars to those scoundrels."

"What the f uck did you just say?" I took a step towards him, ready to scratch his eyes out. "you shamelessly stand before me and confirm that you guys indeed placed a bet on me."

Rolling his eyes, he stepped away from the doorway. "don't be silly Hazel." My glare intensified "You should go ahead, I'm sure you do not want to keep Mrs. Southwark waiting in her car."

Willing not to waste more time on him, I walked away. "Hazel!" He called out again and I ignored him. "you should wake up from that dream you are having before it's too late for you."

It's already too late. I am madly in love with Ravel that I can't think of a life without him in it.

Stepping out of the building, I noticed the trail of luxurious cars, one of them opened and a young man stepped out and approached me. He gestured towards the second car. Nodding silently, I walked over to the car and stared at nothing but black-tinted windows.

Slowly, she rolled down the window and stared at me with pure disgust. "now I understand why my son couldn't tell me where you work." She looked past me to the building, "I guess he is equally ashamed of where you work."

Do not let her words get to you, Hazel. Elenor and Ravel already warned you about how harsh she can be with her words. "Ravel respects and accepts what I do."

She laughed mockingly. "is that what he told you?" she shook her head. "my dear, I'm sure he only said that to get you into his bed."

I had to count to three in my head before responding. "he already achieved that ma'am and he is still with me regardless of my working status or the type of my job."

Anne's lips thinned. "Are you trying to play smart with me right now?"

"No ma'am," I mumbled, avoiding her stern gaze, not because I'm afraid to look her in the eyes but because I don't want to come off as disrespectful again.

She glared at me for a moment without uttering any word, making me extremely uncomfortable. "everyone needs money," she mused, finally breaking the silence, "and you are definitely not an exemption. How much do I have to give you to leave my son alone?"

"Excuse me?" I whispered, feeling insulted by her words.

"I'm giving you an option of an open cheque right now." She explained. "this is

a once in a lifetime opportunity and if you ask me, I don't think you should miss it."

Unable to hide my disgust, I scoff. "Your family must have a thing for writing cheques." She frowned at my word. "your son offered me an open cheque the second time I met him, and that cheque is still lying pretty in my drawer.

"What did you just say?" she asked, stupefied. "My son did what?"

"With all due respect ma'am, don't you think your offer is a bit irrelevant?"

crossing my hand, I wondered if all rich people are like this. "you do realize that I can have that same amount you are willing to offer me to stay away from your son and still have him in my life."

"Or you will leave the relationship penniless." She challenged.

Even if I break up with Ravel, I still have the cheque. Exhaling tiredly, I wetted my lips. "If you came all the way here to tell me to stay away from Ravel, I'll like to go back to work."

"You will regret your decision of rejecting this cheque." She promised, her eyes holding that promise that she will make it happen.

"Or you

will lose your son whilst trying to make more money for the family name."

"don't tell me how to run my family!" she spat. "what do you know about family when you don't even have one!"

I may not have any family due to my bad decisions in life, but I've obviously received more love than she has received in this life. I bowed slightly out of respect. "if you'll excuse me, ma'am, I'll like to get back to work."

Without waiting for her acknowledgment or approval, I walked away without sparing her another glance. The moment I stepped into the restaurant, I was greeted by Harrison's angry face.

"you've been away for thirty minutes Hazel," He spat. "where were you?"

Already in a fucked up mood thanks to Mrs. Anne, I tried not to let it show. "I had to see someone real quick outside the building."

His jaw tightened as he jabbed an angry finger at me. "I've tolerated your bullshit too much in this restaurant Hazel. To my office now!" He stomped away and I silently followed behind. Oscar and the rest of his crew stared at us from the side of his restaurant.

Stepping into Harrison's office, I closed the door softly. "I apologize sir if my actions upset you." I quickly apologized. No matter how angry I am at the moment, there is a probability that my job is at stake. "I assure you that it will not happen again."

He stared at me silently from his seated position. I watched the anger in his eyes change into something else. "Hazel I really wanted to fire you, but I'm going to give you the chance to redeem yourself."

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I frowned, not liking the tone of his voice. "what should I do sir?"

He rose from his seat and slowly advanced towards me. "it is not news that I like you, Hazel," he stopped in front of me, picked up my hair, and sniffed.

"just an hour with me, and I promise to increase your salary and move you to a better place."

Is he insane? I roughly pulled my hair away from his grasp and took a step back. "I have a boyfriend sir, and I have no intention of cheating on him."

He closed I again, sna tching my arm abruptly and squeezing tightly, "an hour with me and I assure you, you won't even remember your boyfriend. You will only scream my name."

I tried to shove him away but he tightened his hold, his face inching closer for a kiss. "let me go!" I screamed, trying to force myself out."

His lips finally found mine and his left hand went to my waistline and he squeezed. I used that opportunity to shove him again and he bulged, staggering backward. "what the f uck is your problem?" I spat. He tried to approach me again but I grabbed the artifact beside me. "if you dare come close to me again, I am going to smash your head with this artifact and I am going to crush your balls with it after slicing your throat!"

My threat got to him and he halted, his eyes gleaming with arousal and anger. Disgusting pig.

"I am going to give you a chance to reconsider my offer."

"you are a lu natic." I spat.

"That's it! You are fired!"

"That's where you are wrong Harrison, I quit!"

## Chapter 48

RAVEL

(PRESENT TIME)

The more each day passes by, the more I have more reasons to dislike June's presence. How she found out that I was having dinner at that restaurant I do not know; one minute I was cating alone, and the next minute she was seated across the table. For a moment, I considered having Raymond walk her out, but I wasn't sure if that ba stard was watching. I do not know who the f ucker is, which is why I have to be extremely careful.

I didn't see it as a daunting task to have dinner with her, but when Hazel suddenly walked up to us, I regretted not sending her back to the hotel or walking away when she imposed on my dinner plans.

Unable to do anything meaningful, I decided to take a break from replying to



the last-minute mail. Stepping out of the balcony, I pulled out a pack of cigarettes, grabbed a stick, and lighted the end.

When was the last time I felt this lonely? Probably the last time I slept in Hazel's arms. Nothing seemed appealing to me, not even the crazy night view, the hot liquid gliding down my throat, or the smoke from the cigarette. Pulling out my phone from my pocket, I clicked on the favorite list on my contact and stared at Hazel's number, contemplating whether I should call her or not.

My hesitancy resulted from the fear that she wouldn't want to speak with me after what she experienced at the restaurant tonight. Letting go of every assumption, I dialed her number and placed the phone on my ear, listening to it ring. To my surprise, she answered.

"Mr. Southwark." She rasped.

Despite the fact that her voice leaves me breathless, I dislike the fact that she refers to me by my last name. Multiple times I have told her to call me by my first name. I'll give anything to hear her call me Rav, but I'd rather not push my luck. "Please call me Ravel." I pleaded softly.

She sighed softly. "what do you want? Why are you calling me this late?"

Shit! I didn't think of the fact that she might be asleep. "I'm sorry if I disrupted your sleep," I swear, it was never my intention. I do want to hear her voice desperately, but not at the expense of her comfort.

"I wasn't asleep." She assured me. "I was actually talking to Da" She paused abruptly, locking in the rest of her words. "I was busy with unfinished work."

I bet my ass that wasn't what she wanted to say. She was actually busy speaking with David. Is he there with her? Does he share her bed or does she share his?

"Ravel" she breathed out. "are you still there?"

Exhaling smoke, I stared at the cigarette trying to figure out when I started smoking. "yeah," I breathed out "I'm still here." How can I fall asleep knowing that she prefers the company of another man?

"Are you going to say something?" she asked tiredly. "At least tell me the reason you called."

She's right, Fuck that bastard boyfriend of hers. I am the one she is talking to right now, I shouldn't be bothered about him. "I called to apologize about tonight."

She fell silent for a moment. "apologize for what?" the softness in her voice made me wonder if I misread the look in her eyes when she addressed June.

"you didn't do anything wrong Ravel, you were only having dinner with your date."

"June isn't my date." I corrected. "she wasn't in that restaurant on my invite, more like she crashed my dinner." And I hate myself for not walking her out or

walking myself out. "I truly apologize for her presence."

She sniffed, followed by shuffling feet and the sound of a door closing. "You do not owe me any explanation, Ravel, even though she wasn't at the restaurant as your date, she is in Seattle as your date, and it is only normal for her to want to have dinner with you."

"Hazel," I drawled out softly. "I want you to know that June's presence in Seattle is beyond my control." I've never been more honest in my life. "If it were up to me, she wouldn't be here."

"I think that's too much information." She mumbled, trying so hard not to snap at me. "is that the reason you called, I'll like to go back to what I was doing." My jaw clenched. She wants to go back to David. "I am obviously more important than what you were doing or you wouldn't have picked up the call." And that is a fact.

"Don't flatter yourself, Ravel," she warned with an edge in her voice. "If I were to have my way, I will end this call"

Shit. That was fucking mean. Chuckling despite the pain, I tried to feel grateful over the fact that I got to hear her voice. "were you able to have dinner? I noticed you left on time." Probably because she didn't feel comfortable being in the same space with me.

"What makes you think I didn't?"

The fact that you are getting defensive proves you didn't and it's all because of me. "I'm sorry." I apologized yet again, unable to utter any other word.

"And why in heaven's name are you apologizing again?"

"because that is all I'm capable of saying." And it pains me to the core. It pains me that I'm not there to cook for her or coax her to have something to eat. "I'm going insane Hazel."

She remained mute.

"I'm slowly losing my mind and I let it happen because I feel I deserve it." I was never a smoker, yet here I am on my second stick for the night.

"Ravel?" she whispered. "are you okay? Is something going on?"

A lot is going on and I can't even share it with you. "I miss you, Hazel."

Chuckling, I rubbed my forehead with the heel of my hand. "I miss you so much that I consider giving it all up."

"Ravel? What are you talking about?" the concern in her voice gave me a glimmer of hope. "are you alone?" she inquired. "where is Raymond? Is he there with you?"

She is going to be mad if she finds out I'm smoking. I quashed the cigarette into the ashtray. "I don't share the room with Raymond or anyone if that's what you are asking."

"The exhibition," she asked, "is it stressing you out? Is something going

wrong?”

Apart from the fact that you are showing up with that f ucker? “Everything is going on fine.”

“If everything is really fine, why are you sounding like you do right now?”

I just told her that I missed her and she decided to just ignore that fact.

“Nothing is wrong.” Maybe that is what she hopes to hear, maybe if I keep saying it repeatedly then everything is going to be indeed fine.

“Ravel,” she called out softly, “I know things might not be smooth with us right now, but you can always talk to me.”

I do not deserve her. “You don’t have to worry, everything.”

“Rav,” she whispered. I bit my lips not to let the tears threatening to drop succeed. I haven’t heard that name in over two years. “what is going on with you.”

The first tears rolled down and I quickly wiped it off, sniffing to keep the others locked in. “Ravel, are you crying?”

I chuckled. “I haven’t heard that pet name in over two years and it kind of got to me.”

She cursed under her breath. “forward me the address of your hotel, I’m coming over.”

## Chapter 49

### HAZEL

#### (PRESENT TIME)

There’s a subtle shift in Ravel’s demeanor, an unusual display of vulnerability that belies his usual stoicism. I couldn’t ignore the faint sound of his sniffing, a telltale sign that something was amiss. Despite our past disagreements, I felt an undeniable urge to set those aside and delve into what was troubling him.

“Ravel,” I ventured softly, the concern evident in my voice. “Are you... crying?”

A brief chuckle escaped his lips, carrying a hint of nostalgia. “It’s been ages since you used that nickname, Rav,” he admitted, his voice laced with emotion. My intention had been to coax out his worries, but instead, it seemed I had tapped into a well of sentiments I hadn’t anticipated.

Swearing softly under my breath, I couldn’t ignore the urgency in my desire to be there for Ravel. “Just send me your hotel address,” I insisted, my determination to support him growing stronger. There was a part of me that believed he might be more open if we were face to face, away from the constraints of digital communication.

“Ravel?” His sudden silence after my offer made me second-guess my words.

“If you’re not comfortable with me coming over...”

“It’s quite late,” his voice finally broke the silence, and I tried to suppress any

feelings of sadness or disappointment that crept in. "Send me your address, and I'll come meet you."

A pang of mixed emotions tugged at me. I knew he was aware of my address; after all, he had sent me those flowers on our last wedding anniversary. I would have easily told him to come over had Daisy's pictures not filled my hallway.. "How about we meet at the exhibition venue?" I suggested, my voice tentative yet hopeful. "I could assist you with those last-minute details."

"Is there someone else with you?" His unexpected question left me momentarily baffled, his words stirring up confusion. "I can tell you're not keen on having me over at your place, so I'm just curious about the reason behind it."

As I discerned the faint sounds of movement in the background, it became apparent that he was preparing himself, likely for our impending meeting. Taking a cue from his actions, I began to quickly change into something more appropriate for our encounter.

I'd rather not have you here," I responded honestly, "This space is personal to me, and I'd rather keep it that way, no offense intended."

A soft chuckle escaped him, carrying an air of understanding. "No offense taken, sweetheart. I'd much rather you not want me in your home than to imagine you having company over there at this hour."

"Ravel, don't push your luck," I cautioned, a slight edge to my tone. His short burst of laughter managed to break through my seriousness, eliciting a genuine smile. "I'll catch up with you later, Ravel." With that, I ended the call, grabbing my jacket and car keys before heading out the door.

As I made my way towards my car, my phone buzzed again, this time with a call from David. I answered, a hint of curiosity in my voice. "David?"

"You're still awake?" His question was laced with surprise. "I couldn't sleep and thought I'd take a chance to see if you were still up."

It seemed like sleep was evading everyone tonight. "Is there something you need help with?" I offered, my voice tinged with concern.

He chuckled playfully. "Hazel, you shouldn't ask a man such a question; you'll set our minds wandering." Uncertain how to respond to that, I chose to remain silent.

"Anyway, how about we meet up for coffee?" David's proposal caught me off guard, and I hesitated for a moment,

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contemplating his offer.

"Sorry, David, but that won't work for me," I replied, my voice tinged with regret. "I've got a few things to catch up on, and I think it's better if I stay back

and focus on them.” The lie slipped out so easily, and although I couldn’t explain the reason behind it, it felt oddly fitting in the moment. “Apologies, David.”

He seemed to take it in stride. “No worries,” he assured me, his tone understanding. “If you need any assistance, don’t hesitate to reach out. I’m happy to help with whatever’s keeping you awake.”

“No!” I found myself blurting out, my response more forceful than intended. The abruptness of my reaction sent a pang of worry through me—had I given away more than I intended? “It’s really late, David. You should get some rest to be productive at the office tomorrow. Let’s catch up later.” Without waiting for his reply, I ended the call.

A soft chuckle escaped me as I sat behind the wheel, feeling slightly foolish for spitting such lies. I eased the car into motion, embarking on the journey to the exhibition. The drive took over an hour, and as I approached the venue, I spotted Ravel standing outside, his presence drawing me in. I parked the car, stepped out, and joined him.

He greeted me with a fleeting embrace, a touch that spoke volumes in its simplicity. “You changed your perfume,” he observed, his keen awareness causing a hint of surprise to flutter within me.

“The perfume wasn’t the only thing that changed,” I replied, the weight of unspoken truths hanging in the air between us. So much had shifted since our last encounter, not least of which was the existence of a daughter he remained unaware of.

“Shall we head inside?” I suggested, a slight shiver passing through me. The chill in the air cut through my jacket, reminding me that it wasn’t quite enough to ward off the cold.

Ravel nonchalantly shrugged off his jacket and placed it over my shoulders, a gesture that carried an air of familiarity. “I guess some things never change,” he remarked, his words invoking a shared history. Memories of times when I had underestimated the weather and he had come to my rescue flooded back. I glanced at him, a mixture of appreciation and concern in my eyes. “Aren’t you feeling cold?” I couldn’t help but worry about his well-being, given the chilly weather. “Please don’t catch a cold because of me.”

His chuckle held a hint of amusement. “No need to fret, I’ll manage.” With a gentle touch at my waist, he guided me towards the entrance of the building. “The jewelry pieces are scheduled to arrive the night before the event,” he explained, revealing his plans. “I’ll be overseeing security measures throughout the night to ensure there’s no risk of theft.”

“Interesting,” I responded, intrigued by his preparations. “And about the runway, you’re using models instead of stone curves?”

“It sounds like that choice might come with a higher price tag,” I commented,

noting the potential financial implications of using models for the event. Ravel simply shrugged, pausing in the middle of the hall. "I felt like trying something different for a change," he explained, his casual demeanor suggesting he was open to experimentation. It was a sentiment I agreed with; after witnessing the impact of his press conference, it was clear that unconventional choices could capture attention and generate buzz. "Ravellux has never used models before, so this will be a first."

My nod conveyed my approval of his decision. "I think the change is a great idea," I told him, a genuine smile forming as I spoke.

"Is Elenor going to be one of the models?" I inquired, aware of their somewhat strained relationship. I wouldn't have been surprised if she chose not to participate.

Ravel's response was laced with a mix of amusement and frustration. "She's actually opening the show, along with a few other high-end models we've hired. And believe it or not, despite being my sister, that crazy woman charged me double her normal rate."

Biting my lips to lock the smile in, I stared at the numbering of the seats. "I guess I got the front seat."

He approached me and stood next to me his shoulder grazing mine. "Contrary to what you think, you always come first Hazel." I highly doubt that. Keeping my thoughts to myself, I took a few steps away from him, creating some space between

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us. Ravel stared emptily at the space I once occupied. "if someone ever told me that you will be eager to get away from, I wouldn't have believed it."

Why is he talking as if I caused this? "you gave up on us first Ravel, never you forget that. You got away from me first."

"And would you believe me if I told you that I regret it?" he whispered, gradually closing the space between us again. "Would believe me if I told you that I go to bed filled with regret and I wake up every morning with the same regret?"

you

I searched his gaze, looking for any emotion that will give away the deception in his words, but I found nothing but intense vulnerability, yet I chose not to believe him. "If you regret it so much, why did you do it?"

Finally looking away, he stared at his shoes. "Regrets come after the action." He stated.

I guess he is right. The act needs to be committed first for regret to follow.

"Your regret changes nothing, Ravel. you broke my trust, ruined our marriage, and ended it yourself. That fact will always remain unchanged."



Only a step away from me, he reached for my hand and I let him grab it.

“What if I’m willing to make amend?”

Surprised by his words, I blinked up at him, trying my best not to stare at his lips. “What do you mean by that?”

“What if I am willing to fight for your love and affection once again?” he wetted his lips, “what if I am willing to do anything to have you in my life again as my wife?”

Chapter 50

DAVID

(PRESENT TIME)

Something is up with Hazel. I can feel it and I really think it has a lot to do with Southwark. Ever since he showed up here in Seattle, it seems Hazel is slowly slipping from my grasp. Every progress I made with her seemed to be slowly disappearing.

I’ve been in her life for three years, and during those three years, I have always wished that she’ll look me in the eye one day and confess her love to me. I am not one to lose hope though. I am not one to give up easily.

My ability to exercise patience is what has brought me thus far in life, it is my patience that made it possible to be in Hazel’s life as someone she trusts.

However, do not take my patience as cowardice. Just as I am patient, I do the necessary things to make sure things fall into place. Proper planning is the basis of everything we do in life.

Making a stop at one of Hazel’s favorite restaurants, I ordered her favorite seafood as lunch and a soft drink before heading, for the office.

The moment I stepped into the gallery, I headed straight for her office. Rose rose from her seat when she saw me approaching. “Ms. Blacks is actually with someone right now.”

My brows furrowed into a frown. Is that ba stard in this office? “Who is her guest? Mr. Southwark?”

Rose shook her head with a knowing smile. “Miss Southwark.” It’s known to anyone who chooses to pay close attention that I have feelings for Hazel, so I am not surprised that Rose is privy to such information.

I lifted the plastic bag in my grasp. “I’ll just drop this off on her desk and be on my way.” Nodding, Rose gestured for me to go in which I did. I pushed the door open and stepped into her office space.

Hazel and Elenor looked up when the door opened. I only smiled at Hazel’s direction, lifting the bag a bit. “I went to have lunch at your favorite restaurant, so I decided to pick out something for you.”

She smiled with gratitude. “That’s lovely, thank you so much.” I dropped it on the table, ready to take my leave when Hazel’s voice stopped me. “This is

Eleanor, Ravel's sister. I don't think you've met her."

Just as courtesy demands, I walked over to the sofa where they are seated and offered her a handshake. "It's nice to meet you." I lied. It's never nice to meet someone from the Southwark family. "Are you in town for your brother's show?"

"Yes, I am." She responded with a sly smile. She doesn't like me and the feeling is so damn mutual. Who knows if she's here trying to convince Hazel to go back to her brother? "You must be David," she inquired, "Hazel's boyfriend."

Her accuracy made me reconsider disliking her. The fact that she recognizes that I'm Hazel's boyfriend means a lot. "Yes, I am." I glanced at an uncomfortable Hazel momentarily. "Did Hazel tell you about our relationship?" Eleanor's smile lingered. "She hinted at it the last time we met." Despite trying to come out friendly, there is something about her that just doesn't sit right with me. "I'm sorry about my brother and what he did to you. He's always one to never react with his fist, but I guess his jealousy got the best of him."

"Do not apologize for your brother's mistake," I remarked. "I'll appreciate it the more if he is the one apologizing."

She blinked twice before letting out a surprising chuckle. "You want my brother to apologize to you?" She chortled again. "There is a probability that you'll be waiting for a lifetime."

"And why is that?" I challenged. "Your brother finds it inappropriate to apologize to people he offends?"

Tilting her head, she searched for the right words. "Let's just say my brother is selective of those he apologizes to."

"And I'm not up that level of those he apologizes to?" If she was going to say this rubbish after taking her time to speak, she would have kept her damn mouth shut.

Her widened smile made me wonder what she possibly finds funny in this situation. "Let's just say that selection is limited to family and close friends."

"How about you stop talking?" That will help me dislike her less. "Because the more you open your mouth in an attempt to defend your brother, the more I wonder if your family is generally fucked up."

"Dav\_"

"Don't Hazel," I growled, chastising her attempt to speak on Eleanor's behalf.

"Don't you dare defend this family's fucked up way of thinking?"

"This isn't my family's fucked up way of thinking," Eleanor interjected, "it's my brother's fucked up way of thinking." I frowned at her comment. "I am here apologizing, aren't I? That means I have nothing against rendering an apology to those offended."

"She's right David." Hazel chimed in, "Besides she's not the offender, so don't

take out your frustration on her.”

My frustration? Does she think I’m frustrated? Not in the slightest. The only thing that frustrates me right now is the fact that this family is slowly making a return in your life.

“I still have some work left to do in my office,” I pointed out, “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll like to get back to it.” Offering Hazel a smile, I made my way towards the door.

“Mr. Ellison,” Elenor called out and I halted my step, turning around to face her. She stood up from her seat and approached me. “Hazel was my friend before I found out she was dating my brother.”

Not sure how that information relates to me, I blinked at her.

“She saved me from getting raped in a club, and ever since, my loyalty has always been with her as a friend. Her happiness is my happiness and I’m a strong advocator of ‘my brother deserves the shit that is happening to him right now.’”

I glanced at Hazel with uncertainty. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I do not want us to be enemies because of my brother’s actions. I’d rather we be friends because I want to get an invite to Hazel’s wedding to you.”

She doesn’t want Hazel back with her brother? Why do I find that hard to believe?

she smiled again, something she seems to like doing. “I don’t care who Hazel ends up with, as far as she’s happy, that’s fine by me, so be assured that I’m not here to ruin your relationship with her.”

“I never said you were.”

“I saw the uncertainty and suspicion in your eyes.” She stated factly.

Stretching her hand, she offered me a handshake. “So can we be friends?”

I glanced at Hazel and she nodded with a smile. Reluctantly, I accepted her handshake. “I’m not sure about friendship, but I’m cool with you.”

“Great!” She exclaimed, returning to her seat. One more glance at Hazel, I walked out of her office.

I had to leave early from the office so I’ll pick up my tux from the designer.

Strutting to my car, I unlocked it, got in, and almost gasped when I saw June seated in the passenger seat. My brows furrowed into a frown. “How did you get into my car?”

She simply shrugged. “Matthew comes with a bonus.” Who the heck is Matthew? She stretched out her hand and I glared at it “I’m June.”

“I think the whole internet knows who you are.”

She shrugged again, retreating her hand. “I believe you are Hazel’s boyfriend.” She mused, pulling the ridiculous pink glasses from her eyes.

“How is that your business?”

"It's my business when my boyfriend is buying dresses for your girlfriend." She retorted, emitting a frown from me. "I don't care what your relationship is like with Hazel, but I want to protect my man from your woman."

"You mean the same man you stole?"

She smiled slyly. "Who gives a f u c k about how I got the title of Southwark's girlfriend?"

Staring at the time, I sighed. "What do you want June?" I am going to be late for my appointment.

"I figured you do not want to lose your woman just as I do not want to lose my man and for that to happen, we need to work together."

I scoffed. "What makes you think I'm going to agree to this bulls hit?"

Grinning, she leaned forward. "Ravel never loses his cool unless it has something to do with Hazel."

I glared at her. "What do you mean by that?"

"All I'm saying is that I'm certain you said something about Hazel that triggered him into beating you shi tless. Do you want me to start digging? I'm sure Hazel will want to hear what exactly you said to Ravel."

Sneaky bit ch. "What's your plan?"

"Work towards making Hazel hate Ravel, while I work towards making Ravel hate Hazel."

Unable to hold it in, I chuckled. "If it was possible for you to make Ravel hate Hazel, you won't be here seeking my help."

"You're right, that is why I want you to instigate behaviors in Hazel that will create doubts in Ravel and I'll equally do the same. Ravel is currently jealous of you, and Hazel is equally jealous of me. Let us feed on their jealousy."