

## Ex Convict 2641

### Chapter 2641

"Hello," Grace and Lina said hurriedly, but their eyes were full of surprise. Especially Grace. 'Did Brian just say... she's his girlfriend?

'Brian has a girlfriend?'

"Are you two seeing each other?" Grace asked.

"Yes, but we haven't been seeing each other for long," said Valda Theller.

"I didn't expect to fall for Valda, but love is unexpected sometimes," said Brian. Valda Theller could feel the fingers holding her clenching as if he was telling her to cooperate with him.

He wanted her to act in front of these two women and convince them she was his girlfriend.

Was the one who hurt him romantically one of these women?

Grace looked at the two seriously. "Are you really seeing each other?"

"Could it be fake?" Brian grabbed Valda Theller's hand and

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pressed it on his heart. "Grace, I think Valda might be the only one who can save me now."

Grace froze, while Valda Theller asked in a panic, "What's wrong? Are you sick? Is it serious?"

Her worried expression was not fake.

She was the only one among the four people present who did not understand the meaning of the word 'save' when it came out of Brian's mouth.

Brian said, "I'm not sick. I'm in good health. I'm just saying you'll save me if I'm in danger."

Valda Theller was relieved. "So, that's what you mean. Of course, I'll save you if you're in danger. You're my boyfriend, after all."

'Even if you're only a pretend boyfriend, I'll still save you. She added silently in her head.

"Then I wish you a happy relationship," said Grace as her eyes fell on Valda Theller's face. "Valda, Brian's a good person. I hope you can cherish him."

"I will. I love Brian very much. I'll cherish him." Valda Theller dutifully 'acted' as his girlfriend.

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"Goodbye, then. Let's get together again when we have the chance," said Grace.

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"Okay." Valda Theller smiled.

Once Grace and Lina left, Valda Theller looked at her right hand that Brian was still holding tightly. His hand still held it tight as if their hands were locked together.

"Well... are you going to let go?" she asked in a mutter. After all, his friend was no longer there.

His fingers loosened stiffly, and only then did she notice the sweat on his palm.

"Are you nervous?" Valda Theller asked abruptly.

"Nervous?" Brian muttered. Maybe he was nervous. He did not expect to let Valda Theller meet Grace so soon.

He was afraid that Grace would sense something wrong and would not believe that he was dating Valda Theller. He was scared that everything he had planned would not go his way.

Fortunately, Valda Theller was smart enough to realize it.

Their interlocked hands let go at last. Valda Theller said with feigned ease, "Look, how about I wear this dress to the booting ceremony?"

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He pressed his thin lips slightly and looked at her in the long mint-green dress. The color made her look fairer. Her apple-like face shape, round eyes, and faint smile made her look amicable.

The tension that filled his body seemed to gradually disappear when he saw her.

"Not bad," he said.

"I'll take this dress, then," said Valda Theller as she walked back to the fitting room and changed out of the dress.

When she walked out of the fitting room to pay for it, the shop assistant said, "Your boyfriend has already paid for it."

"Huh?" Valda Theller looked at Brian in surprise. "That's inappropriate. I'll transfer the money to you."

"There's no need for that. Now that we're dating, it's only natural that I buy you a dress," said Brian.

However, the problem was they were only pretending to be dating!

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Brian turned and walked out of the boutique. Valda Theller

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hurried after him with her shopping bag. "I don't think this is right. We agreed that I'll be your fake girlfriend while you be my model, so there's no reason for you to help me pay my bill."

After a pause, Valda Theller said, "If you were really my boyfriend, I'd have no opinion about you buying me a dress because it's common for couples to give each other gifts. But you gave me a dress in our situation. What if you also give me something else that caught my eye tomorrow? It might not matter to you as these things don't cost much. But I might get under the illusion that you have feelings for me and we're really dating if I keep getting presents from you."

Brian understood that the woman in front of him was hoping to draw a line with him as soon as he heard that. Any other woman would have tried to get more out of him if she were pretending to date him. She was an exception.

However, he might not have been so impulsive as to ask her to pretend to be his girlfriend if she were like any other woman.

Brian said, "Okay, got it. I won't do it again. Consider this my token of gratitude for helping me out. Just this once."

"A-Alright then." Valda Theller could not take it too seriously since he had said so.

The two went to the parking lot, and Valda Theller instantly

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saw Brian's car.

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"Hey, your car is over there..." She had barely finished her sentence when a hand caught hers. The next moment, she fell

into his arms.

"Bri Brian?" Valda Theller froze, instinctively wanting to push him away. However, his arms tightened.

"Don't move," he said in her ear.

Confused as she was, she obeyed his words and did not push him away again.

"Hold me." His voice rang in her ears again.

"Huh?" She was stunned. "Hold... old you?"

“Yes, hold me. Hold me as lovers do,” he said.

Valda Theller hesitated slightly before slowly stretching out her hands to wrap around Brian’s waist.

‘What a thin... waist!’

She was immediately jealous of his waist once she held him.

Any woman would be jealous of it. She could feel that he did not have much fat on his waist even through his clothes.

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‘Wide shoulders, a narrow waist, long legs... Her mind immediately began to wonder what a comic version of him would look like.

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‘He’d be... attractive!’

The more she thought about it, the more excited she was. The embrace that made her flustered at first became natural.

Brian’s voice rang again. “Done.”

“What’s done?” she asked in a daze, still lost in her imagination.

“We’re done now. You don’t have to hold me anymore,” his elegant voice said.

Valda Theller immediately came to her senses. ‘Gosh... I got carried away!’

Her face reddened instantly, and she let go. “Sorry.”

“I should apologize for hugging you just now,” he said.

“Was your friend who I just met nearby?” Valda Theller was not stupid. She immediately figured out the reason for Brian’s

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sudden intimacy.

“Yeah,” he said and released his embrace.

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“Is Grace the friend who used to work at the small noodle

shop?" she asked suddenly as if a woman's intuition had made her think that the friend was Grace.

He paused slightly, and his dark phoenix eyes looked coldly at her. "There are questions you'd better not ask."

At that moment, Valda Theller only had a feeling that the elegant and indifferent man felt dangerous. It was as if the question was taboo.

No, perhaps that woman Grace was taboo.

On the other hand, Lina drove and said, "I didn't know that Brian has a girlfriend. But Valda Theller doesn't seem like the usual women around Brian."

Grace was silent as if she was thinking about something.

"What's the matter? Didn't you always hope that Brian could put aside his childhood feelings for you and start a new relationship?" Lina could not help saying when she saw that her best friend was silent.

"It'd be nice if they were in a real relationship," murmured

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Grace.

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Lina mumbled, "What's the matter? Is it fake? It doesn't look fake to me. If it were fake, wouldn't it have been more convincing if Brian found a beautiful actress?"

After all, Valda Theller might look cute and friendly, but she was not stunning. If Brian wanted others to believe he was in a relationship, he would have chosen a beautiful woman.

"Besides, didn't we secretly see Brian intimately embracing his girlfriend when we were in the parking lot earlier? Brian seems to like Valda Theller pretty much," Lina said again.

"I hope it's just me overthinking," said Grace, but she felt vaguely uneasy. After all, the last time she ran into Brian in the bookstore, Brian had smiled and said...

“Grace, I’ll get over you.”

‘Is it a coincidence that he found himself a girlfriend so soon? He fell in love with someone right after deciding to get over

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“Alright!” Lina’s voice interrupted her thoughts. “You’re just overthinking. Stop thinking about Brian and his girlfriend. What you should do now is take good care of your baby and ensure safe delivery.”

Grace smiled. ‘Yes, what I should do now is take good care of my baby. I shouldn’t be entertaining foolish ideas!

On the day of the booting ceremony, Valda Theller arrived at the film studio with heavy dark eye circles.

As soon as Camille Strickland saw the way her best friend

looked, she said, “What happened to you? Didn’t you sleep well last night?”

“You noticed,” said Valda Theller. She had already used foundation to hide her dark eye circles, but it did not seem to

have much effect.

“Of course, I noticed.” Camille Strickland rolled her eyes at her best friend. “I know this is your first adaptation and you’ll be meeting Gloria today, but you didn’t have to be so excited about it that you even lost sleep over it!”

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Valda Theller smiled. She was too embarrassed to tell her best

friend that this was not the reason she did not sleep well. It was because Brian’s cold and depressing gaze came to her mind whenever she closed her eyes.

Grace, the pregnant lady with a gentle smile, was his taboo. The coldness and depression in his eyes were all because of

her,

An answer vaguely came to mind. Maybe he wanted her to

pretend to date him because of Grace.

When he introduced her as his girlfriend to Grace, he had squeezed her hand so tightly that his fingers stiffened

afterward. A person’s body could only react like that when they were tense.

“Do you want a cup of coffee to refresh yourself?” Camille

Strickland asked.

“No thanks, I had coffee at home this morning before coming over,” said Valda Theller.

“Then let’s say hello to the producer and the director. We should be able to meet Gloria too,” said Camille Strickland as she led Valda Theller inside.

There were already a lot of reporters at the booting ceremony

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venue. After all, Gloria had always done big-budget films. Everyone was curious why he had picked a comic adaptation.

Many reporters even speculated why Gloria picked this film by looking at it from multiple aspects such as director, heroine, producer...

Valda Theller was already sweating when she walked past the reporters and fans into the booting ceremony with her best friend.

“The producer’s over there, Valda. Let’s head over.” Camille Strickland saw the producer at a glance and dragged Valda Theller over.

The producer was chatting with several other people. Camille Strickland suddenly stopped walking as if she saw something that surprised her. She said, “Huh?”

Valda Theller looked at her best friend in confusion. “What’s the matter?”

“Well...” Camille Strickland looked troubled.

Valda Theller followed her best friend’s gaze to see a figure she did not expect to see there.

Raymond Bowman!

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He was chatting with the producer not far away.

“What’s Raymond Bowman doing here?” Camille Strickland asked in surprise.

It was also what Valda Theller wanted to ask.

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Just then, the producer saw Camille Strickland and Valda

Theller and waved to them.

“Come on, let’s go and say hello,” Valda Theller said before taking her best friend by the hand and walking toward the

producer.

Watching Valda Theller walking over, Raymond Bowman fell

into a trance. She wore a long mint green dress today. Her

long hair was tied up in a neat ponytail. She looked the way

she did in school.

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In particular, the faint dark eye circles under her eyes

reminded him of the time when he often saw her with dark

eye circles back then. When he asked her if she did not sleep well, she would yawn and say that she had been drawing comics and catching up on manuscripts.

“Is it necessary to work so hard on comics?” he had asked at

the time.

“You won’t find it hard if it’s what you like.” She gave a broad

smile. Although she had dark eye circles, there was a sparkle in her eyes whenever she spoke about comics and the stories.

she created.

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They looked so bright and beautiful.

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“Here, let me introduce you to CEO Raymond Bowman, Mr.

Bowman is the one who made the additional investment in

our film. With his investment, our film can become better,” the producer introduced with a laugh.

Valda Theller and Camille Strickland were shocked. Although

they already knew that someone had made an additional investment in the film, they did not expect it to be Raymond

Bowman.



Was it a coincidence, or was it Raymond Bowman's intention?

Valda Theller's eyes were instantly full of alarm as she looked at Raymond Bowman.

"These two..."

The producer was about to introduce Valda Theller and Camille Strickland when Raymond Bowman said, "It's alright. I know Valda and Camille. We used to go to the same school."

The producer smiled. "What a coincidence. This is your reunion, then."

"Yeah, it's not easy for us to be reunited." Raymond Bowman chuckled.

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Valda Theller maintained a friendly smile.

After a casual chat about some unimportant things, the producer left with several others, leaving only Raymond Bowman, Valda Theller, and Camille Strickland.

Camille Strickland's fake smile was gone immediately.

"Raymond Bowman, what's the meaning of this?"

"I don't know what you mean by that," Raymond Bowman asked in reply.

"Why did you invest in this film?" Camille Strickland asked.

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"You should thank me for investing. Otherwise, you wouldn't have been able to afford Gloria's salary at all," said Raymond

Bowman.

Camille Strickland did not know what to say for a moment.

"Thank you for investing in the film, Mr. Bowman," Valda Theller said indifferently. Then, she wanted to pull Camille Strickland and leave.

Raymond Bowman raised his hand to stop her and said, "I mean no harm in investing in this film. I only hope that the film based on your original work can be a success. I sincerely apologize for what happened."

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Valda Theller said, "I told you. I accept your apology but that doesn't mean I forgive you Mr Bowman, investing in the film was your decision. Whether you make or lose money is all your matter. I don't need you to invest in anything because of

1. I don't think we have that kind of relationship"

Camille Strickland snorted and said. "A sincere apology? Why didn't you explain to the whole school why you hurt Valda like that, then? How dare you apologize now?"

Raymond Bowman's expression froze.

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Just then, Valda Theller's phone rang. She answered it, and it turned out to be Brian.

"Your film's booting ceremony is being held at the film studio, right? I happen to be running some errands there today. Do you want me to pick you up later?" Brian said.

"I don't know when it'll be over, though," said Valda Theller.

"Then call me when it's over," said Brian.

"Okay," replied Valda Theller.

Today was one of the weekly three dates she had agreed to go with Brian. Who knew he happened to be at the film studio

too?

However, running into someone in such a large film studio.

was not easy unless one had agreed on meeting at a specific location.

People unfamiliar with the film studio's layout often got lost and confused.

Valda Theller put away her phone after the call. Zhou Xinmia's

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eyes lit up as she said, "Did your boyfriend just call?"

"Yeah," said Valda Theller.

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"Your boyfriend is so devoted to you. He's so handsome, thoughtful, mature, and rich. I'm so envious," Camille

Strickland deliberately exaggerated her words.

Valda Theller laughed. Her best friend knew exactly what was going on between her and Brian. She said this on purpose to annoy Raymond Bowman and prove that she, the person Raymond Bowman dumped, had pursuers too.

Raymond Bowman pressed his thin lips and said, "Valda Theller, what's the deal with your boyfriend? You didn't have a boyfriend a month ago but one just suddenly appeared. And you two are deeply in love?"

Valda Theller's expression changed. "Did you look me up?"

Raymond Bowman did not deny it. He only said, "I don't want you to get fooled. Do you know that man?"

"Mr. Bowman, you don't want Valda to get fooled? What a joke. Aren't you the one who fooled Valda?" Camille Strickland said sarcastically.

Raymond Bowman turned pale instantly, and his arm blocking them fell.

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His act of deception back then would always be a thorn that could not be removed. "I... I just..." He had not stammered like that for years.

"Mr. Bowman, I've learned from experience. I know that my boyfriend will never fool me. He's not you, and I trust him!"

The words 'I trust him' seemed to cast him to hell. Raymond Bowman's breathing paused, and his blood seemed to freeze.

It was June, but he was freezing!

Valda Theller also met Gloria at the booting ceremony. Gloria was thinner in person. Although he was already 28 years old, he seemed youthful. He was indeed the perfect actor for the adaptation.

After learning that she was the original author of the drama,

Gloria smiled and said, "I'm glad that I get to play the male lead in this drama. I hope we'll have a pleasant cooperation."

Gloria politely extended her hand as he spoke.

Valda Theller also quickly extended her hand and said, "I'm glad too."

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Just then, the two were photographed by a reporter nearby.

Gloria was obviously used to it as he looked comfortable, but Valda Theller blushed.

"Are you not used to being in front of the camera?" Gloria asked in a mutter.

Valda Theller said, "Yeah. Mr. Stephenson, you're always in the spotlight, so you must be used to being photographed like this."

Gloria smiled lightly. "Yes, it has been years. Even if I wasn't used to it at first, I'm used to it now. I heard that you used to go to the same university as Mr. Raymond Bowman, the CEO of Future Technology. Did Mr. Bowman invest in this drama

because of you, Miss Theller?"

Valda Theller's expression stiffened slightly as she said

awkwardly, "I have nothing to do with him. I just found out he invested in this drama today."

"Really? I thought you were good friends," Gloria said with a laugh.

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Valda Theller pressed her red lips together. She and Raymond Bowman would probably never be friends.

The booting ceremony finally came to an end after more than half a day.

Valda Theller called Brian on the phone. "Brian, I'm almost done." Although they had agreed to call each other only by their first names to be more like a couple, she still felt a little sheepish when she called him Brian. She felt her heartbeat quicken too.

"Okay, what's the closest film studio exit to you?" he asked.

"Exit B3," said Valda Theller.

"Okay, I'll be waiting for you at exit B3 in 10 minutes," said

Brian.

Valda Theller answered in acknowledgment. 10 minutes later,

she came to the exit they agreed on and saw Brian's car already there.

Therefore, she hurried forward. She was about to walk toward the car when a hand suddenly seized hers, stopping her.

“Don’t go!”

Valda Theller turned around and saw Raymond Bowman’s face.

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“Raymond Bowman, what are you doing?” Valda Theller struggled and twisted her wrist.

“Yes, I did fool you, but I don’t want to see you get fooled again.” The memory of her being bullied and laughed at

by others had haunted him for years, and it had become a nightmare. “Valda, I don’t know why this man approached you, but do you really think he’s serious about you?”

“It’s none of your business whether he’s serious or not,” she snapped at him.

‘None of my business...! Raymond Bowman smiled bitterly.

How could it be none of his business?

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“What if I said it has something to do with me?”

Valda Theller paused and looked at Raymond Bowman blankly.

“I wonder what you have to do with our relationship.” A cold voice suddenly rang out. Brian had gotten out of the car at some point and walked up to them.

“Valda is my ex-girlfriend. She can be my girlfriend again

anytime she wants,” Raymond Bowman said sternly. He still did not know what kind of feelings he had for Valda Theller, but he knew that he wanted to make up for hurting her.

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If she were willing, he would treat her well and as his real

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tend this time. There would be no more lying and hurting.

He could also help her boost her career and make her a well-known comic artist.

Brian’s eyes darkened. Then, he looked at Valda Theller. “What

about you? Whose girlfriend do you want to be?" It was like a simple inquiry without emotion.

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However, Valda Theller understood what he meant. He was giving her a choice.

If she said she was willing to become Raymond Bowman's girlfriend, their agreement would be annulled and he would

not trouble her.

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Valda Theller took a deep breath and said sternly, "I'm your girlfriend. You said we'd keep dating unless I asked for a breakup."

There was a flicker of surprise in those phoenix eyes. Then, Brian smiled faintly. "Okay, then we're not breaking up."

Valda Theller looked blankly at Brian's smile, unable to look

away. She had always known that he was good-looking, but he had always been indifferent in front of her. Even when

they pretended to be a couple in front of others, his smile was formal, and he was always indifferent when he hugged her.

However, this smile seemed to carry emotion. It was different than before.

The way Valda Theller gazed at Brian triggered Raymond Bowman. "Valda Theller, do you really think this man will love

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you? How serious is he about you? He just finds you new."

In Raymond Bowman's opinion, Brian looked like those rich heirs he had met before. They were rich, fond of fooling around, and constantly got new girlfriends.

He had seen rich heirs like that all the time.

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Valda Theller retorted bluntly, "Whether he loves me or not is between him and me, and I know how serious he is about

relationships! When he loves someone, he puts in all his feelings. He's even willing to make many sacrifices. Raymond

Bowman, you have no right to make speculations about his relationships!"

She spoke so forcefully that the two men present were stunned. They did not expect her to say that.

Finally, Brian came to his senses and grabbed Raymond Bowman's hand. "I think Valda has made herself clear. If you bother my girlfriend again, don't blame me for not holding back."

"What are you going to do to me?" Raymond Bowman asked.

"How about crippling your hand? What do you think about that?" Brian replied indifferently. His bloody words sounded so

icy when he said them.

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Raymond Bowman's expression changed, and he could feel the pressure of the fingers on his wrist. If he did not let go, the man would keep his word and cripple his hand,

A layer of cold sweat broke out on Raymond Bowman's forehead. 'Should I release Valda's hand? But if I do, Valda

and I...

Just then, Valda Theller suddenly gave her all and pulled her hand out of Raymond Bowman's grip. Then, she grabbed Brian's hand and said, "Let's go."

Brian raised his eyebrows slightly. Moments later, he said, "Okay."

The two got into the car, and Raymond Bowman watched the car leave with her warmth still on his hand.

"Valda..." Raymond Bowman murmured.

'Does she trust that guy that much? I must find out who on earth that man is!'

He did not think that the man loved Valda because the way he looked at Valda did not contain the slightest trace of love!

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In the car, Valda Theller looked at Brian bitterly and said, "Sorry for getting you involved."

"It's nothing to me. Besides, I was the one who proposed that we date," said Brian as he glanced at Valda Theller out of the corners of his eyes. "But how can you be so sure that I'm someone serious about my relationships? Maybe our relationship is just a game to me."

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Valda Theller said, "If it were only a game, you wouldn't have warned me not to love you in the first place. I remember you saying a person's love isn't deep if they can withdraw it easily

when we first met, so I figured that you must have loved someone deeply before."

He pressed his lips together tightly.

Valda Theller let out a breath and said, "If I was wrong, I can only blame myself for judging you wrong."

The traffic light happened to turn red, and the car stopped in front of the zebra crossing. Brian turned his head and looked at Valda Theller. His thin lips said, "Do you really think you can see through me?"

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Valda Theller looked up and gazed at the man in front of her. His angular face and delicate facial features could attract

people's attention easily. However, the aura he exuded

seemed to distance himself from others.

That faint estrangement would only disappear in the presence of the woman named Grace.

Those phoenix eyes seemed to contain all the splendor of the world and the calm sea. No one knew if it was turbulence or

calmness underneath them.

Valda Theller said honestly, "I can't, but at least I know you're

not a fraud."

"What makes you so sure I'm not a fraud?" he asked in reply.

"What else could it be? What are you trying to get out of me? Money or sex?" Valda Theller touched her nose and said in

self-mockery, "If you were trying to get money out of me, your car is worth more than everything I have. There's nothing you can get out of me. And I feel sorry for you if you want to get

sex out of me."

Haha!

Brian was amused. It was the first time a woman had said so.

However, what she said had lightened the mood in the car.



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"Alright. If you have any problems while we're in this relationship, I'll help you settle them."

The statement was tantamount to a promise.

Anyone would be elated to get a promise like that from the crown prince, but Valda Theller quickly said, "No thanks..."

"Don't get ahead of yourself. Maybe you'll encounter some trouble that you can't solve in the future," said Brian as he turned back and looked straight ahead again.

The red light had turned green, so he started driving again.

"Where do you want to go next?" Brian asked again.

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'Where to go... Valda Theller looked at the scenery along the way and suddenly said, "Why don't we... go to a bar?"

"A bar? Do you want to drink?" he asked.

"No, no, it's my new book. The protagonist is a bar owner, but it's been years since I went to a bar. I don't know what bars look like now, so I want to check one out. Of course, we can go somewhere else if you don't want to. I'll just ask Camille to accompany me the next time."

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Brian said, "No, let's go to a bar today. Do you have a specific bar you want to go to?"

"Not really," replied Valda Theller.

20 minutes later, Brian pulled up at a bar's entrance.

Valda Theller knew this bar. After all, she had researched many bars in tMason Swansonty for the protagonist's character.

The bar that Brian brought her to was a new and popular bar in tMason Swansonty. However, the bar was more

popular among the rich because of its high prices. Ordinary working-class people or students would not come here.

Even so, the bar was in line with the bar Valda Theller's protagonist owned. It was a good place to base her protagonist's bar on.

The only problem was... "Would it be expensive here?"

"No," said Brian.

When Valda Theller saw the prices, she instantly understood

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that their definition of 'expensive' was completely different.

She looked at the menu and hesitated.

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Brian seemed to see through her hesitation and said indifferently, "You can order whatever you want. Don't worry about the price."

"But..."

"Since we're dating, we should play along with each other's spending habits. I had no opinions when you said you refused to accept my gift because you'll think what's fake is real if this

were to go on for long. But it's too tiring if we have to calculate the price of every meal or drink every time we go out on

dates."

Brian flipped through the menu and summoned a waiter to order two cocktails as he spoke.

After the waiter left, he said, "This bit of money doesn't mean anything to me, and you don't need to help me save money. What you're helping me with is more important than this."

Valda Theller paused. He was referring to her pretending to be his girlfriend.

"Do you think anyone will believe that I'm your

girlfriend?" Valda Theller asked. Even Raymond Bowman did

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not think they were dating and thought she was being fooled.

She and Brian were like people from two different worlds.

when they stood together.

Brian murmured, "Yes, as long as you look like you love me

and I look like I love you."

"It's not that easy," muttered Valda Theller.

"Is it difficult?" Brian said as he suddenly leaned over and caressed her cheek with one hand. "Valda, is it hard to pretend to love me?"

Valda Theller only felt her heartbeat racing at that moment.

The cheek his palm pressed on seemed to burn.

His dark phoenix eyes were no longer distant and indifferent but misty. They looked near yet far and were seductive.

Gosh, forget about pretending. It would be easy to fall in love with him.

'Does this man not know how captivating he is when he poses like this?'

Just then, the waiter came over with two cocktails, so Valda Theller got to resolve the embarrassment she felt. She quickly turned her head, took the cocktail, and sipped it with her head

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down.

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Brian said nothing more on the subject and withdrew his hand. He picked up the cocktail in front of him and sipped gently.

Valda Theller soon drank more than half the glass.