

## Chapter 14 How Much Money Do You Want

"There's no need for that. I won't be buying or living in that house anyway," Eileen said, bringing silence from Judie.

After a pause, Eileen asked pointedly, "How much money do you want from me?"

Judie gave a quick laugh before she replied, "At least two and a half million. We'll also need to decorate the house. We've raised fifty thousand, depending on you for the rest."

"You must be joking, right? More than two million? How can I get that much money for you?" Eileen said.

A hint of entitlement crept into Judie's tone. "Surely you can request that from Mr. Dawson?"

Eileen stood by the window, her eyes deep as she said, "My relationship with Mr. Dawson is none of your business. Roderick's my brother, but we're never close. It's not my responsibility to do everything for him. If you're capable of purchasing the house, proceed. If not, don't expect me to buy it for you."

Eileen stood her ground, her unwavering stance fueling Judie's frustration. Judie had thought of strategies to leverage Eileen's sense of obligation against her, so she quickly replied, "That's not how it should be. Mom said you'd be our support. And unlike Roderick, I at least have a university degree. If you're not going to help, I might as well end the marriage. Then, this is all on you."

Eileen absorbed her words with a cool detachment. "Is your degree your pride? Without my referral, you'd be nowhere near Apex Group. Your status is no better than Roderick's. Choose divorce if you must; it doesn't concern me at all. And remember, your position in the company is precarious at best. Step out of line again, and it's the end of the road for

you. Don't test my word."

Ending the call decisively, Eileen set the phone aside.

The distant echo of its ringing trailed off as she retreated to her room. She ignored Judie's persistent calls.

Her sleep was uninterrupted. Bryan did not arrive unexpectedly. Moreover, recent days saw him commuting solo, affording Eileen some peace.

Yet, Vivian's presence in the office became more pronounced as she seamlessly assumed Eileen's usual duties like bringing in coffee and getting documents signed.

Eileen's encounters with Bryan grew scarce, limited to brief exchanges in meetings where subtle acknowledgments passed between them under the cover of professionalism.

In her interactions with Vivian, Eileen remained candid, relaying Bryan's comings and goings without fail.

With the annual team-building event on the horizon, Eileen knew participation was expected. The tradition at Apex Group was a yearly affair, and now, they would need to vote to determine the location of the event.

Despite not being an Apex Group employee, Vivian joined Bryan for this meeting.

Vivian's enthusiasm for the proposed destinations was clear. "Bryan, mountain climbing sounds exciting. That peak we once talked about—I've always wanted to tackle it. How about we choose this location this time?"

Bryan's attention briefly landed on Eileen, noticing she was gazing at a spot on the documents. He said, "The goal is to unwind and relax. Mountain climbing would be too tiring."

Reaching over, he gently tapped on the spot Eileen had been looking at. "Here's a thought—four days at this resort should offer everyone a chance to recharge. We'll leave in three days."

His decision, firm yet reasonable, left Vivian momentarily disappointed,

but she acquiesced with a playful huff, extracting a promise from him for a future climb.

Turning to Eileen, Bryan's manner was nonchalant as he passed her the documents. "Tally the attendees and organize the stay like before."

Still processing Bryan's abrupt choice, Eileen replied, "Yes, Mr. Dawson."

Bryan left amidst the excited buzz of the employees.

Vivian's concern drew Eileen back from her daze. "You seem absent-minded," she remarked, linking arms with her.

"I'm not," Eileen assured her with a practiced smile. "Mr. Dawson's decision just caught me off guard."

For a fleeting moment, Eileen had the notion that Bryan might have seen through her preference, but she quickly brushed aside the thought as silly.

After the meeting, Vivian took up a post at Eileen's desk, engaging in small talk that hinted at something unsaid.

As the day wound down, Vivian presented Eileen with a luxurious set of cosmetics.

"You don't look so happy these days. I thought this might cheer you up," Vivian said.

Recognizing the high-end brand, Eileen immediately refused Vivian.

"Rest is all I need, not luxury. I'll have plenty of time to recuperate during the upcoming trip," she said.

But Vivian insisted, nudging the gift closer to Eileen. "It's already yours. I'd hate to see it go unused."

Their conversation halted abruptly as Bryan opened the door. Reacting swiftly, Eileen concealed the cosmetics.

Bryan's instructions were succinct. "We'll need additional rooms—Kian and Jacob are joining the trip."

Eileen's response came with a hint of unease, met by Bryan's lingering

gaze. But Bryan didn't say anything more and left.

Vivian announced her participation nonchalantly as she trailed after Bryan.

Left alone, Eileen grappled with the tangible opulence in her grasp, feeling like there was a heavy burden on her chest.

Vivian's consideration was evident. After gifting the cosmetics, she stayed away from Eileen, only emerging to leave with Bryan at the day's end.

"Pick me up at Oak Villas at eight tomorrow morning," Bryan said, pausing by Eileen's desk on his way out.

Eileen quickly nodded. "Yes, Mr. Dawson."

Catching a glimpse of Vivian's secretive gesture, a finger to her lips and a conspiratorial wink, Eileen could only respond with a courteous smile.

The chance of returning the gift hadn't materialized. Leaving the cosmetics here could stir unwanted speculation. Eileen chose to wait until the office had emptied before taking them with her.

The gift, had it been from a casual friend, wouldn't have been a big deal. But it was from Vivian; there were likely strings attached.

But even without receiving a gift from Vivian, denying Vivian's requests was hard for her.

The following day, Eileen arrived at Oak Villas at seven.

With no sign of Bryan outside and feeling uncertain about the next move, Eileen heard a voice from upstairs.

"Come up," Bryan said.

With her bag left by the entrance, Eileen ascended the stairs. As she rounded the corner, an unexpected gesture caught her by surprise—Bryan pulled her inside.

The room was bathed in soft light, and a gentle, alluring fragrance lingered in the air.

Suddenly, Eileen found herself pushed to the bed, feeling the warmth of Bryan's presence enveloping her in a subtle embrace.

His lips met hers in a fleeting touch, and in the dim light, his intense gaze locked with hers.

"You look tired," he whispered. "Haven't you been sleeping well these past few days?"

"We should head out, Mr. Dawson. We're almost late for work," Eileen said.

Bryan chuckled softly. "Late? But I told you to pick me up at eight, not seven. Didn't you come early on purpose?"

Confusion flickered across Eileen's face. She had a flash of memory. Indeed, he had mentioned eight the day before.

Distracted as she had been, she had stuck to her routine and arrived here at seven without a second thought.

Bryan's gaze was knowing, and he wore a slight smile. He had planned this.

Eileen wondered why he had been so certain she would arrive at her usual time.

Eileen bit her lip, a shade of discomfort coloring her voice. "You changed our schedule on purpose, right?"

Bryan nodded unapologetically. "Yes, an hour is short but better than nothing."

Drawing nearer, his breath warmed Eileen's ear. Eileen tried to resist, only to find her wrists firmly held. "Let's not waste the moments we've got. I've missed you," Bryan said softly.

His words seemed to melt her willpower every time.

She glanced down, noticing the fading reminders of passion on his skin, some healing, some stubbornly lingering.

One hour was indeed short for them. There was so much to do, and they

also needed time to freshen up and change.

This was Eileen's first time doing this at Bryan's place. It caught Eileen unprepared, leaving her no chance to cherish their intimate moment before he carried her to the bathroom to shower.



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