

Lost Me Gained Regret

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I fumbled in the dark to switch on the light, glancing toward the door, only to find it shut.

Christine hadn't closed it. That night, Christine had decided to stay at the hospital to keep me company. Fearing that her presence in the room might disturb my sleep and hinder my recovery, she resolved to sleep on the living room couch, but in case I needed her during the night, she left the door ajar.

It was evident someone had been in my room. Was it Bryant? I didn't know. But it didn't matter anymore.

Next morning, I woke up and felt a whole lot better.

A nurse brought in a breakfast for two, complete with fresh fruit and chicken soup, quite a feast.

Christine clicked her tongue. "Wow, your hospital sure knows how to treat its patients."

The nurse smiled. "We aim to speed up the patient's recovery. Plus, the hospital director has designed Mrs. Ferguson's meal plan."

After checking my temperature, the nurse mentioned, "Mrs. Ferguson, you still have a fever. I'll go and call Professor Franklin to check on you."

Once the nurse left, Christine gave me a puzzled look. "Are you sure you two are getting divorced?"

I glanced at her. "What else?"

"Can we still eat this breakfast?" Christine gestured toward the lavish food, visibly tempted.

I laughed helplessly. "Divorce doesn't mean we waste food. Go ahead and eat!"

That was typical of Bryant, always a mix of harshness and sweetness. But L was done playing his games.

Right after we finished breakfast, Gary entered with several servants, carrying various nutritional supplements like vitamins, probiotics, fish oil, and minerals, quickly filling up half the table.

With a hint of sorrow and consolation, Gary said, "Mrs. Ferguson, I heard about the child... Please don't be too upset. You and Bryant are still young. There will be more chances to have children. Please take these supplements for now. The Ferguson Mansion has plenty more, and once you get discharged, we'll ensure you're well-nourished."

"Gary," I always respected Gary, having been close to Timothy, "this divorce is happening, and there will be no more children. You can take these back."

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Knowing better than to push further, Gary said, "This is from me, on behalf of Mr. Timothy, not Mr. Bryant. Mr. Timothy always said the Ferguson family owes you. Please accept these. Otherwise, Mr. Timothy would never rest easy."

"Okay." Reluctantly, I agreed.

Just bringing up Timothy got me all teary-eyed, I dabbed at them and added, "The pendants Timothy gave for the children are still in the safe in my room. I never took them out. Maybe you could retrieve them for me someday and return them to Bryant."

Gary set the initial codes of safes at the Ferguson Mansion, and though he had suggested I change the codes, our stay there was too brief, and I never got around to it. It made things easier.

Seeing my firm stance, Gary agreed, then hesitated as if he wanted to say more,

"Just..... take care of yourself."

Gary, is there something you want to tell me?" I couldn't help but ask.

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After a pause, Gary revealed, "You asked me to look into Mr. Timothy's medicine, and there's some progress. But it seems as complicated as you suspected. With your divorce from Mr. Bryant underway, I'm worried it'll drag you back into trouble..."

I asked, "You found something?"

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I perked up, pressing, "Please don't let this hold you back. The divorce is between Bryant and me. But Timothy was always kind to me, and I can't stand the thought of him passing away without clarity."

With my reassurance, Gary finally decided to spill the beans. He pulled a transparent sealed bag out of his pocket, containing just one tiny pill. And the pill was all too familiar to me. It was the very emergency pill Timothy always kept in his pocket.

Gary shared, "We found it under the carpet by the desk in Mr. Timothy's study when the housekeeper was cleaning the other day."

I took a closer look, feeling a chill down my spine.

The air in RiverCity wasn't dry, so if the pill had been on the floor for a while, it should have n some signs of moisture. But the pill in the bag didn't have a trace of dampness.

My voice trembled as I asked, "When was the last time the Ferguson Mansion had a deep cleaning?"

"The day before Mr. Timothy's death."

Gary had also considered it and responded immediately, his expression turning somber.

It meant that all signs pointed to the pill having dropped on the day Timothy passed away Timothy had his attacks and needed that pill when he was in a one- on-one conversation with Margaret. But when I confronted Margaret that night, she never mentioned Timothy wanting his medication!

Gary and I exchanged a knowing look, seeing the deep suspicion in each other's eyes. pursed my lips, "Does Bryant know about this?"

Gary shook his head. "Not yet."

"Let's get the fingerprints analyzed first." I pondered, "There's no use telling him now. Wi just this, given his trust in Margaret, he'll think I'm trying to slander his sweetheart."

"Mrs. Ferguson... actually, Bryant's feelings for Margaret probably aren't..." Gary tried to explain on behalf of Bryant, but I gently cut him off, "It doesn't matter what they are. What matters is that he cares deeply for Margaret, right?"

Regardless of Bryant's actual feelings toward Margaret, in his eyes, Margaret was paramount.

That was enough.

Gary's eyes turned cold, his tone becoming stern, "I swear it. If Margaret had something to do with Mr. Timothy's death, she would suffer even more."

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At that moment, I saw a shadow of Timothy in Gary.

I nodded, saying, "I believe you."

Bryant might be biased, but he wouldn't let Margaret off the hook once there's irrefutable evidence, especially concerning Timothy.

Gary said, "Then I'll get the fingerprints analyzed."

"Right." I cautioned him, wanting to ensure reliability, "Ensure to find someone trustworthy so as not to tip anyone off."

After a few more words with Gary, he stood up with a serious demeanor, ready to head back.

Could the propensity for such heinous acts be hereditary?

Teresa was responsible for the death of Bryant's biological mother. And Margaret seemed to be implicated in Timothy's death.

A shiver ran through me as I escorted Gary to the door, only to see Margaret approaching in high heels, showing no signs of sickness or frailty.

Gary's face darkened further, ready to leave. But Margaret glanced toward the nutritional supplements in my hospital room and stopped Gary, assuming the posture of the future. Mrs. Ferguson of the Ferguson family.

With a soft laugh and a gentle voice, she said, "Gary, she's divorcing me Bryant, and Timothy is gone. You should know who you gotta suck up to!"

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Gary hardened his face, gave Margaret a quick look, and snorted in pure scorn.

"Mr. Timothy's only been gone a few days. And you have forgotten his last words? Mrs. Ferguson will only ever be Jane! And you, a disrespectful and ungrateful woman, think you can be part of the Ferguson family? Not a chance!"

Seizing the moment, Gary spat out in disgust before turning to me respectfully, "Mrs. Ferguson, I'll leave you to it. Better get inside before the riff-raff causes trouble."

With that, he strode off with the servants in tow, carrying a presence that reminded me of Timothy in his prime.

"What nonsense is this!" Stunned by Gary's outburst, Margaret scoffed repeatedly, glaring at me. "Has the entire Ferguson family, from top to bottom, fallen under your spell or what?"

"Ever considered it might just be you they find unbearable?" I shot back, my tone dripping with sarcasm.

Margaret gritted her teeth furiously just as Christine emerged, lips curled in a taunt, "Back for more, huh? Did you go home yesterday thinking my scolding was spot-on, wanting another dose?"

"Bitch! You're nothing but a shrew!" Unable to outmatch Christine, Margaret bit back her anger, "And for the record, I'm not here for you. I came to see my mother!"

"Well, that's still better than being a lowlife like you. Get lost!" Christine dismissed her with those final words, ignoring Margaret's contorted face of rage and pulling me inside.

Looking at her, puffed up like a hen guarding her chick, I couldn't help but chuckle, "Suddenly, I see you're the only one who can put her in her place."

Christine asked, "Do you know what this is called?"

I smiled. "What?"

"This is a case of a bully meeting a bigger bully!" Christine tossed her wavy brown hair over her shoulder, her petite face beaming with pride and defiance.

Soon after, Professor Franklin came over to check on me again, changed my dressing, and continued the IV.

Lying in bed, I glanced at Christine. "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

It was almost ten.

Touching her nose, Christine grinned. "Don't be mad at me, but..."

I pressed further, "What?"

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Christine said in fear. "I quit."

"What?" I couldn't believe it.

"With you gone, why should I stay there? To watch that bitch gloat every day?" Christine rolled her eyes.

Her situation was different from mine. I was free of any family or financial obligations and had no pressure. "I dragged you into this..."

"Shut up." She popped a cherry into my mouth. "You think I quit without a plan? I've got something in mind."

I was curious. "What?"

"It's a secret." She winked mysteriously.

I chuckled. "You better have thought this through. No fooling me."

"Allen!" A distressed cry came from outside, "Stop! Give it back to me!"

It sounded like my aunt, Cheryl.

Panic struck, and I tried to get up, but Christine held me back, pointing at the IV in my hand, "Stay put. I'll check E

it out."

"Okay."

In a short while, Christine returned with my aunt, her face streaked with tears.

I handed Cheryl a tissue. "Aunt Cheryl, what happened? Why are you crying your eyes out?"

Her face sallow from illness, Cheryl was a picture of misery and embarrassment.

Christine helplessly explained, "Allen took her bank card."

"The bank card?" I inquired.

Through tears, Cheryl said, "It's the card where I kept the money for my to f treatment. I had just gone to them restroom, and when I came out, I saw him rummaging around. Before I could stop him, he found the card I had hidden away..."

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I didn't think Allen had it in him to go so low. I asked with a frown, "Does Allen know the pin?"

"I... I was afraid I'd forget the pin..." Cheryl's face was a portrait of regret, "It's the same as the one for our joint account."

What? Both Christine and I were speechless.

Allen was a sly fox when it came to swindling money, and with the card in his hands, he'd surely be off to drain the account in no time. And it was too late to report the card missing then.

But something else was bugging me more. "Allen hasn't stopped gambling, has he?"

"Hmm..." Cheryl cleaned her tears, her voice hardened with resolve, "He never really quit over the years. So, I never tell him how much you send us each month. I never imagined. that bastard would dare to steal my emergency funds!"

"Why don't you just divorce him then? Gambling's a never-ending money hole!" Christine couldn't hide her outrage.

"This time," Cheryl looked up at me, her voice filled with apology, "I will, I must. If I had divorced him years ago, you wouldn't have had to suffer all those hard times."

I couldn't help but think of how my parents had prepared me for the worst before they passed or the struggles of those years, feeling a lump form in my throat.

"That's all in the past now." Sniffling, I spoke, "Aunt Cheryl, let me be clear with you. If you're determined to divorce and you've thought it through, I'll figure something out for your treatment costs. After all, you gave me a place to stay when I needed it most. But decide not to leave him, gambling is a deep hole dragging you down, and I can't follow you down. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

you Looking utterly ashamed, Cheryl nodded repeatedly, "Yeah, I understand. Jane, you've given me so much. Consider the treatment costs and that two hundred thousand a loan. I'll pay you back once I'm well."

"Okay." I agreed, not wanting to burden her further.

Though Cheryl's treatment wasn't a small sum, I had saved some valuable items during my three years with the Ferguson family.

For three or four days straight, Christine stayed with me in the hospital, not leaving for a moment. But every night, I could sense someone had visited. Sometimes, it was a gentle kiss on my forehead, a hand holding mine, and sometimes, he just sat quietly by my bed.

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Finally, feeling much better, the doctor told me I didn't need any more medication and that I could go home in a few days.

Unable to sleep due to too much rest in the previous days and without medicine, I lay awake in bed, gazing out at the moonlight through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

For a long while, there was silence, making me wonder if the previous nights had been just my imagination of a dream. Late into the night, as I was about to fall asleep, I heard

those deeply familiar footsteps.

The room dimmed slightly, and I could smell the woody scent of a man with a hint of cigarette smoke. He never used to smoke.

Just as he was about to touch my hand, I opened my eyes, "Bryant thought you'd finally decided to stop bothering me."

The tall figure froze, a mix of surprise and depression in his stance.

Bathed in moonlight, he lowered his head, silent for a while, and spoke in a voice, filled with weariness, "I just wanted to see you, to ensure you were alright with my own eyes."

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I sat up, stretching my hand out to flick on the bedside lamp, and the room brightened up instantly.

Unexpectedly, I saw him in a state I'd never seen before. The always poised and dignified figure with a shadow of stubble along his jaw and dark circles under his eyes suggesting days and nights without sleep was a picture of sheer frustration. What mess had the Ferguson Group gotten into to keep him that busy?

I frowned slightly. "You'd be better off catching some sleep than coming to see me.

His defined and strong fingers tugged at his tie, loosening it, a bitter curve to his mouth, "Now I understand the pain of losing a child."

I clenched my fist, a mocking smile on my lips. "Bryant, I don't need your empathy. Just remember that you're the one who killed your first child. That's enough."

Pain flitted through his eyes, his lips parted slightly, his voice hoarse, "Do you hate me that much?"

"I do." I admitted, "I can't stand you and Margaret. If you feel the slightest debt to me or our child, show up next month at the town hall for the divorce papers."

"Okay." He swallowed hard, his gaze dropping, murmuring, "As you wish."

That night, my sleep was anything but peaceful. Despite finally making a tough decision, couldn't shake the feeling that it wouldn't end so smoothly. The unsettling sensation kept me restless and agitated.

However, the next day brought a piece of welcome news.

On the phone, Mark's voice was brimming with laughter. "Designer Jane, you never I impress."

"Uh?" I paused mid-bite into my apple. "Mark, you're in the mood for jokes this early?"

"What if I say you're the design contest's winner?" Mark chuckled, "Does this sound like I'm joking?"

"Really?" I jumped up, my eyes lighting up.

It was a delightful surprise. After going through all those shits recently, I dared not to hope for any good result in the contest.

Mark's voice was clear and refreshing. "Of course, I was amazed by your design when I saw it. But a competition is a competition. It had to go through a jury vote, so I didn't want to get your hopes up."

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I couldn't hide my excitement. "Mark, thank you!"

"Next time you say thank you, I'm expecting a dinner invite," he teased.

I said, "No time like the present. Let's dine out today."

Mark had been such a great help. It was only right to treat him to a fancy meal. I laughed, "How about tonight? Are you free?"

"My pleasure." Mark readily agreed, a hint of joy in his voice.

After the call, Christine, sitting nearby, burst into laughter. "Am I invited, too?"

I smiled at her. "Of course."

"Mark won't mind me being the third wheel?" Christine teased.

"Don't be silly. Mark's got someone he likes." I chuckled and quickly got to the point, "Let's get discharged today. I'm fine, and there's no point staying here, feeling suffocated."

Christine initially disagreed, but after confirming with the doctor that I was well enough, she happily consented.

She'd been like a loyal friend, sticking by my side in the hospital these past days, and was going stir-crazy, too.

"Feel like shopping? A massive new mall just opened a few days ago. As we were packing up, Christine suddenly suggested. I, too, felt like getting some fresh air, so I readily agreed.

The mall was in the southern part of town, and being a weekday, it wasn't too crowded.

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Christine's shopping spree knew no bounds, dragging me through store after store. She mused that leaving her job enabled her to spoil herself after being a workhorse for four years.

"Hey, isn't that the Patek Philippe woman?" she suddenly exclaimed, nodding toward a luxury boutique we were passing by.

I glanced over. "Yeah, that's Margaret."

There she was, modeling a handbag that cost over a brand-new car, likely contemplating the purchase. Bryant has always been overly generous with her.

I wasn't particularly keen on watching the spectacle unfold, so I tried to pull Christine away, but she suddenly grabbed me, and we ducked behind a column!

Confused, I gave her a puzzled look.

"It's your father-in-law, Albert!" she whispered in shock..

"Albert?" I was surprised.

"Yeah, Albert is out shopping with the Patek Philippe woman!" Christine's face lit up the excitement reserved for juicy gossip.

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"I don't see the big deal," I shrugged it off with a smile. "Margaret has always been the apple of Albert's eye."

Even Bryant couldn't get a sliver of his father's affection. It all went to Margaret.

Still puzzled, Christine peeked out for another look and turned back to me suspiciously. "I've never seen a stepdaughter and stepfather this close. They're almost like real father and daughter."

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"Their bond might as well be," I said, disinterested in delving further into the Ferguson-family dynamics, except for Timothy, "Let's just go."

But before we could make our escape, Margaret called out to us!

I tried to ignore her. Yet, she caught up, sizing me up. "You're out of the hospital?"

"What's it to you?" I retorted, annoyed.

She Immediately turned to Albert, pouting, "Dad! Look how Jane's treating me when I'm trying to be nice."

Christine rolled her eyes as I pulled her behind me, only to hear Albert approach, putting on the air of an elder. "I hear you and Bryant are getting a divorce."

"That's right, next month," I responded truthfully

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Albert couldn't hide his glee at the news, urging, "Well then, you better hurry up with it!"

"Christine would love to speed things up if only your son were as eager!" Christine seemed to think Albert was rushing me to clear the way for Margaret, taunting him before launching into a sarcastic tirade, "It's bizarre. What kind of father looks forward to his son's divorce?"

Albert, not one to take things seriously, straightened up, "You little rascal, what nonsense are you spouting? If they can't make it work, is that my fault? I only want them to find their happiness sooner rather than later."

"You've been searching for so many years, jumping from one to the next.." Christine's gaze shifted to Margaret, her lips curling into a smirk. "Now, you wouldn't be setting your sights on your stepdaughter, would you?"

"What are you implying?" Margaret's face turned red with rage, glaring at us before complaining to Albert, "Dad, look at her!"

Enjoying the drama, Christine cheekily added, "You don't call him Dad in bed, too, do you?"

The air was thick with tension as both their faces soured, and oh Christine, unable to contain her amusement, whisked me away to the grocery store.

Christine tossed snacks into the cart and mused, "What exactly is going on between Albert and the Patek Philippe woman I shook my head. "I have no clue."

"It's not a typical stepfather-stepdaughter relationship." Christine's eyes suddenly sparkled with mischief. "Do you think they're..."

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A stock clerk pushing a cart interrupted us, "Excuse me, coming through."

I tugged Christine back and asked, "What were you saying?"

"Do you think Margaret could be Albert's biological daughter?" Christine's eyes sparkled with the thrill of gossip.

I frowned. "That seems a bit far-fetched. Margaret's even older than Bryant by two years."

Even if it were an affair, it wouldn't have started that early, right?

"Why not?" Christine dismissed my doubt with a wave, excitedly diving into high society scandals. "You know how messy these rich people can get. Marrying one, keeping a few mistresses on the side, isn't that business as usual?"

"But still..." I hesitated, "If Margaret was Albert's flesh and blood, and considering how much Timothy despised Margaret, why didn't Albert tell Timothy?"

That way, Timothy would have been kinder to his granddaughter.

at were Christine paused, finding sense in my words, puzzled. "Yeah, you're right. If Albert's daughter, he wouldn't just sit back and watch Bryant get involved with Margaret. That's incest, right?"

I nodded, not wanting to delve deeper, but Christine suddenly said, "No, something's still off. It doesn't add up."

"Let's not dwell on it. It's none of our business, anyway." I poked her forehead playfully and handed her a bag of tomato-flavored chips. "Here, your favorite."

In any case, next month would come soon enough. Once I got the divorce papers, Bryant and I would be worlds apart, let alone Albert and Margaret. It wouldn't matter if they were father and daughter or, just as Christine had bluntly put it, shared the same bed. It would be none of my concern anymore.

For dinner, we chose a cozy restaurant known for its local comfort food, with Christine and me arriving first. When Mark showed up alone, Christine glanced at him and twitched her mouth sarcastically.

I saw through the awkwardness and asked, "Mark, Steven didn't come?"

Steven used to tag along wherever Christine went.

"He..." Aware of the strained relationship between Steven and Christine, Mark hesitated before saying, "He was caught up with something today."

Christine knew better. "He went on a blind date. His family is pushing for a strategic marriage.

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I was momentarily stunned, feeling a sense of inevitable anger, though not completely surprised. I didn't expect it to happen so soon.

Christine's relationship with Steven was doomed from the start much like mine with Bryant. If not for Timothy, I would never have dreamed of marrying into a family like the Ferguson family.

In front of Mark, I didn't try to console Christine.

Instead, Christine brought up a new topic. "Jane, you represented the Ferguson Group in the design contest and won first place, but you've resigned. What about the jointly-designed?"

Caught off guard, I turned to Mark. "Yeah, Mark, I've left Ferguson Group..."

Mark's eyes twinkled. "Then, would you be interested in joining us?"

"Joining?" My eyes widened in disbelief at what I was hearing.

Designers in our field were usually those who had won international name awards or had made a name for themselves. I never dared to dream that far.

was ours."

Mark nodded, smiling. "I remember your dream brand in college was

"Mark, I've noticed you have a good memory about anything related to Jane." Christine was amused. "Is there anything that Jane said that didn't stick in your memory?"

I squirmed uncomfortably, about to smooth things over as Mark replied, "Not as of yet."

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Christine shot me a quick, suggestive glance that almost spilled with implications.

I was a bit perplexed, but seeing Mark's casual demeanor, I was sure it wasn't what Christine had thought.

After all, Mark had his heart set on someone for twenty years. How could he suddenly take a fancy to someone like me, fresh from a divorce?

Mark filled my glass with apple cider. "No rush. Take your time to think it over."

"Sure." My heart was still racing. After all, it was a brand I had admired for many years. It was seemingly within easy reach, which was almost like a dream.

After dinner, claiming she had another party to attend, Christine asked Mark to drive me home.

As we got into the car, I couldn't help but feel a bit guilty. "Sorry for the trouble."

"Not at all. Consider it a favor returned," Mark teased with a smile.

I chuckled. "But you didn't even let me pay the bill..."

Mark excused himself to take a call halfway through dinner and secretly settled the bill.

His fingers, pale and slender, rested elegantly on the steering wheel. His gaze swept over me, cutting me off. "You invited, and I paid. It's all the same. If you keep thinking of ways to thank me, you'll have to ask me out again."

"Oh..." I shrugged, somehow getting tangled in his logic.

I gave him the address of Riverview Estate. Since Bryant had promised to finalize our divorce as planned, he wouldn't be staying there again. And I imagined he hadn't return since I moved out. Staying at Christine's place wasn't a long-term solution. Moving back to Riverview Estate seemed like the better option.

Arriving at Riverview Estate, the chill from the garage made me shiver as I got out of the car, wrapping my coat tighter and waving goodbye to Mark. "You better head back, bye! Drive safe!"

He watched me until I disappeared into the building, his demeanor soft, "Yeah. Get inside." "Will do." I hurried into the building without looking back.

It was warmer inside. Opening my door to find the lights blazing, I paused, wondering if there had been a break-in or if I had forgotten to turn them off after my last visit to Christine's.

But then, I frowned. A pair of shiny men's leather shoes at the threshold caught my eye.

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They were custom-made and unavailable on the market.

Bryant's towering figure was standing by the balcony, his fingertips glowing intermittently with the ember of his cigarette.

I asked, "What are you doing here?"

He seemed distracted. When I approached and spoke, he finally stiffened, turning around to snuff his cigarette. His voice sounded as chilly as early winter. "He drove you home?"

"Yes."

I admitted, "You haven't answered my question. Why you're here? Ondo you want to go back on your word? You're not giving me the house?"

He bit his lip lightly. "Am I that petty?"

I pressed, "Then please leave."

"So eager to draw lines between us," Bryant's brows furrowed slightly, his eyes cold. "You think Mark is some saint?"

"That's none of your business, Bryant.

Let's not interfere in each other's lives anymore, okay?" I was exhausted by this issue.

Bryant didn't respond but coldly walked over to the coffee table and picked up a paper bag, handing it to me without a word.

Out of nowhere, he added, "You should keep them."

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I paused, glancing into the bag to find two exquisitely crafted velvet boxes. Inside were the gifts Timothy had prepared for the child..

A sharp, dense pain sliced through my heart as I spoke with a cold detachment, "These were from Timothy for the child. Since there's no child, you should keep them."

He glared at me, "Grandpa gave them to you. If you want to return them, return them to Grandpa.

I realized that to reason with him was utterly futile.

I pursed my lips. "Bryant, I can accept other things, but these are too valuable." He blurted out without thinking, "They're for you, not some stranger."

I clenched my fists, fighting the odd sensation in my chest, trying to stay rational. "We're going to divorce. It's better to keep things clear."

"Clear?" Bryant's indifferent gaze lifted slightly at the corners, leisurely observing me.

I panicked for a moment, "Yes."

"With what shall we divide 'clear'?" He leaned back against the couch, his figure relaxed, casually saying, "We've been married for three years. You've seen every inch of my body and fully enjoyed my company in bed. God knows if you've secretly taken photos of me. haven't even settled that score with you, and you want to clear things up?"

I swore inwardly, 'This man is impossible!'

I glared at him in frustration, grinding my teeth. "How shameless are you to say that? Haven't you seen me naked? Didn't you enjoy it in bed?"

"You've seen me more times." His argument was nonsensical.

I was beyond words. "What's your proof?"

"Let you have another look right now." He said it casually, his long fingers reaching for the second obsidian button on his shirt, his movements slow and deliberate, pleasing to the eye.

At first, I felt a flush of warmth, but then, seeing through his tactic, I scoffed, "Go ahead. and strip. Let's see if you dare to show off your abs and V-line to everyone today."

He said. "Oh."

I thought he would explode, but instead, he just smirked, his voice smooth, "As my wife wishes."

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His fingertips didn't stop, unbuttoning one button, two buttons, and three.

He peeled off his shirt, showing his broad shoulders and lean waist, the classic masculine physique, revealing vast expanses of smooth, well-defined chest muscles, and further down was the hint of a sharp V-line!

"Shall I continue?" He looked at me, his voice casual, fingers gripping his belt buckle, seemingly ready to strip himself if I just nodded.

I watched him with frustration, yanking the curtains closed and grinding my teeth.
"Bryant! Are you sick? Kind of an exhibitionist?"

"Weren't you the one who asked me to strip?" He feigned innocence, looking somewhat wronged.

I rolled my eyes, picking up the black shirt and throwing it at him. "So whatever I ask you to do, you'll do?"

He replied, "Yes."

After hearing his precise response, my heart fluttered slightly, "Really?"

He locked his eyes on me, "Yeah."

"You said it." I pondered and then looked at him, "I never mentioned m Timothy's dying wish to you. Timothy said he didn't allow Margaret to marry into the Ferguson family. Can you

do that?"

Bryant asked, "You want me to agree to this?"

"Can't you?" My heart sank bit by bit as I asked

His feelings for Margaret were deep. For Margaret, he would disobeym en He Timothy wish.

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His brows furrowed slightly, amused by annoyance, "How many times om have li I've long moyed past any feelings for her you imagine I have? How could I poss her? Jane, are you stupid? I don't love her!"

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"Could it be me instead?" I stood my ground, locking eyes with him, my words deliberate and straightforward.

I To say I had no hopes would be a lie. I could deceive anyone but not my own heart. I hadn't moved on. Despite knowing there was no way forward for us, I still harbored a sliver of hope that, at some point over the years, he had felt something for me, even if it was just for a fleeting moment. It had been eight years. How many eight years did one have in a lifetime?

His eyes drew me in like whirlpools and his voice had this tempting pull when he spoke, "If I said it was you, would that stop us from getting a divorce? Can we not end it?"

I was stunned, struggling to maintain clarity as looked at him and shook my head. "Bryant, if you had feelings for me, it would only mean my years of unrequited love Weren't in vain. That migh give me a bit of solace. But that is not a reason for us to keep going."

Bryant asked, "All these years?"

"Yes, all these years Suddenly, I felt ready to lay bare my feelings, no longer hiding them. I laughed and said, "Eight years, Bryant, I've been into you since college, for eight years."

After saying it all out loud, maybe I could finally let go of regrets. Telling Bryant openly that I had feelings for him was not shameful.

"How could I..." Bryant's eyes widened in surprise, a mix of joy and skepticism. "Didn't you have a thing for Mark back in college?"

I took a deep breath to quell the bitterness in my heart. "Who told you that? Or did you think there must be a romance between them if a guy and a girl get along well?"

Bryant hesitated, "Then..."

"Forgot? Didn't you wish me a happy eighth anniversary recently?" I forced a smile, though not graceful, and continued, "The day I woke up in the hospital and saw you, I started to fall for you. Thanks for getting me to the hospital in time and for all the meals you went out of your way to treat me to."

"You..." Bryant looked away, his posture wavering, his voice tight. "You fell for me because of that?"

it was just For some reason, I sensed panic in him. I tried to sound casual. "Maybe, to you, a small favor, long forgotten, but to me back then, it was a beacon of light, Bryant, regardless, I was grateful to you."

Having said it all, I was ready to start anew, leaving the past behind. I wouldn't owe Bryant anything anymorel

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He suddenly pulled out a pack of cigarettes, lighting one with a grace that made it more distinguished.

After a few puffs, his expression turned even murkier.

The smoke seemed to choke him, a rare moment of disarray as he looked the one to at me, "If..ifl

"If...if I hadn't been take you to the hospital that day..." He coughed, his eyes

reddening, his voice rough, "Would you still have fallen for me?"

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