

Divorced Me 921

Chapter 921

The next morning.

Sunlight peeked into the room as Maria groggily opened her eyes, only to realize she was clinging to Sidney like an octopus.

The memories of last night came rushing back like a tide.

A cold glint flickered in her eyes as she turned onto her back.

Sidney stirred, glanced at her, and said, "Last night..."

Maria cut him off, "Last night, someone deliberately set me up."

Sidney nodded. "I'll help you."

Maria's eyelashes fluttered slightly before she suddenly asked, "Why?"

"What?" Sidney looked momentarily taken aback.

Maria fixed her gaze on him, her expression serious and clear. "Why did you stay last night? And now, why are you offering to help me?" Sidney's face tightened.

After a brief pause, he finally said, "You didn't let me leave last night."

Maria blinked, then unexpectedly laughed. She sat up swiftly, straddling his waist.

"Sidney, you're lying."

Her fingers traced lightly over his chest. "Last night, I told you to stop. So why didn't you let me go?"

At that moment, they were both completely bare, and her bold movement caused the covers to slip, revealing her pale skin.

The red marks scattered across her body stood out like blooming crimson flowers, rising and falling with each breath.

Sidney's breath hitched, his eyes instinctively catching a glimpse of her exposed skin.

His Adam's apple bobbed as he muttered, "I wasn't lying."

Maria clearly noticed the change in him, and she leaned forward slightly, brushing against him teasingly, her touch both light and suggestive. Sidney squeezed his eyes shut tightly. "Get off."

But Maria didn't budge. Her nose brushed along his cheek as she whispered, "Is it really so hard to admit you like me?"

Sidney remained silent, his mind a mess, just as it had been since last night.

He couldn't explain why.

The room was quiet for a long while. When Maria saw he wasn't responding, her interest in continuing suddenly evaporated. "Forget it."

She slipped off of him, saying coldly, "I'm not interested in your feelings anyway."

With that, she turned to leave the bed.

But suddenly, something tightened around her waist, and before she knew it, Maria was pinned down onto the bed. "You..."

Maria was startled and tried to turn around, but Sidney's strength was overwhelming. He held her down, leaving her helplessly sprawled on the bed, forced to endure.

Despite her earlier teasing, her body

responded in the most fervent

way yielding

easily to his

"Sidney, you bastard..." Maria muttered softly, cursing him under her breath.

Sidney remained silent, his lips trailing kisses along her neck and shoulders as the covers slipped away. An hour later.

Maria lay exhausted on the bed, too drained to even lift a finger.

From the bathroom, the sound of running water echoed-it was Sidney, showering.

"Hmph..."

Her body had been honest, after all.

She closed her eyes, resting for a while before finally getting up and walking to the bathroom door.

"I need a shower too."

Not long after, the door swung open.

Sidney, caught off guard, was

greeted by the sight of her standing there,

completely bare, her body now

marked with even more trauma

of

their encounter.

His gaze darkened as he silently stepped aside.

Maria, uninterested in acknowledging him, walked past and entered the bathroom.

Sidney left, downing a glass of cold water to calm himself.

Looking at the mess of the room, his brows furrowed tightly.

Something felt off...

It seemed like things were heading in a direction he could no longer control.

Just then, his phone began to ring.

Chapter 922

Sidney glanced at his phone-it was Fawn.

Since he'd turned her down last time, she hadn't contacted him.

Why was she suddenly calling now?

"Hello, Miss Powell," he answered, keeping his tone polite.

Fawn's voice was serious. "Where are you right now?"

Sidney asked, "Is there something you need, Miss Powell?"

"There is. It's important!" Fawn's voice grew sharper. "Your former boss, she's not as innocent as she seems. I saw her last night checking into a hotel with an old man. Sidney, don't let her fool you!"

Sidney's brow furrowed immediately.

"Do you have proof, Miss Powell?"

"I saw it with my own eyes! How about this-I'll send you the location. Come see for yourself, and you'll know I'm not lying."

Sidney responded, "Alright, send it over."

Last night, Maria had been with him the entire time.

And before he showed up, there had been an old man in that room.

Maria had clearly been set up.

And now, this call from Fawn... It was hard not to suspect she was involved.

Fawn continued, "I'll send it now. Come quickly."

She hung up right after, and moments later, his phone buzzed with a text.

It was the exact hotel they were in-complete with the room number.

Sidney's expression darkened further.

Maria emerged from the bathroom, catching sight of his troubled look.

"What's wrong?" she asked, puzzled.

Sidney hesitated before explaining everything to her.

"Tch!" Maria scoffed, a cold smirk playing on her lips. "It's clear now who set me up. I'm sure you've figured it out too."

She walked over, taking his phone and glancing at the message.

After thinking for a moment, she typed out a reply and sent it.

Sidney watched her actions silently, not stopping her.

Maria sat on the couch, her expression calm.

"Wait for it," she said. "She'll be here soon."

Sure enough, about half an hour later, there was a knock on the door.

Maria glanced at Sidney, gesturing toward the door with her chin. "Go on, open it."

Sidney, now fully dressed, walked over and opened the door.

Fawn stood there, her face twisted in frustration. Her gaze quickly swept the

Sidneyom, landing first on

then on Maria, who was lounging on the couch in a bathrobe. The room was a mess—clothes scattered across the carpet, hinting at exactly what had happened the night before.

How could this be?

Last night, wasn't Maria supposed to be with that disgusting old man?

Why was Sidney here instead?

Unable to hold back her frustration, Fawn blurted out, "Why are you here?"

Sidney looked at her with a mixture of disappointment and confusion. "Why did you do this?"

"What?" Fawn was taken aback, not expecting the question.

Maria stood up and walked over to her.

Without warning, she slapped Fawn across the face.

Fawn screamed, clutching her cheek in disbelief. "How dare you hit me?"

Maria calmly slapped her again. "I did hit you. What are you going to do about it?"

Fawn's face stung with pain, her expression now a mixture of shock and anger. Her eyes burned with hatred as she glared at Maria.

Maria's voice was cold. "It seems your parents were right. Someone like you is only fit to be used for a transaction, not worthy of real love."

"I'll make you pay!" Fawn screamed, her composure completely shattered. The thought of her plan failing, and the fact that she would now be forced to marry that old man filled her with despair. She felt like her entire life had been ruined.

With a cry, she lunged at Maria.

Maria frowned, stepping back a couple of paces.

Before Fawn could reach her, Sidney swiftly grabbed her wrist, stopping her in her tracks.

Chapter 923

"Why did you do this?" Sidney's gaze remained fixed on Fawn, his confusion still gnawing at him.

Tears welled up in Fawn's eyes as she cried, "It's her! She's the one who ruined everything! If it weren't for her, you would have agreed to marry me! I wouldn't have to go through with this arranged marriage. I hate her!" Sidney's frown deepened. "It wasn't her. She never tried to stop anything. I was the one who didn't want to marry you."

"Why?" Fawn's voice trembled with disbelief. "Why didn't you want to marry me? When I proposed it, I saw you hesitate. You were considering it! Why would you change your mind?"

She stared at him, convinced he was lying, that he was defending Maria.

Sidney released her hand, his tone calm. "I have ambitions, but I'm not willing to sacrifice my marriage for them. It's as simple as that."

Fawn shook her head, her voice almost pleading. "I don't understand. It would've been a fake marriage! Why wouldn't you agree? How could you not?"

Sidney replied firmly, "Why shouldn't I refuse? Miss Powell, you've been trying to avoid your arranged marriage through this plan, but did you ever stop to consider what it would mean for me? Do you think your parents wouldn't start pressuring me too?" Fawn was momentarily speechless, her mouth opening and closing without finding the right words.

Maria shot a surprised glance at Sidney.

"Hmm... seems like we were both thinking along the same lines," she mused.

Sidney's tone grew colder. "Miss Powell, you owe her an apology."

Fawn bit her lip, glaring at Maria with venom in her eyes. "I will never apologize to her. Even if I could do it all over again, I'd make the same choice!"

With that, she spun around and stormed out.

"Hmph." Maria let out a cold laugh, her gaze trailing after Fawn with a steely glint.

Sidney looked at her, his brows furrowed. "What do you plan to do?"

Maria's voice was cool as she replied, "Naturally... I'll return the favor."

She wasn't the kind to just let things slide. If someone dared to target her, there was no way she wouldn't strike back.

Sidney didn't say much in response,

but he was still taken aback by the lengths Fawn had gone to. Her

actions were a stark contrast to the sweet, innocent image she usually projected.

After a quick clean-up, the two of them left the hotel. Maria didn't say a word to Sidney and headed straight home.

Once in her study, her fingers flew over the keyboard as she pulled up all the information she could find on the Powell family.

Then, she dug into the details of

Fawn's arranged marriage. The man she was supposed to marry was a real estate tycoon, nearly sixty years old, who had already outlived three wives. Officially, they had all died of illness, but Maria discovered that each one had actually died from abuse.

The tycoon had a twisted hobby-he enjoyed "sharing" women with his son.

The old man from last night was none other than the real estate tycoon.

Fawn wouldn't surrender easily-she would try everything to escape this marriage.

"That won't do," Maria thought. "I'll make sure she goes through with it myself." Nightfall.

Inside the bar, the lights flashed in vivid colors, the music pounding through the air. Fawn sat with her group of friends, downing drink after drink, her face a mask of frustration.

If she couldn't find a way out soon, she'd be married to that old man.

"What now?" she wondered desperately. "What should I do?"

At that moment, one of her friends leaned in with a suggestion. "If you hate the old man so much, why not go after his son? He's about your age. You're stuck with the family either way-might as well pick the younger one."

Fawn seethed with anger, but she had no better options. "How can I achieve that?"

Her friend smirked. "I happen to know where Ian will be tonight. You could confront him and explain the situation. If he agreed problem solved."

Chapter 924

Ian Ford was the son of the real estate tycoon.

Fawn tightened her grip around her glass. After a moment, determination flashed in her eyes. She raised the glass, downing the last of her drink, and said, "Fine, I'll take the risk!" Marrying Ian was certainly better than ending up with that disgusting old man.

Her friend's gaze flickered slightly before handing Fawn an address.

Without hesitation, Fawn went straight there.

It was a private club. A bodyguard stood at the door of the suite. She walked up confidently, saying, "I'm Fawn Powell."

The bodyguard, clearly aware of who she was, stepped aside and opened the door for her.

Inside, the room was dimly lit, and Fawn couldn't immediately see

"Hello? Is anyone here?" she called out.

anyone was there.

There was no response. She took a few cautious steps forward when suddenly, someone lunged from behind, grabbing her tightly.

"Ah!" Fawn screamed, instinctively struggling, but her resistance was cut short by the sharp prick of a needle in her arm, cold liquid seeping into her veins.

"Fawn, you didn't follow through with your promise. Now, how should I punish you?"

The disgusting voice made her skin crawl.

"You... why is it you?" she stammered, recognizing the old man.

"Why wouldn't it be me?" he sneered, laughing as he pushed her onto the bed. "I'll visit your parents tomorrow to ask for your hand. But tonight... you'll behave yourself!" "No!" she cried out.

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Outside the bar.

Maria sat in her car, sending a transfer from her virtual account before driving off.

There was no way Fawn would escape now.

By morning, her parents would walk in on her in bed with that old man.

With this matter resolved, Maria's mood lifted considerably.

Maria drove straight to the area where Sidney lived.

His apartment was in an old, run-down neighborhood, with dim, flickering streetlights-some even broken.

She sat quietly in her car, not getting out to look for him.

She needed to think things through. What was her relationship with Sidney now? And what did she want it to be in the future? Should they be together?

She found herself looking forward to

it. A man who could handle himself in all aspects-whether in the kitchen, in conversation, or...

elsewhere. She liked that about him.

Maria pulled out her phone and called Sidney. "Hello?"

His smooth, pleasant voice instantly lifted her mood.

"Sidney, should we give this a shot?" she asked, bluntly, without any lead-up.

On the other end, there was silence.

After a long pause, he finally responded, "Maria, I think things are fine the way they are now."

"Hmm?" Maria was a bit surprised.

After everything they'd been through together, and since he hadn't exactly rejected their intimacy, she thought he might say yes. "What's so good about it?" she pressed.

Sidney replied, "Your feelings for me

aren't genuine, and I don't have much emotional attachment to you either. Trying something under those circumstances doesn't really mean anything."

The smile on Maria's lips gradually faded. "You have a point. Alright then, goodnight."

With that, she hung up the phone, ending the conversation abruptly.

Maria drove away, leaving the night behind her.

Sidney stared at the phone after the call ended, his emotions a mix of confusion and conflict.

Neither of them was truly invested. If they together now, it wouldn't last, and in the end, they'd up hurting each other.

And if he knew it would cause harm, then it was best to avoid it.

Sidney put his phone away and turned to enter the hospital room.

Ruth looked up at him, concerned. "What's wrong?"

Sidney replied, "Nothing, just some work stuff. I'll take care of it tomorrow."

His mother watched him carefully, letting out a soft sigh. "Sidney, why don't you ever share anything with me?"

Chapter 925

Sidney's expression faltered slightly before he replied, "Just focus on getting better. I can handle everything else." "Oh really?" Ruth frowned. "And what about a wife? Can you handle finding one? Are you going to solve that?" Sidney remained silent.

Ruth sighed, her tone turning serious. "Sidney, you're not getting any younger, you know. By the time I was your age, I already had you, and you were running errands for me. It's time you started

thinking about settling down and having a family." With little else to occupy her time in the hospital, Ruth spent her days chatting with other patients.

Her roommate, Jackie Warren, already had two grandsons who visited her every evening, lifting her spirits so much that her health had been steadily improving.

Right now, Jackie had just gone out for a walk with her grandsons, leaving Ruth feeling envious.

Sidney listened quietly, peeling an orange.

When he finished, he handed the slices to Ruth.

She took the orange but didn't let up on her comments about needing a daughter-in-law.

At that moment, the door to the room opened, and the patient from the next bed walked in.

"Jackie, you're back," Ruth greeted her with a warm smile.

Jackie nodded, her face crinkling into a grin. "I just dropped my grandsons off, so I came back."

Her eyes landed on Sidney. "Sidney, you're here early today."

"I wasn't too busy today," he answered.

Jackie chuckled. "You're such a good son-always visiting when you can."

Ruth waved her hand dismissively. "You're the one with the good fortune! A son who's devoted, a sweet daughter-in-law, and two adorable grandsons. I'm not so lucky. This stubborn boy of mine can't even find himself a girlfriend!"

Jackie looked surprised. "How can that be? Sidney's handsome and has a great job. I'm sure there must be girls lining up for him."

Ruth shook her head. "If that were the case, he'd have brought one home by now. I'm starting to think no one wants him!"

"Mom," Sidney muttered, clearly exasperated, trying to stop her endless complaints.

Ruth sighed dramatically. "See? Look at him, already losing his patience with me."

Jackie chuckled and suddenly said, "Hey, Ruth, if you trust me, I actually have someone in mind. She's my niece-very pretty, works as a white-collar professional in a company, and is about the same age as Sidney. Why don't we introduce them?"

Ruth's eyes lit up immediately. "Really? What's her name? How old is she?"

Sensing that the situation was taking a turn he didn't like, Sidney quickly interjected, "Mom, it's getting late. I think I'll head out. If you need anything, just give me a call.

Without waiting for a reply, he stood up and made a swift exit, his footsteps quickening as if he was escaping.

"That boy!" Ruth scowled, glaring at his retreating figure.

Jackie laughed. "Looks like Sidney's mind is still on his work, but no rush, he's still young."

Ruth, however, sighed. "He might not be in a hurry, but I am! I want grandkids, Jackie. Now, tell me more about your niece. Where did she go to school?"

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As the evening breeze swept

through, Sidney's thoughts scattered

with it. Walking along the roadside,

his mind drifted to Maria's face, her lazy, carefree attitude, almost like a

cat

He couldn't stop thinking about what she had said earlier today.

For some reason, it left him feeling unsettled.

What new game was she playing this time?

Sidney wondered if Maria would ever show some sincerity.

Chapter 926

A few days later, Sidney received a call from his mother.

"Hello, Mom? What's wrong?" Sidney asked, stepping out of a restaurant where he had just finished a meeting with a client.

Ruth's voice sounded concerned. "I'm not feeling well. You should come over right away."

Hearing this, Sidney immediately grew anxious.

Flagging down a cab, he asked, "What's wrong? Have you called a doctor?"

Ruth brushed it off. "Oh, I don't want to explain everything over the phone. Just come quickly."

Before he could ask more, she hung up.

Sidney's expression tightened with worry as he leaned forward and said to the driver, "Sir, please hurry."

Twenty minutes later, he arrived at the hospital. He rushed into the hospital room, only to find his mother sitting on the bed, laughing and chatting with a young woman.

There was no sign of her being unwell.

Sidney froze for a moment, his concern still evident, as he rushed over to her.

"Mom, where are you feeling unwell?" he asked, quickly scanning her for any signs of illness and reaching for the call button.

Slap!

Ruth slapped his hand away and said, "I'm fine!"

Sidney stopped, finally noticing how healthy and lively she looked. Her face was full of color, and her spirits seemed high—nothing like someone who was unwell. His brows immediately furrowed as he said, "If you're fine, why did you tell me you weren't? Do you know how worried I was?"

"I know, I know. I was wrong, I won't do it again," Ruth replied, nodding quickly but with a tone that made it clear she wasn't all that sorry.

She swiftly changed the subject, "Anyway, Sidney, let me introduce you to someone. This is Diana White, the niece of Jackie. She's one year younger than you and studied architectural design in college, just like you. I'm sure you two will have plenty to talk about." Ruth then turned to the young woman standing beside the bed and smiled. "Diana, this is my son, Sidney Troy."

Diana stood up, dressed in a delicate

floral dress, her whole de

pure and fresh. She gave Sidney a shy smile and extended her hand. "Hello, Mr. Troy."

It finally dawned on Sidney why his mother had summoned him in such a hurry.

Feeling a bit resigned, he knew he couldn't be rude to the young woman.

With a polite smile, he extended his hand and said, "Hello, Miss White."

Ruth leaned back in her bed with a satisfied smile. "I'm feeling a bit tired. Why don't you two head outside and chat?"

Diana blushed slightly and glanced at Jackie, who chimed in, "Diana, why don't you go buy me some canned fruit? I've been craving it."

"Okay, sure," Diana replied sweetly, nodding obediently.

Sidney shot his mother a helpless look before stepping out of the hospital room with Diana.

Diana's gaze couldn't help but drift toward him. Dressed in a black suit, his hair slightly tousled from running over, Sidney looked clean-cut and handsome. His sharp features,

neatly arched brows, and bright eyes gave him the air of the kind

Of

sunny

guy she had always admired. Even

his voice, calm and clear, was

exactly her type.

"Do you know where the supermarket is, Miss White?" Sidney asked, breaking the silence.

Diana shook her head. "No, I don't. Could you take me there?"

"Sure." Sidney nodded, leading the way toward the supermarket.

As they waited by the elevator, Sidney had already regained his composure, clearly not interested in striking up a conversation.

Since his mother hadn't explicitly

told him the purpose of this setup he figured he could just play

dumb-take Diana to the

and

then bring her back. Simple.

But Diana wasn't thinking the same.

She had fallen for him at first sight!

As they stepped into the elevator, Diana turned to him with a soft smile and asked, "What kind of work are you doing now, Mr. Troy?"

Chapter 927

Sidney pulled out his business card and handed it to Diana. "I currently run an architectural design studio."

Diana accepted the card, noticing the name "Starlight Design Studio" printed on it. The card also had Sidney's contact information, and a smile tugged at her lips as she tucked it away. "I'm currently working in the product development department at Tudor Group," she said with a hint of pride in her voice.

It was hard to get a position at Tudor Group-only the best survived the rigorous rounds of interviews.

Sidney gave a slight nod. "Tudor is a good company."

Diana looked at him and asked, "Do you have a girlfriend?"

Sidney, however, replied, "Miss White, we're here. This is the supermarket."

Diana's brows furrowed slightly at his avoidance of her question.

Why didn't he answer her?

Still, she reminded herself not to rush things. If she seemed too eager, he might get the wrong impression about her. So, she decided not to press the matter further.

Sidney also went into the store to buy some of Ruth's favorite fruits, and the two of them headed back to the hospital.

When they returned, Ruth and Jackie were chatting away, both of them beaming with smiles.

"Aunt, here are the canned fruits," Diana said, pulling the cans from the bag and handing them to Jackie.

Jackie chuckled and said, "Well, how am I supposed to eat these if you don't open them for me?"

Diana froze for a moment, then turned to Sidney. "Mr. Troy, would you mind helping me with this? I'm not strong enough to open it."

"Sure," Sidney replied.

He took the can and opened it effortlessly.

Ruth, watching from the side, couldn't help but grin widely.

Sidney turned to her, his voice calm. "Mom, I'd appreciate it if you didn't pull these kinds of stunts again. I don't like them."

"Alright, alright, I get it. No more scaring you," Ruth said, nodding quickly.

Sidney sat down, half-listening to his mother's chatter. As he absentmindedly pulled out his phone, he opened his social feed and immediately saw a new post from Maria.

She had uploaded nine photos from

the beach. In each one, she wore a floral dress and a wide-brimmed hat, looking carefree and at ease. Every picture captured her beauty perfectly.

Sidney scrolled through the photos, his focus entirely on Maria's beach pictures. He seemed lost in thought, his expression unusually absorbed.

Ruth, noticing his silence, curiously

glanced over at his phone. When she

saw he was looking at a woman's photos, she paused but decided not to say anything.

After a moment, Sidney liked the post and then put his phone away.

He stayed for a while longer, chatting with Ruth, before finally standing to leave.

Diana also took the opportunity to rise and say, "Aunt, it's getting late, so I'll head out. I'll visit you again soon."

"Alright, dear," Jackie nodded with a smile.

Sidney and Diana walked out of the hospital room, one after the other.

"Mr. Troy, where are you headed? Could you give me a lift?" Diana asked hopefully.

"I'm taking the subway," Sidney replied.

Diana froze for a second, the smile on her lips faltering slightly.

He didn't own a car?

It seemed like his design studio wasn't doing all that well.

Still, he was handsome, and starting his own business at such a young age meant there was potential. He was a work in progress-a project she could manage. "I'll accept that," she thought, convincing herself.

"I take the subway too. I live near the Tudor Group. What about you?" Diana asked, trying to keep the conversation going.

"I live out in the more rural part of the city," Sidney said casually.

The mention of the less developed

area, far from the city center with its

long commute and sparse

surroundings, made Diana's

expression falter, a flicker of

disappointment passing through her eyes.

Her demeanor cooled noticeably.

Outside the hospital, she pulled out her phone, pretending to read a message. "Oh, my friend just texted me. I'll be heading off now. Goodbye." "Goodbye," Sidney responded, showing no hesitation or interest, and walked off without looking back.

Diana glanced back and noticed that Sidney had already walked off.

Her expression darkened.

"What is with this guy?"

Did he not realize today was essentially a setup for them to meet? His attitude was downright dismissive-so disrespectful! Feeling frustrated, Diana turned and left.

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Sidney had walked a few blocks when his phone rang.

Seeing it was his mother, he answered.

""Hey, Mom."

Sidney's tone was calm but distant.

Ruth's voice came through quieter than usual. "Sidney, what do you think of Diana?"

Sidney sighed. "Mom, I'm not in the mood to date right now. Please stop trying to set me up."

Ruth's voice grew sharp. "I didn't ask if you want to date! I asked what you thought of Diana. Stop dodging my question."

Sidney pinched the bridge of his nose, feeling cornered. "I don't have any particular thoughts about her."

Ruth pressed on, "Do you think she's pretty? Is she your type? Answer me directly, and don't try to change the subject!"

Sidney, clearly exasperated, said, "Yes, she's pretty. But she's not my type."

Ruth huffed. "You've got to be kidding me! She's gorgeous, and you don't like her? What's your type then? Don't tell me you're still hung up on Aveline. She'll never like you back, and you know it!"

"I'm not hung up on her," Sidney replied firmly, sitting down on a bench and letting the evening breeze cool his thoughts.

Ruth sighed on the other end. "I liked Aveline too, but that's over, Sidney. You need to let her go. There are plenty of great women out there. Diana's one of them. I'm not asking you to start dating her tomorrow just get to know her. Sometimes feelings develop over time." Her tone softened at the end. She didn't want to push too hard and risk making Sidney pull away completely.

Sidney, feeling weary, replied, "Okay, I hear you."

Satisfied for the moment, Ruth ended the call without further discussion.

Sidney, feeling unsettled, unlocked his phone again and found himself scrolling through Maria's recent beach photos. He stared at them, his thoughts once again in turmoil.

...

Maria had spent a week enjoying

herself in Dalee, and by the time she returned to Cloudflare City, a week had passed. She brought back gifts for everyone at the studio, but when she got to Sidney's desk, she noticed it was completely empty.

Puzzled, she asked, "Where's Sidney?"

Alex, one of the employees, grinned. "Mr. Troy went out. I think he's on a date." Huh? A date?

Maria raised an eyebrow in surprise. "He's seeing someone?"

Alex chuckled. "Seems like it. There's been a girl picking him up after work yday for the past week. They're

nove

getting pretty close. I even took a picture. Want to see?"

He pulled up his phone and found the photo he had taken.

In the glow of the setting sun, Sidney stood face-to-face with a girl.

She was cute, with delicate makeup and a floral dress, smiling up at him.

Sidney stood there casually, one hand in his pocket, looking relaxed. He didn't seem distant or annoyed, which caught Maria's attention.

Maria's eyes flickered as she glanced at the photo, then she turned away.

"That's nice," she said.

Alex sensed something off in the atmosphere but couldn't quite place it.

Maria placed Sidney's gift on his desk and retreated to her office. Sidney hadn't moved into her space, so everything remained unchanged, including the lingering scent of the orange-scented air freshener she liked.

Still, the image of Sidney with that girl kept replaying in her mind.

"Well, look at him, always such a charmer."

Chapter 929

The next day, when Sidney arrived at the studio, he noticed a gift box sitting on his desk.

Puzzled, he asked, "Where did this come from?"

Alex appeared again, grinning. "Ms. Maria brought us all gifts. She's back."

""Maria's back?"

Sidney was a bit surprised-she'd returned quietly, without any fanfare.

He opened the box to find some local specialties from South City, the sweet scent of floral pastries filling the air. His expression softened slightly.

Alex, ever the gossip, sidled up next to him. "So, Mr. Troy, how's it going with that girl? Are you two together yet?"

Sidney frowned. "What girl?"

"Don't play dumb. We've all seen her-the pretty one who loves wearing floral dresses. Even Ms. Maria knows about her," Alex said, eyes twinkling with amusement. Sidney's brows furrowed further. "She only got back yesterday, how could she know?"

Alex chuckled. "I told her! She seemed a bit surprised, to be honest."

Sidney paused, then asked, "Did she say anything?"

Alex thought for a moment. "She mentioned it's about time you started dating."

Sidney's face suddenly darkened.

Oblivious to the shift in mood, Alex continued, "So, are you guys together? When you are, don't forget to send me a wedding invitation!"

Sidney cut him off, his voice cold. "Did you finish your work yet?"

"Huh?" Alex froze, finally noticing the storm brewing on Sidney's face.

"I'll get on it right away!" Alex stammered, hurrying back to his desk, wondering "What just happened?"

He was in a good mood a second ago, so why did things turn so sour?

Sidney's gaze drifted back to the gift box. The interest in looking through it had completely vanished.

Setting it aside, he focused on his work, pushing everything else out of his mind.

...

Maria had planned a casual day out with a few close friends for some shopping.

One of them, Tiana Evans, suddenly said, "My brother's flying back to the country today. How about you all come with me to the airport to pick him up?" Maria raised a brow. "That doesn't sound necessary. You should just go by yourself."

But Tiana pouted. "No, no! You all have to come with me. We'll just pick him up real quick, and maybe we can even make him buy us dinner." Another friend chimed in, "We've got nothing better to do. Let's go. By the way, Tiana, is your brother cute?"

Tiana paused, thinking for a moment. "He's alright, I guess."

"Alright? What does that mean? Got a picture?" one of the girls asked eagerly.

Tiana pulled out her phone and swiped through until she found a photo. "Here, see for yourselves."

Curious, Maria leaned over for a look.

The moment she saw the picture, her mouth twitched slightly, and she glanced at Tiana. "Have you become immune to how good-looking your brother is?" Tiana blinked in confusion. "Wait, what? You actually think he's good-looking?"

"He's incredibly handsome!" one of the girls exclaimed. "Better looking than any of those male celebrities these days."

"Exactly! If he looks this good in a

photo, imagine what he's like in person I'm definitely going to

airport-I need to see this in real life!"

Tiana rolled her eyes, exasperated. "You both have boyfriends. Can you not drool over my brother?"

One of the girls laughed. "But Maria doesn't have a boyfriend! Perfect timing she should come with us. A good-looking guy and a beautiful girl, they'd be perfect together!"

Tiana's eye's suddenly lit up as she turned to Maria. "That's right! You don't have a boyfriend yet. How about considering my brother? You could be my sister-in-law!"

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Maria held her cup of fruit tea, sipping slowly, her expression calm as she replied, "Don't joke around like that. What if your brother already has someone he likes?"

"He doesn't! I can guarantee that!" Tiana immediately countered. "He's a total blockhead. There was once a girl who tried to pursue him, and he asked her how she did on her physics exam. I couldn't believe it!" The girls around burst out laughing.

"Wait, so what? Does she need to outscore him in physics for him to even consider her?" one of the girls teased.

Tiana rolled her eyes. "No, no! If she did better than him, he'd start giving her the problems he couldn't solve. If she didn't, well, she wasn't even qualified to help him solve anything."

"Wow, sounds like your brother's pretty tough to deal with," someone remarked.

Tiana waved it off. "That was years ago. He's grown up now-he's not like that anymore."

The group fell silent for a moment, absorbing the absurdity of Tiana's brother.

By 3 PM, the plane landed.

The girls were already at the airport, waiting in the arrivals hall.

Tiana, still enthusiastically highlighting her brother's virtues to Maria, suddenly turned and spotted a tall man emerging from the exit.

"Over here, bro!" she shouted, waving energetically.

Herman Evans, with a small suitcase in one hand, dressed in a casual jacket and wearing a warm smile, strode over to them.

"Tiana, you're here early."

Tiana replied with a smile, "Of course! You're finally back-I had to come early! Not only that, but I brought my girlfriends along to welcome you. See how much I care?" Herman's gaze swept over the group of girls, and he gave a polite nod. "Thanks."

"No need to be so formal. So, are you staying for good this time, Herman?" one of the girls asked.

Herman nodded. "Yeah, I'm back for good."

Tiana quickly chimed in, "Well, since we've been waiting here to greet you, don't you think you should treat us to lunch?"

Herman chuckled, shaking his head. "I should've known. Alright, what do you want to eat?"

Tiana's eyes lit up. "Let's go! I've already made reservations."

The group headed out of the airport and split into two cars. Tiana eagerly opened the door to the first car's Ckseat, gesturing for her brother to get in first.

Herman climbed into the car, and before Maria could react, Tiana grabbed her arm and pulled her toward the car. "Maria, you sit in this one." Maria sighed, feeling a bit helpless, but there wasn't much she could do.

Reluctantly, she climbed into the car.

Tiana glanced at her two other friends and said, "You two take the other car, okay?"

The two girls exchanged knowing looks, let out a light huff, and climbed into the other vehicle.

Meanwhile, Tiana slid into the

passenger seat, fastening her seatbelt while saying, "By the way, this is my friend Maria Conner. She runs her own architecture design studio."

Herman extended his hand politely, "Nice to meet you, Ms. Conner."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Evans," Maria replied, shaking his hand briefly before pulling away.

Tiana watched the two through the rearview mirror, growing anxious at the lack of conversation. Her eyes gleamed with mischief, and she asked, "Bro, you've been abroad for

years did you manage to get

yourself a girlfriend?"

Herman, unruffled, replied, "You seem so concerned about me. What about yourself? If I remember correctly, didn't Mom and Dad set up a date for you?" Flustered, Tiana protested, "We're talking about you right now! Don't change the subject!"

Herman chuckled softly. "I've been busy. No time for dating."

Tiana, refusing to let it go, smirked. "Well, this time you're in trouble. Mom and Dad are definitely going to arrange some blind dates for you too!"