

Lost Me Gained Regret #Chapter 31 - Read Lost Me Gained Regret Chapter 31

Chapter 31

Chapter 31

Glancing at the clock, it was already past 2 AM. Wasn't Bryant supposed to have left work with Ma Margaret? Instead, he ended up grabbing drinks with Steven, and from what Steven implied, Margaret wasn't there..

y out of Calling Steven again only led to the realization his phone was dead, probably battery.

Left with no choice, I changed and hailed a cab to their usual hangout spot, a private club they often frequented.

By the time I arrived, the crowd had mostly dispersed. Only Steven and Mark remained in the private room alongside Bryant, sprawled on a couch, dressed in a designer suit, his long legs crossed, deep in slumber.

Seeing me, Steven gave me a helpless look. "Jane, I don't know what got into Bryant today. He kept egging Mark on to drink, and we couldn't make him stop."

I had a hunch about what might have triggered it. Bryant was still stubbornly convinced that there was something between Mark and me.

It seemed all men might share this trait. They could mess around all they wanted, but they'd never allow even a hint of infidelity from their wives, even if such a hint was nothing but baseless suspicion.

I shot an apologetic glance at Mark, who looked refined and gentle even in his drunken state. "Mark, are you okay? I brought some hangover pills. Do you want some?"

His eyes were hazy from the alcohol. "Sure."

As Mark regained a bit of sobriety and looked up at me, his cheeks flushed and eyes sparkling like a kid waiting for candy, I placed the pill in his palm and handed him a glass of water. "I'm so sorry you had to drink so much."

"You're telling me," he lamented. "Bryant wouldn't stop pouring, and despite our attempts to intervene, he drank everything handed to him!"

Steven was venting, and before I could process it all, he handed me the car keys. "You can drive, right?"

"Yeah," I said.

Approaching Bryant, I braced myself against the smell of alcohol and gently tapped his face. "Bryant, wake up. It's time to go home."

He frowned in annoyance and broke into a dazed smile upon seeing it was me. "Honey."

As he spoke, he enveloped my hand in his. His palm was cool.

Steven's laughter grew louder, clearly amused. See, Jane? Good thing I didn't call
Chapter 31

Margaret. She'd be furious."

Only Mark, sitting in the corner, remained silent throughout.

I attempted to withdraw my hand, but Bryant's drunken strength was surprisingly formidable, and he wouldn't budge. So, I let it be.

With Steven's help, we got Bryant into the car before Steven turned to assist a similarly inebriated Mark.

Once in the driver's seat, the first thing I did was roll down the windows. I used to be indifferent to the smell of alcohol, but tonight, it was making me nauseous.

The roads were empty at this hour. Woken up in the middle of the night, on top of the day's frustrations, I found myself aggressively alternating between the gas and brake pedals.

Uncomfortable with the bumpy ride, Bryant mumbled in protest, "Kevin, slow down!"

"I can't slow down," I retorted without thinking.

"Ugh..." Bryant felt like vomiting.

"Don't you dare throw up, I instantly felt goosebumps.

"Ugh... Bryant continued.

"Swallow it!" I was beyond annoyed. I've always had a strong aversion to seeing or hearing people vomit, and being pregnant only made it worse.

Without a doubt, I'd lose my dinner if he threw up.

"Burp!"

Hearing him belch and then quiet down finally relaxed my tense nerves.

2/7

Chapter 32

I Chapter 32

About fifteen minutes later, the car slowly rolled into the driveway.

"We're home, Bryant, I announced as I opened the car door.

Unexpectedly, the man beside me, who was out cold from drinking, slumped toward me as I opened the door.

I frowned, bracing myself to hold him up. "Can you stand up on your own?"

But I got no response.

Left with no choice, I had to wake Emma, who was sound asleep, to help me get Bryant back into his room.

"Mrs. Ferguson, do you need help?" Emma asked, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"No, it's fine. Go back to sleep," I replied, feeling sorry for disturbing Emma's rest.

After Emma left, I struggled with the nausea from Bryant's alcohol fumes as I bent over to help him out of his shoes and tie, then straightened up to head downstairs. But as I turned to leave, I found my hand suddenly gripped in his.

"Sweetheart..." he mumbled with his eyes still closed.

I didn't think he was calling for me. More likely, he had reached a point with Margaret where they called each other endearing terms like that.

I tried to pry his eyelids open. "Bryant, look at me. Do you see who I am?"

"Sweetheart..." He wasn't cooperating, turning away from my attempts and pulling my hand closer, whispering, "Jane, my wife is Jane."

My heart skipped a beat. But I quickly reminded myself, thinking Bryant was just drunk. wouldn't take it seriously. When he was sober, he would only choose someone else.

I pursed my lips, saying lightly, "Is that so? But you don't even love Jane. Must be tough, being married to a woman you don't love."

His words in the office, spoken to Timothy, were etched clearly in my mind.

'Jane, don't be foolish anymore.' I told myself inwardly.

"It's not tough..." He nuzzled my hand, his usually cold face showing a hint of contentment, drunkenly saying. "My wife is great. She's the best woman."

"At least your eyes aren't blind." I snorted.

After marrying into the Ferguson family, I had been perfect toward the elders and Bryant. Even if Bryant didn't love me, he couldn't fault me there.

1/2

Chapter 32

Bryant mumbled a few more words I couldn't make out, probably thinking I had left, and drifted back to sleep.

After ensuring he was sound asleep, I freed my hand and went downstairs to make him a hangover soup.

He tended to wake up in the middle of the night after drinking too much.

With this soup, he'd wake up the next day without a hangover.

It might have been a habit formed over the three years. Even though I'd had the divorce papers drafted and I had moved out of this house that no longer felt like mine, I still found myself taking care of him.

As I fished the softened ingredients out of the boiling pot, I finally realized what I was doing, smacking my forehead in frustration.

'What am I doing?' I couldn't believe it.

I wanted to leave, but wasting food didn't sit right with me either. I would chalk it up to a good deed for the day, like looking after a stray dog. I found a reasonable excuse for myself.

I strained out the ingredients when the soup was ready and carried it upstairs.

I intended to leave it on the bedside table and go, but as I reached the bed, I found myself caught in a pair of lucid eyes.

Startled, I felt somewhat uneasy. "You're awake?"

"Yeah," Bryant murmured.

"This, um, I made you some hangover soup on a whim." Feeling like got caught do something wrong, I placed the bowl on the bedside table, "Drink it if you want, or jus throw it out."

I turned to leave, in a hurry to escape.

Unexpectedly, the man, who was too drunk test an hour, she wenty to stan stan hour ago, suddenly reached out, pulling me back with a firm grip around my waist.

"Sweetheart, can we not get a divorce, please?"

Chapter 33

Chapter 33

The fabric between us was thin, yet the skin around my waist felt like it was on fire.

I froze as if possessed by a ghost, but thankfully, my mind was crystal clear. "We laid it all out, Bryant. I can't be in a marriage with a third person involved."

"I'm sorry," he murmured, his forehead pressed against my back, his voice muffled.

Did I feel a twinge of sympathy? Of course.

It's not easy to erase years of affection overnight. I wanted to relent, to give Bryant another chance. But then, the recent events screamed in my memory, demanding attention. The choice was between him and me.

I sighed. "Bryant, you realize your mistakes, but then you repeat them. It's meaningless."

This time, I chose to put myself first.

After seven years of choosing him, it was enough.

Bryant was silent for a long while, unable to respond.

"Let go, Bryant. Here's so far we can go." I never imagined I could say such cold words to him.

Unrequited love? It was like throwing yourself into a grand solo sacrifice. Just one look or a beckoning from them, you'd ecstatically run back, floating on air for days. Your heart would bloom with joy.

nually Who would have thought that one day, all you'd think about was leaving?

I didn't remember how I left, but I was still in a daze when I returned to Riverview Estat Thankfully, morning sickness spared me any further turmoil. I fell asleep as soon as I down, with no time left for troubling thoughts.

The doorbell woke me the following morning. Other than Christine, no one knew I had moved But Christine would have just let herself in. She knew the code. It was probably just someone confused about the floors.

I tried to ignore it, hoping to enjoy a lazy weekend's sleep, but the persistent ringing forced me out of bed Opening the door, I found Bryant's imposing figure blocking the entrance, his eyes fixed on me. "Are you thinking about settling down here for good?" he asked.

"What else?" I asked, thinking our conversation the night before had been clear enough Since mentioning divorce, Bryant seemed to have dropped his façade. His expression was Chapter 33

indifferent. "Come home with me."

It was an order, his handsome features exuding an authoritative charisma.

Too bad that I wasn't buying it anymore. "Don't you remember what I said last night?"

"What did you say?" He feigned calm, unashamedly claiming, "I got a thing."

"You were sober enough last night." I scrutinized him skeptically.

"Don't know. I blacked out." Bryant argued.

drunk. Can't remember

"Whatever, it doesn't matter." I didn't want to argue and attempted to close the door, but he blocked it.

He calmly stated, "Grandpa called. He wants us to join him for lunch."

"Oh." I had almost forgotten about that detail.

All I could think about was finalizing the divorce and living separately without Timothy knowing.

I stepped aside to let him in, pointing to a pair of cotton slippers by the entrance!
"Make yourself comfortable. Give me twenty minutes"

With that, I went off to get ready, putting on makeup and changing into an apricot-colored long dress with a casual knit cardigan, then rejoining him.

He had made himself home on the sofa, casually opening a juice. Seeing me, he attempted small talk. "Nice place you've got here. When did you decorate?"

2/2

Chapter 34

Chapter 34

Barely a week after he'd handed me the keys, the house was already under renovation. I was chasing contractors from dawn till dusk. He never bothered to ask about it.

No matter how late I got home, at most, he'd politely comment, "Quite the night, huh?" or, "Looks like the Design Department's swamped"

That was it. No inquiries about where I'd been or what I'd been up to. It wasn't within Bryant's scope of concern anymore.

With divorce on the horizon, I wasn't in the mood to hold back. "Maybe it's because you've been too busy with Margaret."

Sure enough, his face tightened at the mention.

I felt a twinge of satisfaction.

Bryant said, "We haven't been in touch lately."

"No need to explain to me. It didn't matter anymore." I said, "As you please. Once we divorce, you can bring her home."

"Jane, why do you have to be so snarky?" His brows knitted together, a hint of helplessness in his tone.

I looked indifferent. "And how should I speak?"

"Divorce or not, she has nothing to do with us," He said.

"Seriously? What a joke." Dropping that bomb, went to the foyer, changing shoes to leave. Waiting in the car, the driver hurried to open the door for me. As I settled into the car, Bryant followed close behind.

Bryant, who usually had little to say, made an awkward conversation throughout the ride. His gaze dropped to my feet, puzzled. "Why have you stopped wearing heels?"

"Flats are more comfortable," I replied emotionlessly.

Since I found out I was pregnant, I ditched the heels. Didn't want to risk anything.

"Oh. He uttered a word and pondered before asking, "When will Christmas' limited edition go into production?"

What? I looked at him, perplexed.

Even though the Design Department I headed was responsible for a luxury brand, it wasn't the focus of the Ferguson Group in recent years. Bryant had delegated authority long ago, only requiring project updates at meetings, never inquiring privately.

1/2

Chapter 34

'What's with him today?' I wondered, 'First heels, and now Christmas' limited edition.'

Bryant's eyes narrowed, a smirk playing on his lips. "What, can't I check on my employee's work?"

Under his roof, I had no choice but to play along. "Before next Friday."

The samples were already ready. After we had confirmed the designs on Monday, we could push the suppliers to ready the materials, and production could start.

"Oh." He responded again, and wanting to end the conversation, I said bluntly, "Bryant, stop beating around the bush. Just sign the divorce papers soon and be a decent ex-husband."

He asked, "And what does a decent ex-husband look like?"

I fumed. "Like you're dead."

Perhaps my words were too harsh, and Bryant finally lost interest in com further conversationx Even as we arrived, his expression was as frosty as ever, looking like someone had trodden on his to

But despite the rush, we were still a tad late.

Seeing us, Emma greeted us with a smile, "Mr. Timothy's already here, waiting for you guys."

I immediately felt guilty. I was the one who promised Timothy not to divorce yet here I was, living elsewhere.

Helplessly, I looked at Bryant, hoping he might help explain.

Before I could speak, he seemed to have guessed my intention, coldly saying, "Just pretend I'm dead."

With his long strides, he left me trailing behind

2/2

Chapter 35

Chapter 35

I never realized Bryant had such a penchant for holding grudges.

There was nothing for it but to steel myself and follow him, but before I could even attempt an explanation, Timothy turned around with a warm, welcoming smile. "Heard from Emma that you moved out, Jane?"

"Yes, Timothy." Acknowledging it seemed the only way forward. If Grandpa got mad, I'd figure out how to smooth things over later.

But Timothy didn't seem inclined to blow up at me. Instead, he shot Bryant an angry look, "Useless brat, you can't even keep your wife!"

Bryant looked helpless. "Grandpa, be reasonable. It was her choice to leave. What could I do?"

"She left, and you didn't think to go after her?" Timothy's disappointment was palpable, "You're just like your father. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

"Aren't you the tree?" Bryant managed a small laugh.

"You bastard!" Timothy pretended to grab a coffee mug to throw at him but set it down again, struggling to find the right words. Finally, he just sighed, "Hungry. Let's eat."

Dinner was surprisingly harmonious.

Timothy kept piling food onto my plate until it resembled a small mountain. "Eat up. You've gotten so thin. Need to put some meat on your bones."

"Thanks, Timothy." My smile was as warm as the feeling swelling in my heart.

After my parents passed, no one else took the time to fuss over my meals like this. My aunt's family was well-off, but my uncle and cousin would subtly monitor every bite I took at their dinner table. I loved food, but even at eight, I knew how to read the room. Every bite I took was from the vegetables.

When I looked at the bounty before me, my eyes welled up.

Timothy always had an authoritative aura but was all warmth around me. "Silly child, why the tears?"

"Nothing" shook my head, fighting back the tears with a polite smile. "You're just so nice to me. It reminds me of my parents."

Bryant said, "I never got to meet your parents. We should visit your home sometime..."

As Bryant glanced at me, Timothy's face turned stern, his voice harsh, "Shut up! With how little care you're showing, Jane's right to dump you! She totally should!"

Bryant wanted to argue, and I interrupted, "My parents are gone."

12

Chapter 35

Bryant asked, "When did..."

"When I was eight." I interrupted before he could ask more, not to defend him before Timothy but to avoid upsetting Timothy further. Still, there was an ache in my heart. The tears had fought back, threatened to spill again.

It wasn't his fault, after all. Timothy arranged the marriage, and Bryant was only responsible for showing up to sign the papers. It made sense that he didn't know about my family. I consoled myself with that thought. Bryant looked stunned, a flicker of guilt passing over his face. "Sorry."

"Sorry for what? If you're sorry, take Jane to the cemetery someday!" Timothy spoke up.

I was about to refuse, but Bryant spoke first, earnestly, "You're right."

Then he turned to me, "How about this afternoon? Are you free?"

"Yeah, sure." In front of Timothy, I didn't want to make a scene.

And besides, Bryant probably didn't mean it. It was likely just something to say to appease Timothy. Once Timothy left, we could go our separate ways.

That satisfied Timothy, who warned Bryant, "If you bully Jane again, and she wants a divorce, I won't intervene. You've warned you!"

"Don't worry, Timothy." I served Timothy some stuffed bell peppers, softly saying, "He can't bully me."

Chapter 36

Chapter 36

Anyway, we were on the verge of a divorce.

After dinner, Bryant joined Timothy in the backyard for a game of chess.

I was leisurely making tea on the side.

Bryant played chess with a cunning and ruthless strategy, capturing another piece, which made Timothy glare at him, "You think you're dealing with a stranger? Not leaving any room for your old grandpa?"

"Alright then." Bryant chuckled, and indeed started to go easy, which made Timothy quite happy. His laughter was hearty, and with a meaningful tone, he said, "Remember, br family and strangers are not the same."

I handed over a cup of tea, "Timothy, have some tea."

"Okay." Timothy responded, taking a sip and then contentedly said, "If you two could always be this harmonious, I'd be holding my great-grandchild in no time!"

Neither of us said a word.

My heart stirred, and I instinctively placed my hand on my stomach.

Looking at Timothy's face, which was showing signs of age, I felt a pang of guilt.

If there weren't any rifts or issues between Bryant and me, I could have told Timothy right now that I was pregnant, and he would be able to hold his great-grandchild very soon.

But there were no ifs. And I could only let Timothy down.

Bryant gave me a profound look, then said, "Don't worry, I'll do my best."

"You better!" Grandpa patted his hand, "If it comes to it, let Emma whip up some of her special dishes to boost your strength."

"I'm strong enough as it is."

Perhaps due to the inherent competitive nature in men, Bryant immediately retorted.

I kept my silence.

Even though Bryant and I were on the verge of divorce, hearing this dialogue between them made my cheeks heat up instantly.

In this marriage, Bryant was quite insincere in many aspects.

But in bed, he was always genuine. If he were to "boost" his strength, I might not survive his vigor

"Then make it quick! I want to hold that baby soon!"

1/2

Chapter 35

After issuing his command, Timothy slowly got up, "Alright, I won't take up more of your time, go with Jane to the cemetery to visit your in-laws."

With that, we headed to the front yard.

Seeing us, the family driver opened the car door for Timothy and, after bidding us goodbye, drove off.

"Let's go." Bryant walked to the Mercedes, tilted his chin up, signaling me to get in the car.

"You don't need to drop me off, I can take a cab."

"Aren't we going to the cemetery?"

I looked at him in surprise, not expecting him to be serious about it, "You really want to go?"

"I said I'd go with you, and I will."

Bryant opened the passenger door forcefully, "Get in."

Okay."

I had no choice but to get in.

The cemetery was located in the suburbs. It should have been a smooth drive, but we got stuck in traffic due to an accident.

Just before getting out of the car, I received a call from Christine.

"Jane, I'm heading over to your place later!"

Hearing this, I replied excitedly. "I'm not home right now, later okay? But you c
ahead.

She hesitated for a moment, then said mysteriously, "Can I bring two friends along with me too?"

"Of course, you decide."

To me, Christine was more like a sister than a friend.

I could go to her place whenever I wanted, so I was never wary of her.

Christine seemed excited for a moment, then calmed down, "Okay, up now! Come back early I'll hang up tonight, and make sure you're hungry!"

I smiled helplessly, agreeing readily.

After hanging up, I caught Bryant's ambiguous gaze, "Whose call was that? How can he just go to your place? Does he have your security code?"

"Even I don't have it. He added that last bit as an afterthought.

Chapter 37

Chapter 37

What was that supposed to mean? He thought I cheated on him before we even split?

He was exactly that type of guy.

I couldn't be bothered to explain, so I just said indifferently, "Just friends."

"What friends?"

"Bryant," I couldn't help but smile softly, "Dead men don't pry."

If he wanted to be a ghost from my past, then he might as well vanish for good.

Bryant almost laughed out of irritation, his tongue clicking against his cheek in scorn, "Fine."

When we got to the cemetery, I stepped out of the car and started climbing the steps up the hill.

Seeing he wasn't following. I turned back to wait for him.

As I did, I noticed him carrying some flowers he must have prepared at some point, which caught me off guard.

I bit my lip, then said, "Thank you."

"For what? It's the least I could do," he said flatly.

As he caught up, we walked side by side toward my parents' gravestone.

This was for the best, I guess. Even if it was just for appearances, at least my parents would be at peace, knowing this much.

The gravesite was well-kept, with only a bit of dust on the tombstone.

It was strange. My parents had been gone for years, and I didn't think about them all that often.

Not like when I was a kid, crying into my pillow night after night.

But seeing their photos on the gravestone now tears just started falling uncontrollably.

Bryant, always so dignified and reserved, knelt down beside me..

"I'm sorry it took me so long to bring Jane to see you."

His voice was gentle, serious as he bowed his head three times, and on the last one, murmured, "I was wrong before, and I'll try to learn..."

I couldn't hear the rest of what he said Not that it mattered he Chapter 37

We didn't have a future together anymore.

"Mom, Dad..."

As I touched their photos on the gravestone, my tears flowed even more, and all the things. I wanted to say were reduced to a simple, "I miss you so much." So very much.

I missed feeling like I belonged to a family.

After they left, I never really had a home again. Marrying Bryant, I thought I'd finally have a family, but it was just a fantasy.

I cleaned my tears, overwhelmed with sadness, yet I forced a smile.

"Mom, Dad, I'm pregnant, two months now! In a few months, the baby will be here. I don't know I'm so happy, Mom, if it's a boy or a girl, but either way, you'll be thrilled, won't you Dad. I'm going to have family again. I'll take great care of my baby, just like you did for me, giving my baby all my love. I'll bring my child here to see you."

I looked at the gravestone, speaking to it in silence.

I wondered if they could hear me.

They say families have a way of sensing each other, so maybe they could.

"Dummy."

Suddenly, a warm, deep voice. sounded above me, and the next second was enveloped in a broad, solid embrace.

Bryant stroked my hair, "Why cry? Those who've passed only wish for you to be happy.

Instinctively, I wanted to push him away, but then I paused.

Maybe, in this respect, we shared a common pain.

He'd also lost his mom, even before I had. And his father, always com m

preoccupied with Toor indulging in his own pleasures, was never really a good father.

Chapter 38

Chapter 38

Otherwise, the Ferguson Group wouldn't have ended up directly in Bryant's hands.

"How about you? How have you been?" I lifted my gaze, looking up at the sharp lines of his jaw, and asked hesitantly.

"These three years since we got married," he managed a slight smile, sighed softly, and said, "it's been good."

That answer made me want to cry even more.

It was regret, wasn't it? After all, if it hadn't been for all those issues, we could have grown old together.

On our way back, we both remained silent, an unspoken agreement between us. Some things are better left unsaid.

He couldn't truly change what was happening, and I couldn't just live with it.

Better to let go now, while we could still look at each other without disdain.

Autumn days are short and the nights-long. Through the car window, the setting sun cast a golden glow over his figure.

"I'll walk you up." When we arrived at Riverview Estate, he spoke before I could.

I didn't refuse, and we went up together. Standing at the door, I pursed my lips, "I'm You can go back now."

"Okay."

Bryant nodded slightly, yet he didn't move.

b I ignored him, about to enter my code, when the door was pulled open from the inside, revealing Christine's radiant face. "You're back I heard some noise at the door and thought it was the delivery guy."

Seeing Christine in my apartment seemed to ease Bryant a little.

As I walked in, I joked, "So you expected me to come back hungry, hoping for takeout?"

"Of course not! I might not be a cook, but Mark makes delicious meals!"

Christine glanced at Bryant, raising her voice towards the kitchen, "Right, Mark?"

I realized then, "Mark's here too?"

"Yeah, you're celebrating your new place, right? I thought to invite a few friends over. I just called Steven and Mark, didn't bother with the others you're not too close with."

Chapter 38

That's when I noticed new decorations and trinkets around the place. It felt festive.

A warmth spread through me, as I suddenly felt a genuine sense of belonging to this apartment.

I completely missed the clear shift in Bryant's expression, from sunny to a cold dreariness, in an instant.

"Jane, you're back?" Steven, who had been helping Mark in the kitchen, came running out, his playful smile fading into guilt upon seeing Bryant at the door.

Bryant, with one hand in his pocket, looked at him with a half-smile, "You seem cheerful."

"Ahem..."

Steven scrambled to explain, "Bryant, I thought you were busy..."

"I'm not busy."

"Well... then, do you wanna join us in... celebrating Jane's new house warming?"

Steven's words came out with difficulty, torn between the man he admired since childhood and Christine's admonishing look.

I, however, didn't make much of it.

Considering Bryant had missed my birthday every single year for the past three, why would he bother with a housewarming?

"Alright."

Unexpectedly, before Steven could finish, Bryant readily agreed, stepping in as if he owned the place.

Everyone was taken aback.

But it was Mark who eased the tension, "The more, the merrier, right?"

The atmosphere turned a bit awkward, yet Bryant seemed oblivious, casually thanking Mark, "Appreciate you coming over to celebrate."

The undertone of his words carried a subtle nuance.

2/2

Chapter 39

Chapter 39

Mark seemed oblivious to any undercurrent in the conversation or perhaps chose not to delve deeper. With a gentle smile, he said, "No worries. Why don't you all wash up?"

Dinner's almost ready."

Mark was quite the chef. The table was laden with dishes that were a feast for the senses, making everyone's mouth water.

Steven and Christine couldn't stop singing his praises.

I couldn't help but join in, "Mark, your cooking skills are totally amazing!"

"Give it a try, see if you like it," Mark encouraged as he brought out the last two dishes, placing a plate of spicy shrimp in front of me with a warm smile. "You should like this one."

I was surprised.

Aside from Christine, everyone assumed my taste was similar to Bryant's-very mild. But before I could speak up, Bryant's cool voice interjected, "She can't handle spicy food. You might have been close in college, but you clearly don't know her taste..."

"Mr. Ferguson," Christine was quick to correct him, her tone playful despite the seriousness of her words, "after all this time together, where has your attention been? Jane's favorite is spicy food, the hotter the better!"

It was a sobering reminder.

Indeed, where had his attention been?

I had always adapted to his preferences, yet he never took the time to understand Bryant frowned slightly, a trace of confusion in his eyes. "You like spicy?" "Yes."

As we spoke, I peeled a shrimp and ate it deliberately, maintaining eye contact with his beautiful, deep-set eyes as I earnestly replied, "Bryant, I don't like bland food; it's just not satisfying."

Bryant's demeanor darkened, and the atmosphere turned even more awkward.

I knew it wasn't the right moment for such a conversation.

Bryant was not known for his patience, and this only served to spoil what was otherwise a lovely meal.

But I had held my tongue for three years. Was there ever going to be a "right" time? Could I never speak my truth?

172

Chapter 39

Unexpectedly, Bryant, usually so willful, lowered his proud head in front of us.

"From now on, we'll make meals that you like," he said.

I was speechless, my heart swelling with a bittersweet ache.

It seemed he was willing to change, but it wasn't enough to set our marriage back on track.

On the contrary, this made it all the more painful.

I would have preferred he never changed, that he remained indifferent to my feelings.. That way, I could leave without any regrets.

Christine patted my head, bringing the issue into the open with a smile, "What do you mean from now on? It was you who pushed her away. Don't try to compete with me in the future."

I knew Christine well enough; she would stand up for me even if it meant losing her job at the Ferguson Group.

As for Bryant, though I hadn't completely figured him out, I knew he struggled to separate personal issues from professional ones, potentially putting Christine at risk.

"Alright, let's eat," Steven interjected, wary of Christine's boldness possibly angering Bryant. "I'm starving here."

The meal was eaten with a n a mix of emotions.

But, adhering to the principle of not letting my unborn child go hungry, I m ate my fill. Steven raised his glass with a grin, toasting, "Here's to your new beginnings!" "Thank you. I'm sticking to juice for now," I replied with a smile, clinking my glas his.

Christine offered her sincere blessings, "Here's to Jane, may your future be filled with happiness and your path smooth and straight!

227

Chapter 40

Chapter 40

Then the both gave me their gifts.

Mark handed me a beautifully wrapped gift box with a warm smile, saying, "Hope you like it."

"Thanks, Mark," I responded with a grin, genuinely touched by the gesture.

My surprise was evident when I discovered a dress of such unique design inside. "Did I you design this yourself?"

"Yeah, it's one of a kind," he replied with a proud chuckle.

"Mark, you're so thoughtful!" Christine complimented, before playfully challenging Bryant, "Mr. Ferguson, since you're here for the housewarming party, I assume you've brought a gift as well?"

I wanted to intervene, knowing that Christine had caught Bryant off guard, but she silenced me with a glance.

Bryant locked eyes with me, his gaze intense, before he reached into his suit jacket and presented me with a small velvet box. "I hadn't found the right moment to give this to you- until now," he said, his voice barely concealing the emotion beneath.

"What is it?" Christine leaned over, her curiosity piqued.

Upon opening the box, I was stunned to find a pair of ruby earrings. "You were the one who bid on these?" I asked, incredulously.

The earrings, a much-coveted item from a recent auction, known for their unpar color and clarity, had fetched a staggering price, bought by a mysterious bidder. I admired them online, never imagining they would end up as a gift from Bryant.

"Do you like them?" Bryant asked, his smile deepening.

"They're too expensive," I protested. While the gifts from Mark and Christine were generous, they were within my comfort zone. These earrings, however, were beyond my wildest expectations. The thought of accepting such a lavish gift from Bryant, especially when we were on the verge of divorcing, made me hesitate.

"Love them!" Christine intervened before I could refuse, offering Bryant a sincere smile. "Mr. Ferguson, you're the most generous ex-husband ever!"

I choked on my drink, coughing as Christine's words took me by surprise.

"Mr. Ferguson, cheers! Holding up her glass, she toasted Bryant and then proceeded to down several more in his honor.

After the party, as I was getting ready for bed, Christine, a bit tipsy, made a point. "You were being silly not accepting it. After the divorce settlement you've agreed to, you should

10

Chapter 40

take whatever you can get."

"This apartment itself is worth a fortune," I laughed off her concern.

"But can you easily turn it into cash? Keep the jewelry. It'll serve as both a statement piece and a rainy day fund," she advised, reminding me that to someone like Bryant, the cost was trivial. "Besides, if you don't take it, who knows who will? Why let someone else benefit?"

As the evening wound down, Steven and Christine, clearly having enjoyed the wine, were sprawled on the couch, barely moving.

While they were sleeping, Steven tried to curl up with Christine, who m half-asleep, kicked him off the bed with a grumbled "Get lost!"

Shaking my head in amusement, I covered them with blankets.

Looking up, I accidentally met Bryant's gaze. He appeared om unexpectedly vulnerable, his eyes slightly glazed and his posture relaxed in a way that seemed out of character.

Approaching him, I softly offered, "Let me drive you home."

But he just glanced towards Mark, who was tidying up the kitchen, and replied in a husky voice, "

His words, tinged with a hint of hurt, caught me off guard.

12/2