

My Beloved Has Risen from Death's Embrace Novel

CHAPTER 141

Posted by **AdminJ**, 1725 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

Chapter 141

Orion strode into the hall, the first thing on his mind was to wash off the dried snake blood on his hands.

“Leonardoodle, there’s a snake’s nest in the backwoods, about half a mile from the first trail marker, at the base of the cliff. Get someone to clear it out.”

“Oh, alright!”

“Cedric, sprinkle some sulfur around the perimeter of the room where Ms. Nightshade will be staying tonight.”

Cedric nodded, “Right away, sir!”

Leonard, watching Orion issuing orders as if nothing had happened, couldn’t help but approach him. “Orion, sometimes I really don’t get you. If you care about Xanthea so much that you even think of laying sulfur around her room, why would you do ‘that thing’ to her in the woods? It got me wronged.”

He hadn’t finished his sentence when Orion’s icy gaze silenced him, “What did you say?”

Leonard, intimidated by that look, muttered, “Maybe I’m reading too much into it? But Xanthea implied it, and if nothing had happened, why would she down that glass of wine to drown her sorrows?”

Orion’s eyes narrowed as he glanced at the bottle of strong red wine on the dining table.

She hadn’t eaten for over eight hours and had just been frightened.

“Where is she now?”

“She just, just ran out.”

“Cedric, prepare some sobering soup.”

“Got it!”

Leonard, startled by Orion’s suddenly grim demeanor, watched as he hurried away, murmuring to himself, “What on earth is going on?”

In the restroom.

Xanthea clutched the sink, retching, but nothing came out.

The strong alcohol swirled in her stomach, burning ever more fiercely, as if it wanted to set her entire being on fire. It was so hot she felt like stripping, her head spinning dizzily. In her haze, a writhing, sinister snake suddenly appeared before her eyes, causing her to scream, the hallucination then disappearing completely.

She shook her head, trying to stay alert.

No, she couldn't stay here any longer!

The mere thought of a snake slithering into her room while she slept sent chills down her spine.

Frantically, she pulled out her phone, scrolled through her contacts, her fingers becoming uncontrollable, her vision blurring despite her efforts to stay clear-headed.

"Hey Siri, find, find Samuel's number, have him, have him come pick me up."

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Before she could finish, a call came through.

"Huh? That was fast, I didn't even finish!"

"That's not Samuel's name, who's Matthew?"

Xanthea tilted her head, visibly confused and thoroughly intoxicated.

Oh!

It took her a moment, then it clicked, it was Matt, her honey!

She immediately answered the call, joyously shouting. "Matt."

On the other end, Matthew, overwhelmed by the sweet, long-missed greeting, stood up excitedly. "Xan?"

How long had it been since Xanthea had called him like that? With such dependence and affection, as if he was her entire world!

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1736 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

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Ever since Xanthea's coming-of-age celebration, it seemed like she had transformed into someone entirely different.

Gone were the days when she clung to Matthew, made a fuss over him, always thought of him, and constantly wanted to be by his side.

Her world had expanded to include academics, career pursuits, various hobbies, and friends.

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In contrast, Matthew felt like he was losing importance, with their one-on-one time dwindling to a pitiful amount. It seemed like he was gradually being phased out of her life, leaving him anxious and every day, fearing she might change her heart and leave him.

Hearing that familiar call now felt like a throwback to the past when nothing had changed!

This time, he resolved to cherish and protect her more than ever, never again taking her for granted!

"Matt, calling so late, are you missing me?"

"Yes! Yes, I've been thinking about you all day!"

"Huh."

Xanthea grinned, revealing a sweet smile.

"I missed you too!"

"By the way, Kan, where are you right now?"

“Me?” Xanthea looked around, noting the pavilion, walkways, street lamps, small trees, and a sign emblazoned with ‘Marlowe’ in golden letters, “I’m in the bathroom.”

“The bathroom? Which bathroom?”

“One in a really huge mansion! It’s as big as a castle!”

Xanthea described with no exaggeration, and Matthew began to sense something was off.

This wasn’t Xanthea’s usual way of talking. Could it be she was drunk?

Xanthea wasn’t known for her drinking, always moderate, only indulging in a bit of wine on special occasions. How could she be drunk?

He had earlier phoned the Nightshade family, her mom mentioned she was at the comp any. Then he asked Oliver, who was **at** a social event and didn’t elaborate much, only mentioning she was safe with Mr. Lockwood and not to worry. But still, he couldn’t resist calling her.

He had assumed ‘Mr. Lockwood’ was a senior executive at Olihea Media, but now, who would dare get **Xanthea** drunk and take her to a grand mansion? Could it be this Mr. Lockwood was Orion?

Orion got he drunk and took her to a mansion, what was he planning?

Matthew’s nerves tightened, and he anxiously asked, “Xan, are you with Orion right now?” Orion?

When Matthew said that name, Xanthea’s heart skipped, and she frowned, muttering, “Orion, Orion.”

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Why did that name sound so familiar? It seemed like to her.

A figure suddenly appeared, blocking a menacing thug; strong arms and a warm chest pulled her out of the icy lake water; drunkenly, he pinned her to the bed, his lips and tongue wildly claiming her as his own; he pried open her tomb, kissing earnestly, a single hot tear dropping on her cold corpse.

Countless fragments of memory flooded her mind. Xanthea briefly snapped to clarity, then lost herself in another vision.

On the rooftop, the cheating couple spotted her, their faces twisted in ugliness and scorn.

She stood there, disbelieving her eyes.

Laughing, they pushed her off the skyscraper, those terrifying faces etched forever in her memory.

Xanthea turned pale, her body ice-cold, even her hand holding the phone trembling uncontrollably, as she listened to the incessant voice in her ear, her emotions suddenly spiraling out of control.

“Why? Why would you do this to me? Why?”

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Her sudden shrill scream startled Matthew.

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1709 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

Chapter **143**

“Xan? Xan, what’s wrong? Are you in danger? Is Orion trying to hurt you?”

“Huh.”

She smirked coldly.

“Orion hurt me? No way, I’m perfectly safe with him. Sure, he can be a bit of a bad boy, but,”

But what?

Xanthea furrowed her brow, feeling like she was forgetting something.

She tried hard to remember, but couldn’t. The noise on the other end of the phone was too much, and she abruptly **hung** up. As soon as she did, it came back to her, “Oh right! He won’t hurt me, but he might hurt you guys. Be careful.”

“You’ve been so naughty, Ori will help me get my revenge!”

She lifted her head proudly, hands on her hips.

Seconds later, she looked around confusedly, “Where am I? How did I get here? I’m so tired and sleepy, I just want to go home.”

She walked a few steps forward to a trash can, bent down, “Ah, home at last!”

She threw away her phone and was about to dive into the trash can, but suddenly a warm large hand grabbed her arm from behind.

“Ms. Nightshade.”

“Huh?”

Xanthea turned around to face a man of breathtaking beauty. His features were so perfect it seemed like each had been meticulously crafted by the divine—arching brows like polished onyx, deep-set eyes, a sharp nose, and striking facial contours.

Who was he? How could someone be so handsome, so tall? His face, his build, made her want to gulp. Orion pulled her close, his breath heavy with the scent of liquor, “Are you alright? I’ll take you to o…” “Hello, handsome.”

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Before he could finish, Xanthea cheekily grabbed his tie, her sparkling eyes curving into a mischievous arc

at his face.

as she stared intently

“Which elite family’s son are you? So good-looking—I’ve seen all the high-profile young masters in Havenbrook how come I’ve never seen you?”

Her delicate fingers played with his tie, her lips curling into a teasing smile, clearly flirting with him.

Orion paused, then his eyes narrowed slightly.

Was she drunk?

Really? Ms Nightshade, you’ve seen so many men?”

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“Of course!” Xanthea tossed her head proudly, boasting, “I am, after all, the precious heiress of the

Nightshade family, gentle and smart, beautiful inside and out. Men line up from Crestwood to Seraphia to woo me, um.”

Before she could finish, Orion suddenly gripped her waist and lifted her up.

“What are you doing?”

Xanthea looked at him curiously. Orion’s eyes twinkled with a hint of mockery, “You seem drunk. Allow me to sober you up.”

Drunk?

“I am not! I’m perfectly clear-headed, put me down now!”

“Oh?” Orion looked down at her as she pushed against his chest, “Can you tell me what this is?”

Xanthea looked at her hand and scoffed, “Huh? Do you think I’m a fool? Of course it’s there.”

Her mind was clear, her pronunciation perfect, which made Orion reconsider her state of intoxication...

“I got it right, didn’t I?” Xanthea raised an eyebrow and smirked at him playfully, “Turnabout is fair play, now it’s my turn to ask you a question.”

With that, she suddenly yanked down on his tie, her lips brushing close to his immaculate face, her breath teasingly warm, “Babe, you’re so handsome, how much would it cost for me to spend the night with you?”

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1771 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

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The sweet intoxication of the wine breath gently wafted from the young woman’s lips, lightly cascading over the man’s sharply defined, cool marble-like face, igniting a burning heat. Accompanied by a lazy, sultry tone in her voice, Orion nearly stopped in his tracks, his eyes instantly deepened.

He looked down at the girl in his arms, her long, curled lashes fluttering slightly, shading eyes filled with the seductive glimmering lights. Her petite, dazzling face was flushed with the warmth of the drink, casting an enchanting glow on her cheeks. She gently bit her lush red lips with her teeth, a look of playful reproach as if struggling to bear some burden.

At that moment, she seemed to transform into a mesmerizing, soul-enticing fox, her clothes half-draped as she lay in his arms, gently pulling at his tie, beckoning him with a tender allure.

A spark of fiery desire ignited in Orion's pupils, rapidly consuming his composure and restraint, as he felt the soft, fragrant embrace of the woman he had longed for in his arms. He wanted nothing more than to... Yet, Xanthea seemed unaware of the danger, one hand hooked around his neck, while the other teasingly caressed his face.

From his sculpted eyebrows to the deep hollows of his eyes, sliding down his prominent nose, ending at his thin lips.

Every spot her delicate fingers touched sparked tingling sensations, sending electric currents through his skin, radiating to every limb.

Orion's gaze was intense, his Adam's apple bobbing, every inch of his flesh and blood thrilled and boiling for her.

"Hmm?" Xanthea let out a single, intoxicating syllable, "Hey, boy, name your price?"

"How much are you willing to offer?"

Orion's voice, already husky and ominously deep, barely concealed his growing desire. "That depends on how much you're worth."

Xanthea withdrew her hand, her expression playfully mischievous as she eyed him.

"If you want to serve me, good looks alone won't cut it, a nice body can't be lacking either! Let me check out what you've got!"

With that, she swiftly flipped open his suit jacket, and through the thin layer of his silk shirt, she could clearly feel the burning heat and well-defined muscles of his torso.

Xanthea gasped, her hand withdrawing as if burned, her voice coquettishly complaining, "So tough."

This wasn't at all what she expected!

She thought, she was just flirting with a pretty boy, not realizing that his physique was so robust. If she angered him it could end badly for her!

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"No more, no more, I'm going home!"

She pushed him away and turned to run, but it was already too late.

Orion's face twisted with desire at her coquettish complaint, his pupils flooding with a deep, crimson lust

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that seemed ready to devour her whole.

"Ah-

Just as Xanthea tried to flee, Orion's strong hand grasped her delicate waist firmly.

"What are you doing?"

"No, mmm."

Before she could struggle, she was forcefully pressed against the cool marble wall, one hand cushioning her head while the other firmly restrained her arms. His hot lips descended like a storm onto her soft, rose-colored lips.

"Mmm."

In an instant, Xanthea's eyes widened in shock, unable to believe that this audacious man dared to kiss her so boldly!

The strong alcohol mingled between their lips, catalyzing the intense and ambiguous atmosphere of the night. Outside, the wind and rain beat against the swaying trees, their leaves trembling as if in sympathy with Xanthea being wildly claimed by Orion.

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1762 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

Chapter **145**

“Xan, oh, Xan.”

Orion’s kiss was forceful, almost frenzied, like a man crazed by an addiction, utterly consumed.

“Let go, let me go! Mmm!”

Xanthea felt his bites and kisses fierce as if he were a wild animal at feeding time, her lips numb and painful, as if her skin was about to peel off.

Worst of all, she was running out of air; her mouth and lungs felt vacuumed clean, blinding flashes of light darting across her vision.

This rogue, this villain, not only dared to assault her but now seemed intent on suffocating her too!

Her feeble attempts to punch his solid chest became weaker, her breaths shallow and faint.

Just as she felt on the verge of passing out, Orion released her.

Like a reprieved prisoner, Xanthea pushed him away, gasping for fresh air. After a few moments, she regained some strength and glared at him furiously, “How dare you! An audacious rogue, assaulting a lady of my standing!”

He chuckled, a low, gruff sound from deep within his throat. He wanted more than just to dare; he wanted her.

Hearing his chuckle, Xanthea looked up, puzzled, only to meet his eyes, burning with an unsatisfied, feverish madness.

What did that look mean?

“Mmm!”

In a flash, he was upon her again, **as** if her moment to breathe was a mere timeout.

“How dare you, how dare you again! Mmm.”

Her punches, rhythmic against his chest, seemed futile and even carried a hint of unwilling attraction.

She thought she might pass out again from lack of air, but this time, the sensation of his lips and tongue sparked something unfamiliar.

It felt almost light, her resistance ceased, and she nearly wanted to close her eyes in involuntary surrender.

Terrified by this new sensation, she began to cry.

Her vulnerable sobs reached him, and, lost in a haze of lust, he reluctantly let her go, noticing her swollen, tender lips and her eyes, glossy with tears,

“Please, no More, okay? Please, I was wrong.”

Unknowingly, her plea made her even more irresistible, more vulnerable.

Orion pulled her close again, easing his own aching desire. Her curves fit perfectly against him, his gaze intensified by the emotions swirling through him.

He thought, “Xan, Xari, are you trying to kill me?”

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“Let go, you’re holding me too tight, you’re so strong.”

Xanthea complained softly, thumping his back lightly. As she kept hitting, a wave of fatigue overtook her, and she fell asleep right there in his arms.

Feeling the stillness in his arms, it took Orion a long time to gently relax his hold, gazing down at her excessively charming face, her breaths even and soft. He couldn’t help but lower his head and place a gentle kiss on her forehead.

“Xan, my darling.”

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CHAPTER 146

Posted by **AdminJ**, 1748 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

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In the grand hall of the mansion.

“Leo!”

Queenie rushed in from outside, breathless. Spotting Leonard emerging from the study but without Orion in sight, she urgently asked, “Where’s Ori? Where is he?”

“What do you need him for?”

Leonard sipped his red wine leisurely, a hiss escaping his lips in appreciation.

It was a vintage treasure indeed, rich and full-bodied from just a sip, intoxicatingly so. Earlier, Xanthea had downed a whole glass and was likely to be fast asleep shortly.

Leonard had hoped to use the wine to create an opportunity for Orion tonight, but it seemed his plan had backfired.

“I need to talk to him urgently, stop asking and just tell me!”

“He just stepped out, went down the west corridor to find Xan.”

Before he could finish, Queenie turned and dashed outside.

“Hey, he went to see Xan, why are you in such a rush to find trouble?”

Queenie sprinted down the corridor, looking around desperately until she finally spotted a tall, striking figure at the end.

“Ori.”

Her voice was filled with joy as she called out, but it abruptly stopped.

It wasn't just him.

Beneath him was another figure, desperately struggling but unable to escape his overpowering grasp.

He was kissing the girl wildly, with such ferocity it seemed he might consume her alive, losing all his usual aloofness and polished demeanor.

At this moment, he seemed like a completely different person, crazed and captivated, utterly lost.

Queenie recognized the fiery red hem of the fox dress and covered her mouth in disbelief.

So the rumors were true!

Xanthea really was Orion's girlfriend. Yet, what broke Queenie's heart wasn't this realization but the scene before her.

She had imagined that even if Orion had a girlfriend, it would just be a cold, arranged marriage, or a decorative vase set aside to appease the elders and silence the gossip.

After all, someone as naturally cold and distant as him wouldn't really fall in love, let alone be passionate

about someone.

But now, Queenie saw him passionately kissing the girl in his arms, even if forcefully, he was drowning in it, indistinguishable from any man lost in love.

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Queenie thought, "Orion had really lost his soul to that seductress! That flirtatious vixen, only after **his** money!"

She had to expose Xanthea! She had to show Orion how truly vile and repulsive that woman was!

Orion gently kissed the girl's serene sleeping face, from her forehead to her nose, then to her delicate cheeks, barely resisting the urge to kiss her moist, tender lips again.

"Buzz–Buzz–"

The vibrating phone at his feet snapped him out of his reverie. He looked down and saw 'Matthew' flashing on the screen, the red haze of desire in his eyes fading, replaced momentarily by a flash of rage.

He picked up the phone and slid to answer.

On the other end, Matthew's voice came through, frantic, "Xan, you finally picked up! I was so scared, what happened just now? What's going **on?**"

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1697 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

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"Come on, talk to me! I'm really worried about you, seriously worried. Just tell me where you are, I'll come pick **you** up!"

“Xan! Xan? Xan?”

Though the call connected, no one spoke.

After a deathly long silence, Matthew seemed to sense something and paused **for** a few seconds, “Mr. Lockwood, is that you?”

The sound of fabric rustling and a girl’s faint whisper suddenly carried over.

Orion, in front of the glowing phone **screen**, madly kissed Xanthea’s pale, slender neck amidst his anxious

words of concern.

Matthew faintly heard a moan too hard to bear, and his mind exploded.

He didn’t care that the person on the other end might be the powerful Crestwood tycoon, nor did he care about any potential retaliation; all he knew was that Xanthea was his girlfriend and off-limits to anyone else!

Clutching the phone tightly, he burst out, “Orion! Is that you, Orion? What are you doing to Xan? Let her go! Right now! Taking advantage of a girl, what kind of gentleman does that make you?”

“Have you lost your mind? She’s my love, my fiancée, what you’re doing is criminal, I could sue you!” His threats were unheeded, his anxious pacing suddenly stopped, “Or, do you just like the challenge? Knowing full well Xan despises you, finds you repulsive.”

A thunderous crash came through, making Matthew’s ears ring.

He froze, then his phone clattered to the ground. It was Orion, it really was Orion!

Matthew was holding onto a last shred of hope, which now shattered with the sound of the explosion. Why would Orion smash the phone if not provoked?

Had Orion gone mad? With any woman at his disposal, why insist on stealing Xanthea? Matthew had to find her immediately!

Orion’s eyes gleamed cruelly as he crushed the phone in his hand. After a long while, he carried the girl in his arms towards the mansion.

Hiding behind a pillar in the corridor, Queenie saw him leaving and quickly ran out, arms spread to block his path.

“Ori.”

She barely spoke when she met his warning **gaze**.

Was he warning her not to wake Xanthea?

Orion was so indulging towards this temptress!

Without time to feel heartbroken, she bit her lip, sobbing softly, “Ori, I know you don’t like me, but I didn’t come to bother you today. I came to tell you the truth, the woman in your arms.

Fearing his **anger**, she dared not speak ill of her, merely pulled out her phone.

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“Here’s a recording I made in the backwoods today, just listen, and you’ll understand everything!”

She played the recording, and immediately Xanthea’s disdainful, playful voice filled the air.

“Ms. Marlowe, perhaps I wasn’t clear enough earlier in the hall. Orion and I are hardly the couple madly in love. He’s the one hopelessly smitten, daydreaming and chasing me relentlessly. If it weren’t for his deep adoration and wealth, I would have kicked him to the curb long ago. You have no idea how annoying he can be, always wanting hugs and kisses.”

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1730 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

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The recording was dripping with the girl’s arrogance and mockery, **and** as Queenie heard it, she couldn’t help but smirk.

That little vixen, so naive to have no guard up against her! **Once** Ori heard this, he’d definitely going to dump her ruthlessly. Then, all her lies **and** pretenses would be useless!

“Ori, you heard that, right?”

When the recording ended, Queenie exaggerated, “Xanthea said it was you who fell head over heels for her, pestering her relentlessly, using every dirty trick in the book to keep her by your side!”

She was eager to see disappointment and anger on his face, but Orion remained as calm as a still lake after hearing the recording, replying simply, “Yes.”

“What?” Queenie was stunned, hardly believing her ears.

Orion continued, “Everything she said is true.”

No, no, that couldn't be! How could that be possible? Ori, with his impeccable background, status, character, and skills – superior in every way – how could he stoop so low to chase after a manipulative temptress?

Reeling from shock, she staggered back as Orion carried Xanthea and walked towards the mansion. Watching their retreating figures, Queenie shook her head in disbelief, and then suddenly yelled, “Even if she doesn't love you, even if she's only with you for the money, you still don't care?!”

Her shrill voice pierced the night, slightly awakening the drowsy girl.

Xanthea, groggily opening her eyes, wondered about the source of the noise, thinking it sounded like a dog barking, before a warm hand gently covered her eyes, sending her back to sleep.

Orion's gaze, sharp and colder than a valley breeze at night, turned to Queenie, “I don't. As long as she's willing to be with me, no matter the reason, I couldn't ask for more.”

After those last words, Queenie felt as if struck by lightning, collapsing to the ground in despair.

“Ms. Marlowe, you seem out of sorts today, spouting nonsense and disturbing Xan's peace. Come apologize before you leave tomorrow, or else Chairman Marlowe will have to do it for you.”

He would involve her grandfather over such a trivial matter? Queenie watched his back, tears streaming down her face, feeling utterly defeated.

Why? Why did he love her so much, willing to forsake his dignity, everything, just to be at her mercy? With all the wonderful women in the world, why her?

“Boss, you're back.”

Cedric had been waiting in the lobby and was startled to see Orion carry Xanthea while he entered, especially noticing her disheveled long hair, slightly swollen red lips, the faint marks on her fair neck, and her disheveled red dress beneath the suit jacket.

What on earth had the boss done to Ms. Nightshade?

He thought the car ride earlier, where the boss had crossed lines while Ms. Nightshade was asleep, was already too much, but this was on another level entirely.

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1763 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

Chapter 149

Seriously, the boss didn't exploit Ms. Nightshade's tendency to black out after a drink and take advantage of her, did he?

"Whoa!"

Leonard stood at the dining table, catching a glimpse of the girl in the man's arms, and nearly spit out his drink.

Calling Orion a beast before was actually an understatement!

Out there in broad daylight, forcing himself on Xan was bad enough, but now with Xan completely knocked out, he was still not holding back!

and that suit jacket thrown over her to cover up; he

He looked at the poor state of her mouth, her neck, and that suit jacket thrown assumed her skirt must have been all torn up.

Such a pity, his one-of-a-kind vintage dress worth millions had been ruined!

"Ms. Nightshade's drunk. I'll take her up."

"Alright!" Cedric nodded, "Room 203, on the second floor. I've already sprinkled sulfur around. Boss, do you need dinner brought up?"

"No, I'll stay with her."

Stay with her? What else did he intend to do?!

Leonard watched him carry the girl upstairs and couldn't help but lean in **and** whisper, "Ahem, just, you know, take it easy, man. She's out of it; don't do anything rash."

Orion gave him a cold glance, and Leonard mimed zipping his lips..

"Forget it." He thought, "He's not gonna listen."

A twenty-year-old man was indeed a frightful creature, full of vigor and impossible desires, never satisfied. Poor Xan might have to suffer with that slim figure.

Room 203 on the second floor of the mansion

Orion pushed open the room door and gently placed the girl on the large bed, pulling over a thin blanket. As he saw her sprawled out in a seductive red dress, her pale limbs exposed and unguarded, her expression innocent yet utterly tempting, like a fascinating enchantress beyond comparison, he was momentarily transfixed.

A surge of intense desire unexpectedly sprang forth, heading straight for his loins, making him involuntarily bend down closer until his nose almost touched hers, his eyes fixated on her stunning face; he looked like a hungry predator eyeing its prey.

She was his utterly and completely his.

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead, and his Adam's apple bobbed dryly from the intense swallowing. Every inch of his tense body burning with pain. He wanted her so badly.

"Liar, a liar!"

"No, please no!" /

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The girl, deep in sleep, suddenly seemed to be having a nightmare, shaking her head in terror, her hands flailing as if frightened, her voice trembling with a cry that snapped him back to reality.

He stood up quickly, recalling Leonard's words.

He knew he shouldn't, couldn't, but every time he found an opportunity, he lost control like a madman, especially after tooting such tender sweetness.

He knew how intoxicating and irresistible she was, and he dared not think **about** what might happen if he went too far, if she'd lose her life.

Just looking at her now, he was overwhelmed, **unable** to contain himself.

In the dark, vast bedroom, heavy, intense breathing began to fill the air, the scent of hormones thick in the atmosphere.

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Posted by **AdminJ**, 1819 Views, Released on May 15, 2024

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Orion stared at the girl intensely, his eyes shimmering with a fiery blaze as if he was hell bent on devouring her whole in the fire. Until a flush of red crept up his cheeks, his heavy growl dissolved into the long night. After a while, he tenderly and meticulously wiped the hem of her fairy-like dress and glanced at his hand blandly before heading toward the bathroom.

"No! Please no, don't come any closer! There are snakes, so many snakes! Help me, Mom, Dad, help me!"

When Orion returned to the room, he found the girl thrashing in the throes of a nightmare, her hands flailing as if to ward off something.

"Xan?"

He approached her, and saw the sweat and terror on her face; brows furrowed slightly, he turned to grab a towel.

Unexpectedly, she grabbed his wrist immediately.

"Don't go; don't leave!"

"I'm not leaving, just grabbing something: I'll be right back."

"Don't go."

She kept muttering in fear, as if afraid he'd never return, her voice filled with frightened whimpers, "Dad." The girl's trembling, sultry call of "dad" jolted Orion as if he'd been electrocuted, freezing him in place. He narrowed his eyes, looking at the girl whose lips slightly parted, face wearing an expression as if she was begging for reassurance, "What did you just call me?"

“Dad.”

Little temptress, was she really trying to torment him to death? Orion closed his eyes, and gently kissed her forehead to comfort her, “It’s okay, everything’s okay now. There, there, no need to be scared anymore. I’m right here with you; you’re my beloved treasure.”

As the face of the girl on the bed relaxed and her breathing evened out into deep sleep, Orion gently held her hand and sat on the carpet beside the bed, placing a dark **iris** beside her pillow.

“Xan,” he murmured, “do you know the meaning of the black iris?”

In the darkness, his gaze upon her was as deep and intense as the night itself, filled with tenderness that could drown one in its deep affection.

—

Secret admiration, desperate love.

-My rare find, not to be kept, not to be had,

If only time could stop at this moment, forever paused here. Eyes closed, he sighed deeply, kissing her

hand.

“Ugh, it hurts.”

As morning light filtered through the sheer curtains, casting patterns across the curvaceous form of the girl in the large bed, Xánthea grimaced slightly, and then slowly sat up with a painful expression, clutching

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her head. It hurt so much, and her body, too, seemed as if as if it had been trampled.

Was this the aftermath of a hangover? She slowly opened her eyes, and upon seeing the unfamiliar brand new nightgown on her, her mind went blank

Beside the bed, a fresh black iris stood in a vase, and on the dresser lay a phone. She delicately picked up the battered, broken device, examining it for a long moment before her expression twisted in realization. This was her phone?!

“Who the hell smashed my phone?!”

Angry, she jumped out of bed, clutching the phone, ready to storm out, but stopped abruptly at the sight in the dressing mirror.

Reflected clearly, she saw the slightly open collar of her nightgown revealing a couple of suspicious red marks along her neck and collarbone, which looked like hickeys?!

Nightgown, hickeys, a sore body, a smashed phone, and a faint scent of musk lingering in the air. In an instant, Xanthea’s face turned pale, and her mind uncontrollably conjured a horrifying scenario.

Had she been taken advantage of last night after getting drunk? The broken phone could be a result of a failed struggle!

Although her body felt terrible, apart from the headache and the weakness in her limbs, there was no other sensation, especially no pain down there. According to her knowledge of physiology, was it possible?

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