

Divorced Me 1081

Chapter 1081

Jolie said nothing further, standing up and leaving without looking back.

She couldn't wrap her head around it.

Ian's perspective was on an entirely different wavelength from hers. She knew that even if it wasn't her, he'd find someone "like-minded" eventually. People like him weren't uncommon in their social circle. But for now, she just couldn't accept it.

Ian followed her out, holding up his phone. "Miss Quin, how about we exchange numbers? If you change your mind later, you can always reach out."

Jolie glanced at him, hesitated, and then pulled out her phone.

She couldn't outright refuse and burn bridges. Who knew? They might end up as partners someday.

The two exchanged numbers.

Meanwhile, across the street.

A car was parked by the curb. The driver returned to the vehicle, handing a file to the man in the back seat.

"Mr. Cooper, here's the document you requested."

Gavin's gaze shifted from the pair across the street as he took the file and began flipping through it.

The driver got back into the car and started the engine. "Where to next, Mr. Cooper?"

Gavin didn't respond. The rustle of pages turning filled the car, slow and deliberate, creating an odd sense of tension in the air.

The driver could feel a cold sweat forming on his back. After what felt like an eternity, Gavin's voice finally broke the silence.

"Find out who that man is."

The driver blinked. "Who?"

Gavin's sharp gaze flicked out the window.

The driver followed his line of sight and immediately spotted the man standing with Jolie. His heart skipped a beat.

He thought to himself, "This Miss Quin is certainly bold already tied up with Mr. Cooper yet brazen enough to pursue someone else."

The driver quickly responded, "Understood."

Meanwhile, Jolie sneezed suddenly, frowning slightly. "Am I catching a cold?"

It seemed she'd need to take some medicine once she got home, just in case.

As soon as she stepped inside, her phone buzzed with a notification.

Glancing at the screen, she saw a message from Gavin. No words, just a location pin.

Jolie's lips pressed into a thin line, and her slender fingers tapped out a reply.

"What does this mean?"

Gavin replied, "Nine times left."

Jolie was speechless.

Taking a deep breath, she tossed the phone onto the table and sank into the sofa, her expression darkening.

The thought of being forced into such an intimate situation with him filled her with resistance. But she had no way out; after all, she'd agreed to this herself.

After sitting for a while, she sighed, got up, and headed to the bathroom to shower and change.

The location Gavin had sent her was the same place where she'd woken up last time.

When Jolie arrived, the sky had just turned dark.

She stood at the door for a long moment, hesitating before finally reaching out to ring the doorbell.

The door opened shortly after, revealing Gavin's tall frame in the doorway.

He looked as though he'd just finished working out. Dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and sweatpants, his breathing was uneven, and the collar of his shirt was soaked with sweat. Jolie forced a faint smile. "Mr. Cooper."

Gavin turned without a word, leaving the door open for her to enter, then headed straight to the bedroom to shower.

Jolie sat on the couch in the living room, her gaze lowered, clutching her bag tightly. She couldn't help but feel tense.

About twenty minutes later, the bedroom door opened. When she looked up, her eyes widened in shock. Gavin walked out wearing nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist.

His broad shoulders and narrow waist formed a striking silhouette, with well-defined muscles glistening from droplets of water that trickled down his chest, disappearing into the towel.

He casually dried his damp hair with a towel in one hand. The wet strands fell messily across his forehead,

softening his typically cold

demeanor and giving him an air of seductive nonchalance.

Jolie's cheeks flushed with a telltale redness. She quickly averted her gaze, but before she could react further, her chin was suddenly caught between his fingers, lifting her face upward. en

The faint scent of cedar lingered as his lips descended upon hers.

Chapter 1082

Jolie's breath hitched as Gavin captured her completely off guard. His lips dominated hers with an intensity that left her no room to resist, his tongue teasing and tangling as though he intended to consume her entirely. "Mmph..."

A muffled sound escaped her, and she instinctively tried to push him away. The kiss was overwhelming, leaving her breathless, and she felt as if she couldn't take it.

But the moment her hands brushed against his skin, she recoiled as though burned.

He had just taken a shower.

He was wearing nothing but a towel, his skin warm and damp, carrying the faint scent of soap.

Fortunately, the kiss ended as abruptly as it began. He pulled back slightly, though his breath still lingered over her lips, leaving her flustered.

"You were going to push me away?" he asked, his deep voice tinged with something unreadable as his eyes locked on her flushed face.

Jolie's lashes quivered, her hands frozen mid-air, and her voice trembled as she stammered, "I... I wasn't ready."

Gavin chuckled softly, his thumb brushing lightly over the curve of her jaw. "And when will you ever be ready? Next year? Next decade?" Jolie bit her lip, speechless.

"Besides," he added in a calm tone, "weren't you the one who wanted to end this as quickly as possible?"

He had a way of piercing through her thoughts with unsettling precision, making her feel as if every layer of her defenses had been stripped away.

Standing before him, Jolie felt utterly exposed, as though all her secrets were laid bare. The realization unsettled her deeply.

Taking a shallow breath, she pressed her lips together and said, "Fine, let's get this over with."

She closed her eyes tightly, bracing herself.

But the heated kiss she expected never came. After a long pause, curiosity got the better of her, and she opened her eyes to find him still in the same position, gazing at her with a dark, unreadable expression. His eyes, black as night, seemed to pull her in, their intensity making her heart pound.

Feeling unnerved, she blinked and asked hesitantly, "What... what's wrong?"

Without answering, Gavin released her and turned, striding toward the kitchen.

"Hungry," he said flatly, tossing the words over his shoulder as his tall figure disappeared into the dining area.

Jolie froze.

Hungry?

She had assumed he'd go straight to the point.

But as soon as he mentioned it, her stomach growled softly in response, as if in agreement.

Pressing her lips together, she stood and followed him into the dining room.

On the table were six dishes and two sets of plates and utensils, neatly arranged.

"Did you include me in dinner too?" Jolie asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Are you hungry?" Gavin countered.

Jolie nodded honestly. "Starving."

"Then sit down and eat," he said simply before beginning his meal.

He didn't even bother putting on a shirt, sitting there casually in nothing but his towel. Jolie caught a glimpse of him, her cheeks heating inexplicably before she quickly averted her gaze and sat down to eat.

Neither of them was particularly talkative, so the atmosphere remained relatively calm as they ate.

Jolie finished quickly, feeling satisfied.

Glancing at Gavin, she said, "I'm going to take a shower."

"Alright," he replied indifferently, not even looking up.

She stood and headed to the guest room. While showering, her thoughts drifted, and Gavin's tall, powerful frame flashed in her mind—broad shoulders, defined muscles, and an unmistakable strength.

Normally, he wore his suits so impeccably, not a crease out of place. Who would have guessed what was hidden beneath?

The more she thought about it, the more she realized... maybe she hadn't lost entirely.

His physical presence, his prowess-he was exceptional, undeniably so.

Every time they were intimate, the pleasure was undeniable, leaving her breathless and fulfilled.

If that was the case, then why not let go and enjoy it?

After all, there was no escaping this arrangement.

So why not savor the

moments of joy and make the best

of the present?

Chapter 1083

After finishing her shower, Jolie felt as though she'd gained some clarity. With her thoughts sorted, she decided there was no point in being reserved anymore. She stepped out of the bathroom dressed in a robe. But when she walked into the living room, Gavin was nowhere to be seen.

"Huh? Where did he go?" she muttered, a hint of confusion flickering across her face. She called out tentatively, "Mr. Cooper? Mr. Cooper?"

"Over here."

A voice came from behind her, slightly off to the side.

Turning around, Jolie spotted Gavin standing at the doorway of a room, the space behind him shrouded in darkness.

She walked over, tilting her head curiously. "Mr. Cooper, what are you doing?"

Gavin's eyes darkened slightly as he studied her.

Something about her had changed.

Her gaze seemed brighter, clearer, and when she looked at him, the previous cold indifference was no longer as pronounced.

What had happened to cause such a shift in her demeanor?

"Come in," he said, turning and walking into the room.

Jolie hesitated for a moment before following him inside.

She quickly realized it was a home theater.

The spacious room was furnished with several leather recliners, all facing a massive screen at the far end. The lighting was dim, casting the space in a cozy, intimate glow.

Gavin took a seat in one of the chairs, reclining slightly as he settled in.

Jolie glanced around before asking, "Mr. Cooper, are you planning to watch a movie?"

"Do you not enjoy movies?" he replied evenly.

She stepped forward and sat down in the chair next to his, a small table separating them.

On the table, an assortment of fruits and snacks had been thoughtfully arranged.

"I do," Jolie replied.

But wasn't she here for something else?

Dinner made sense-it was around mealtime. But now, a movie?

What was this supposed to mean? Was this all part of some elaborate prelude?

Gavin glanced at her. "What kind of movies do you like?"

"Comedy, horror, thrillers, action... anything, really," she said casually.

"No interest in romance?" he asked.

Jolie's lips twitched into a faint smile. "It's all fake. Nothing worth watching."

Gavin raised an eyebrow, studying her expression. Her clear eyes betrayed no hesitation; she meant every word.

She didn't believe in love, and

naturally, she didn't buy into the love stories portrayed in movies. If it was all just actors playing roles, why not watch something more exciting instead?

Without another word, Gavin tapped on his phone. The massive screen in front of them lit up, and the lights in the room dimmed until they were completely off.

Jolie adjusted her chair into a

recliner-bed with a few taps on the

controls, settling in comfortably.

Picking up a strawberry from thonet

table, she popped it into her mouth, her eyes narrowing in quiet

contentment.

Gavin watched her every move, his gaze lingering as she lazily ate one strawberry after another. For a moment, his focus shifted from her to the strawberries. Were they really that good? Curious, he picked one up and tasted it himself.

It was... fine. Nothing special.

The movie began. It was a

high-octane superhero blockbuster.

The stunning effects and

action-packed scenes quickly grabbed their attention, delivering an exhilarating experience that left little room for small talk.

Jolie was fully engrossed in the movie, completely unaware of the man's frequent glances in her direction.

The film lasted about an hour and a half, and by the time it ended, it was well into the evening.

She glanced at the time-nearly ten o'clock.

Surely, it was time to get to the main purpose of her visit? She was eager to wrap things up and head home to sleep.

Turning to Gavin, she asked, "Mr. Cooper, are we watching another one?"

Gavin gave her a brief glance and replied, "What do you feel like watching next?"

Huh? That wasn't what she meant at all!

Jolie bit her lip, a flicker of embarrassment crossing her face, but she steeled herself and asked bluntly, "When are we getting started?"

Chapter 1084

Why was he wasting time with all these talks? Wouldn't it be better to get straight to the point?

Gavin easily read the impatience in her eyes.

He remained silent for a moment before shifting his gaze away from her.

Jolie frowned, confused by his reaction. What was he thinking?

After a long pause, Gavin stood and walked toward the door. Jolie followed him out of the theater room.

The living room lights were bright, casting a warm glow over the space.

Gavin, now wearing a gray robe, his broad shoulders, and long legs effortlessly exuding authority, strode toward the liquor cabinet.

He opened the glass doors, pulled out a bottle, and poured himself a small glass of wine. Taking a slow sip, he leaned against the counter with an air of ease.

Jolie didn't push him further. She had come to understand he operated on his own terms and at his own pace.

"Miss Quin, what's on your mind?" he asked suddenly.

"Excuse me?" Jolie blinked, startled by the unexpected question. "What do you mean?"

His sudden inquiry threw her off, leaving her uncertain of his intentions.

Holding the glass in one hand, Gavin leaned against the bar, his dark eyes fixed on her. "Are you planning to marry Ian Moore?"

The question made Jolie's brows knit tightly together. "Mr. Cooper, what do you mean by that? Are you investigating me?"

Gavin raised the glass and drained the remaining wine in one motion. Then he set the glass aside and stepped closer to her, his imposing presence closing the gap between them.

"If you're going to arrange a marriage, why look so far afield when a perfectly good option is right in front of you?"

Jolie stood her ground, meeting his gaze steadily. "Because I don't like what's in front of me."

"Oh?" Gavin arched a brow, his tone laced with intrigue. "But from what I've seen, your family seems quite satisfied."

It was as if everything was playing out exactly as he had planned.

That suffocating sense of being manipulated washed over her again, making her stomach tighten in unease.

Jolie hated this about him—his ability to make everything feel like it was under his control. She worked hard to suppress her frustration and said, "Mr. Cooper, just because my family approves doesn't mean I do. Besides, my rebellious phase might be a little late, but I'm in it now. I don't like anything they've arranged for me."

A rebellious phase.

So that was what this was. No wonder she'd gone to meet Ian—it was all part of her resistance.

"Pointless. What you're doing changes nothing."

Jolie's expression turned colder. "Mr. Cooper, whatever is going on between us won't last long. When

these nine times are over, I don't et

want anything to do with you. Since you like my sister, why don't you focus on her and stop interfering in other people's lives?"

She'd decided to lay everything out in the open. It was better to be direct than to keep playing this back-and-forth game.

Gavin's gaze remained calm as he asked, "Does it bother you that I liked her?"

Jolie frowned immediately. "Why would I care? I don't give a damn about you."

His face betrayed no emotion as if her words didn't affect him at all.

Jolie continued, "Mr. Cooper, there's no point in having this conversation. We both know we'll never end up together."

Without saying a word, Gavin suddenly grabbed her hand and pulled her toward the bedroom.

"Don't speak too soon."

No matter how much Jolie insisted

they couldn't and wouldn't be together, Gavin remained

composed, as if utterly convinced

that she could never escape his

grasp.

Jolie stared at him, exasperated.

He was so confident-too confident!

He seemed to believe he could easily read people's minds, control their thoughts and actions. But he was wrong about her.

She wouldn't fall for it. She didn't like him, and that wasn't going to change. Not now, not ever.

The bedroom was dimly lit, casting a soft glow over the room.

The bed was plush and yielding, and when she fell onto it, her body bounced slightly from the impact.

Gavin's tall frame loomed over her, shadowing her smaller figure. His dark gaze lingered on her lips as he spoke in a low, deliberate tone.

"Miss Quin, at the very least, you do enjoy how good I make you feel in bed."

Chapter 1085

Jolie was speechless.

This man was utterly shameless!

The night was a whirlwind of passion.

Once she decided to let go, she embraced the experience fully.

Her sudden enthusiasm surprised Gavin, who hadn't expected such a shift in her demeanor. Her flushed cheeks, quickened breaths, and slender legs wrapped around his waist revealed a fiery side of her that was completely unlike before. This time was far more intense than their previous encounters.

It wasn't until dawn that Jolie finally fell asleep. Gavin carried her to the bathroom, cleaned her up, and then carefully tucked her back into bed. Watching her sleep, her defenses completely down, his eyes darkened with unreadable emotion.

...

When Jolie woke, it was already noon.

Turning over, she accidentally rolled into Gavin's chest.

Startled, she froze.

Opening her eyes, she saw him propped up against the headboard. A pair of glasses rested on his face, and a tablet sat on his lap as he worked on something.

"You're not at work?" she asked, her voice muffled from just waking up.

Her sleepy tone, coupled with the lingering drowsiness in her expression, made her seem adorably innocent.

Gavin removed his glasses, set the tablet aside, and turned his gaze to her. "Are you hungry?"

Jolie nodded.

Without another word, Gavin got up and left the room.

She sat there for a moment, feeling dazed and confused about their dynamic.

Were they... too comfortable with each other?

It felt oddly domestic, almost like they were an old married couple.

Shaking off the thought, Jolie covered her eyes with her hand, frustration bubbling up inside her. This feeling was unsettling.

After washing up and getting dressed, she walked out to find Gavin in the kitchen.

He stood tall by the counter, wearing a black apron tied around his waist. His shirt sleeves were rolled up to his elbows as he focused on chopping vegetables.

The rhythmic sound of the knife

hitting the cutting board filled the air.

His

movements were precise and

so

efficient, exuding a natural ease that caught her off guard.

Leaning against the doorframe, Jolie watched him in mild surprise.

This was Gavin Cooper, the heir of the Cooper family, yet here he was, cooking.

As if sensing her curiosity, he spoke without looking up. "I didn't like the food abroad, so I taught myself how to cook."

Gavin didn't turn his head but seemed to sense her gaze and read her thoughts effortlessly. Without looking back, he spoke directly. Jolie fell silent, startled.

"How is his intuition this sharp?" she thought.

Was this man a devil?

Her lips parted as if to say something, but she hesitated. Initially planning to leave without a word, she decided against it at the last second. "Mr. Cooper, you're very impressive."

Gavin finally turned, his eyes meeting hers. "In which way, exactly?"

Jolie blinked, taken aback.

Was he flirting with her?

Choosing not to dignify his question with an answer, she turned on her heel and walked away.

Gavin's lips curved slightly in amusement as he continued preparing the meal.

Settling on the couch in the living room, Jolie picked up her phone and began scrolling through her messages. One from Daisy popped up, asking her where she was. Jolie frowned but ignored it as another notification came in-this time from Ian.

"Have you made up your mind, Miss Quin?"

Jolie didn't reply immediately. Before she could decide, her phone rang. It was Dolly.

"Hello, Dolly," Jolie answered.

"Jolie! So, what do you think? How do you feel about Ian?"

Jolie hesitated for a moment. "Do you really know everything about him?"

"Not entirely. Why? Did you notice something off about him?"

Jolie lowered her gaze. "Not exactly. He seems nice, but I'm still thinking it over."

Dolly laughed. "What's there to think about? You'll never know what he's really like unless you spend more time with him! How about this: let's go out tonight for dinner and a

movie I'll set it up just like I net

last

time-halfway through, I'll make an excuse and leave so you two can have some time alone. Sound good?"

Chapter 1086

Jolie chuckled lightly. "Dolly, you've really thought this through, but I'm not ready to deal with it yet. When I've made up my mind, I'll reach out to him."

Dolly pressed on. "What exactly are you considering? Maybe I can help you figure it out."

Grabbing a cushion, Jolie said, "Everything."

Dolly went quiet for a moment before sighing. "Jolie, don't you think you might be overthinking this? Your goal from the start was a simple arranged marriage. You're not going to fall for him, and your relationship will be respectful but distant. "If you're going to overanalyze even an arrangement like this, it'll only make you unhappy. After all, in our circles, how many people are truly in love?"

Jolie hesitated, her thoughts drifting. "You're probably right, Dolly."

Dolly sighed again. "I won't push you. Just make sure you've thought it through before you contact him. He's approaching this with the same mindset, so don't leave him hanging for too long." "Alright, I" Jolie began to respond but suddenly froze as a shadow loomed over her.

Before she could react, a warm, firm pressure descended on her lips. Gavin had swooped in and kissed her, his breath hot against her skin as he deepened the kiss with deliberate intensity. A startled gasp escaped her, and her eyes widened in shock.

She stared at him, utterly incredulous at his sudden move.

"What's that sound?" Dolly's confused voice crackled through the phone.

Jolie snapped back to reality, quickly shoving Gavin away.

She fumbled for an excuse. "I just... took a bite of something. I need to go eat now. Let's talk later."

Without waiting for a reply, she hung up abruptly.

Turning to Gavin, her brows furrowed deeply. "Mr. Cooper, what are you doing?"

Gavin straightened up and met her gaze with a calm expression. "Breakfast's ready."

Jolie blinked, utterly baffled. "Then why didn't you just call me? Why did you kiss me?"

Gavin's tone remained unhurried as he replied, "I assumed you didn't want anyone overhearing our relationship, so I found another way to signal you."

Jolie was speechless.

He could've just tapped her or something!

Why did he have to kiss her?

She couldn't shake the feeling he'd done it on purpose.

Jolie's clear eyes flickered with a trace of irritation, but she quickly masked it with calmness. "Mr.

Cooper, think once we're off the

bed, we should keep somet

We're not close enough to kiss whenever and wherever we like."

With that, she turned and walked straight to the dining room.

Gavin watched her retreating figure, his expression unreadable.

She'd just gotten out of his bed, yet she spoke so coldly.

"Women... impossible to figure out," he thought and shook his head as he followed her to the table.

The pasta he'd prepared was simple,

but when Jolie glanced at the plate, her eyes lit up. Picking up her

utensils, she dove in, and her

expression softened as she tasted

how surprisingly good it tasted

Gavin entered the room and sat down, but Jolie paid him no mind, focusing entirely on her food.

When she finished, she got up and left without a word, her face composed yet her actions dripping with defiance.

"She got quite a temper," Gavin thought, glancing at her briefly before turning back to his own meal.

...

Once she stepped out of the neighborhood, Jolie finally let out a long breath.

But just as she relaxed, a car pulled up beside her, and the window rolled down, revealing Selena's puzzled face.

"What are you doing here?" Selena asked, her expression a mix of curiosity and suspicion. Jolie froze.

to you noment, she was at a los's

How was the supposed

this?

After a brief pause, Jolie pursed her lips and asked, "Can you give me a ride somewhere?"

Selena narrowed her eyes, clearly skeptical, but eventually said, "Get in."

Jolie climbed into the passenger seat, buckled up, and Selena asked, "Where to?"

Chapter 1087

"The pharmacy," Jolie replied.

Selena raised an eyebrow, surprised. "The pharmacy? Are you feeling unwell?"

Jolie pressed her lips together, choosing not to answer.

Seeing her reluctance, Selena didn't push further and drove to the nearest pharmacy.

Jolie got out of the car, bought a pack of pills and a bottle of water, then returned to the car and immediately took the medication.

Selena caught sight of the label on the box and frowned deeply. "Why are you taking birth control pills?"

Jolie drank a sip of water and said matter-of-factly, "Because I don't want to get pregnant right now."

Selena was momentarily speechless.

Her mind began connecting the dots-Jolie had come out of that neighborhood, not looking for her, and it was still morning...

So, she'd been with a boyfriend?

But something about Jolie's demeanor didn't quite fit the idea of a romantic visit to a boyfriend.

Then another possibility struck Selena: Gavin also lived in that neighborhood. Her gaze sharpened as she studied Jolie's expression. "You..."

Selena opened her mouth, wanting to ask more.

But Jolie cut her off. "Don't ask. Whatever you're thinking, you're right, but not completely."

Selena blinked, confused.

Now she was even more curious.

Still, if Jolie didn't want to talk about it, Selena wasn't one to pry.

Instead, she asked, "Where to next?"

"Home," Jolie said.

Selena shook her head. "You're on your own for that. I'm not heading back there." "Not to the Quin family house. Take me to my apartment. I'm living alone now." Selena didn't say another word, restarting the car.

She had always kept her distance from the Quin family, her feelings toward them teetering on rejection. The only reason she maintained contact with Jolie was that they had never clashed.

When they arrived, Selena stopped the car and said simply, "Take care of yourself."

Then, without waiting for a response, she drove off.

Jolie stood watching the car disappear, her lips curling into a faint smile. But it didn't last long before it faded away completely.

Back at her apartment, she fell into bed and slept deeply. When she woke again, it was already evening.

The room was dim, and for a moment, she sat blankly on the bed, an inexplicable wave of loneliness washing over her, as though the entire world had abandoned her.

Shaking off the feeling, she got up, turned on the lights, and made herself a plate of pasta. But as she ate, she realized something-her cooking paled in comparison to Gavin's. Her pasta was ordinary, uninspired, utterly lacking the flair his had.

"How is he so good at everything?" she wondered, irritated.

How could someone as busy as Gavin still find the time and energy to learn how to cook and excel at it?

"It's infuriating, comparing yourself to someone like that," she thought with a sigh.

Lost in her thoughts, she was startled when her phone began to ring.

Picking it up, she saw Daisy's name on the screen.

"Hello, Mom," she answered, her tone calm.

Daisy's warm voice came through the line. "Jolie, your birthday is in a week. Is there anything you'd like?"

"I'd like to be free from your control-is that an option?" she thought.

Lowering her gaze, Jolie replied, "Nothing in particular."

Daisy said, "How about this? We'll organize a birthday party for you-a dinner cruise on the bay. We'll invite all the prominent families from Larbor City. You should also personally invite Mr. Cooper. It's your birthday; he'll surely come. We can celebrate properly then.'

Even her birthday had to be turned into a networking event.

What was the point?

"Jolie, did you hear me?" Daisy asked when Jolie remained silent.

"I heard you," Jolie replied distractedly.

Daisy chuckled, pleased. "Good.

Come home in the next few days so we can finalize the guest list. You'll also need to personally deliver an invitation to Mr. Cooper-it'll show our sincerity."

"Alright."

Chapter 1088

Jolie set her phone aside, waiting for Daisy to finish her rambling before the call finally ended. She suddenly felt a sense of emptiness, as though everything around her had lost its flavor.

Pushing her plate of pasta away, she stood up and went to her bedroom to change clothes. Afterward, she stepped outside and made a call to Ian.

"Mr. Moore, good evening," Jolie began directly. "I've made my decision. I think we can give this a try."

Ian's voice was warm as he replied, "I think so too. Miss Quin, have you had dinner yet?"

"Not yet."

"Then let's have it together," Ian offered. "I'll send you the location. It's a new restaurant I recently discovered-it's quite good."

"Sounds great," Jolie agreed.

She drove to the restaurant Ian mentioned, and by the time she arrived, he was already waiting.

"Mr. Moore, you're early," Jolie said with a smile as she sat down across from him.

Ian smiled gently. "This is technically our first official date. Naturally, I wanted to arrive early."

Jolie raised an eyebrow, amused, before saying, "My birthday is in a week. The Quin family is hosting a dinner cruise to celebrate. Would you be willing to attend as my boyfriend?" Ian leaned back slightly, a faintly amused smile tugging at his lips. "You're putting me to work this quickly?"

Jolie replied calmly, "As you said, this is a partnership. You help me, and I'll return the favor."

Ian studied her for a moment before nodding. "That works for me."

Jolie extended her hand with a small smile. "To a successful partnership."

Ian took her hand and shook it firmly. "To a successful partnership."

After finishing the meal, Jolie didn't feel much relief. Still, she believed her decision to push back against her family's control was a small victory, and that was enough for her.

In the days leading up to her birthday, she returned to the Quin family home. Daisy pulled her along to choose a gown for the celebration and pick out invitation designs. Finally, the day of the birthday dinner cruise arrived.

That morning, Jolie opened her eyes and sent a message to Selena.

"Happy birthday, Selena."

There was no reply.

Jolie stared at her phone for a moment, a faint trace of loneliness flickering across her eyes. But she quickly brushed it aside and got up to start her day.

...

At the Cooper estate, Selena held her phone in hand, her expression unreadable.

A maid approached Aveline and said, "Miss Aveline, someone from the Quin, family delivered an invitation for you. They're inviting you to Miss Quin's birthday party."

Aveline glanced at Selena before taking the invitation.

Selena put down her phone, saying nothing.

Aveline skimmed the invitation and remarked, "I won't be going."

She casually set the invitation aside and turned her attention back to Selena. "By the way, is Aaron coming to spend the day with you?" Selena nodded. "Yes, he should be here soon."

Aveline's lips curved into a soft smile. "Then I'll leave you two to enjoy your time together. But before I go, I have a gift for you."

She handed Selena a beautifully wrapped gift box.

Selena's eyes lit up. "Wow, a surprise!"

Aveline smiled. "Open it and see if you like it."

Selena nodded eagerly, but as she opened the box, her expression froze for a moment.

"What's this?"

She pulled out a small model of a villa-intricate, elegant, and beautifully designed down to every detail.

Aveline chuckled. "It's your gift along with the keys to your new home."

Selena gasped, covering her mouth in disbelief. "Oh my God! You live up to your status as the heiress of the Cooper family. You're so generous!"

Aveline had given her a whole villa as a gift!

Aveline added with a smile, "That's not all. There's more inside. You and Aaron can go take a look together."

"Absolutely! I can't wait to see what else is there," Selena exclaimed, nodding enthusiastically.

Just then, Gavin's voice came from the doorway. "What's that?"

Chapter 1089

Aveline and Selena turned toward the voice and saw Gavin standing nearby, holding the Quin family's invitation between his fingers. His expression remained impassive. "The invitation to Miss Quin's birthday party," Aveline explained.

Gavin set the invitation down without comment and walked away, his indifference as apparent as ever.

Aveline frowned slightly. "Brother seems unusually interested in the Quin family."

"Speaking of which..." Selena tapped her chin thoughtfully. "I came across something recently, and I'm not sure if it's related to him."

"What is it?" Aveline asked, her eyes bright with curiosity.

Selena recounted her encounter with Jolie near the neighborhood gate and how she had seen her buying birth control pills.

"Do you think it's possible that she and Gavin..." Selena trailed off, but her meaning was clear.

Aveline's expression turned contemplative. "It's possible, but they don't seem like they're in a relationship."

Selena hesitated, frowning. "Gavin wouldn't... take advantage of a young girl, would he?"

"I wouldn't know," Aveline replied.

Having only recently returned, she realized she didn't fully understand Gavin and Gernard, let alone Gavin's personal life. Selena's worry deepened. "I think I need to bring this up with him at some point."

Aveline raised a brow. "And how exactly do you plan to address it?"

"I'll just... ask him not to mess with Jolie," Selena said, though her voice wavered slightly, betraying her lack of confidence.

Aveline sighed. "They're both adults, Selena. Whatever they're doing, they know where the lines are. Besides, have you really let go of your own issues with the Quin family?" Selena fell silent.

She couldn't deny it her relationship with Jolie wasn't the kind where she could meddle freely.

"Maybe you're right," Selena said after a long pause. "I'll just take it one step at a time."

...

Night fell, and the massive cruise ship gleamed under a blanket of dazzling lights. Towering thirteen stories high, the luxurious vessel radiated grandeur, casting shimmering reflections on the rippling sea. Prominent families dressed in their finest attire ascended the staircase, their polite laughter and cheerful chatter filling the air as they mingled.

Daisy and Terence stood at the entrance, warmly greeting the arriving guests. However, Jolie, the star of the evening, wasn't present at the reception. She was to make her entrance only after everyone had boarded and the ship had set sail.

The sea sparkled under the fading hues of sunset, its golden light resembling scattered fragments of treasure glistening atop the waves.

In a private lounge, Jolie sat waiting. Her gown was already on, and her hair and makeup were perfectly done. She held her phone, typing out a message to Ian. "Are you here yet?"

Ian replied, "I've already arrived."

"Are you ready?"

Ian replied, "I won't lie-I'm actually a little nervous."

Jolie chuckled softly, replying, "Don't be. After tonight, we'll be completely tied together."

There would be no turning back after this.

Her gaze drifted out the window,

landing on the glimmering ocean. A fleeting sense of melancholy

washed over her, and before she knew it

she could stop herself, a familiar powerful, handsome face surfaced

in her mind.

Shaking off the thought immediately, she refocused on perfecting her appearance, forcing herself to push any unnecessary distractions aside.

...

Guests continued to arrive in waves, but Terence noticed someone missing.

Turning to Daisy, he asked, "Did Jolie deliver the invitation to Mr. Cooper?"

Daisy nodded. "I saw her write it with my own eyes. But he hasn't shown up... Did she not send it?"

Terence's brows furrowed. "That girl! We've spoiled her too much, and now she's gone and done this!"

Daisy's expression darkened, but

she quickly composed herself. "Enough. Let the captain know time to set sail. We can't delay the banquet for one person."

"Fine," Terence muttered, preparing to leave with her.

Just then, the roar of a car engine drew their attention. A sleek luxury car pulled up in the distance, its polished surface gleaming under the lights. Daisy's eyes lit up with recognition. "That's Mr. Cooper's car-he's here!"

Chapter 1090

The luxury car rolled to a stop, and the driver promptly stepped out to open the door. Gavin emerged, his tall and commanding presence instantly drawing attention. Terence and Daisy quickly descended the steps to greet him.

"Mr. Cooper, it's wonderful to see you," Terence said, a flattering smile on his face.

"You've come at the perfect time," Daisy added, her tone enthusiastic. "Please, come aboard."

Gavin gave a faint nod. "Of course."

The banquet was being held on the third deck of the ship, where many guests had already gathered. Some stood out on the deck, admiring the sunset over the water. Gavin's arrival caused a ripple of surprise among the crowd, but the reaction quickly turned into a flurry of polite greetings as people eagerly approached him.

Jolie noticed him immediately. His presence was commanding, making him stand out effortlessly, like a lighthouse towering over a crowded harbor.

Her brows furrowed slightly.

Why was he here?

She distinctly remembered not delivering the invitation to him.

Knock, knock.

The sound of the door opening pulled her from her thoughts.

Turning around, she saw Daisy entering the room.

"Jolie, it seems Mr. Cooper has high hopes for you. You must seize this opportunity and do your best to win his favor," Daisy said, taking Jolie's hand with a pleased smile.

Jolie didn't respond, her expression indifferent and distant.

Daisy noticed her reluctance and asked, "Jolie, what's on your mind?"

Looking up, Jolie met her gaze. "If I don't like it, do I have to do it anyway?"

Daisy reached out and gently stroked her cheek.

"What nonsense are you saying? Where else in Larbor City could you find someone more outstanding than Mr. Cooper? If he's showing interest in you, you should take the chance.

Becoming Mrs. Cooper is a dream countless women would give anything for." Jolie pressed her lips together, remaining silent.

Daisy patted Jolie's hand and said, "Get ready and come down in a bit."

"Alright," Jolie replied softly.

As Daisy left, Jolie turned back to the window, her gaze drifting to the deck.

Gavin stood there, a champagne flute in hand, exuding an air of cold elegance. People gravitated toward him, eagerly initiating conversation, but he remained aloof, never making the first move.

He had every reason to be proud-his presence alone commanded attention.

But she couldn't understand one thing:

Why was he here?

Could it really be, as Daisy suggested, that he was interested in her?

Ridiculous!

She scoffed at the thought. She had seen it clearly before his feelings had always been for Selena.

Shaking her head, she turned away from the scene outside, dismissing the idea entirely.

Regardless of his reasons, tonight would mark the beginning of Daisy's relentless push for her to get closer to Gavin. That much was certain.

...

The cruise ship glided smoothly

across the water, the sun setting behind the horizon and casting a warm glow over the ocean before disappearing entirely. As night fell, the ship came alive with lights, illuminating the sea around it like a floating palace.

Daisy stepped onto the stage and began her speech, warmly thanking the distinguished guests for attending Jolie's birthday celebration. Afterward, she enthusiastically introduced the star of the evening.

"Let's all welcome the birthday girl-Jolie Quin!"

Jolie appeared gracefully, descending the stairs to join the crowd, her expression calm yet poised as all eyes turned toward her.

The lights in the grand banquet hall suddenly dimmed, leaving the room in near darkness save for a single spotlight focused on the staircase.

All eyes turned, and there she was-Jolie Quin, standing elegantly at the top of the stairs.

She looked every bit the part of a

refined princess, dressed in a champagne-colored gown that shimmered under the light. A diamond tiara adorned her head, and her flawless makeup only enhanced her natural beauty.

With one hand resting lightly on the railing, she descended step by step, the spotlight following her every move.

Guests watched her intently, many with looks of admiration and awe as she glided down with an effortless grace.

Reaching the bottom of the stairs, Jolie joined Daisy, who greeted the crowd with a warm smile and took her daughter's hand.

"Thank you all once again for attending my daughter's birthday celebration," Daisy announced. "I hope you all have a wonderful evening of food, dancing, and fun!" Applause filled the room as the opening dance was announced.

Jolie, as the star of the evening, was expected to lead the first dance. She would choose a gentleman from the crowd to join her-a decision that would undoubtedly draw attention to the chosen man.

The one she picked would likely be seen as a potential suitor and a key prospect for a future alliance with the Quin family.