

**Chapter 20 Ride to work**

Ember emerged from her parents' apartment building, her mind preoccupied with the day ahead. She gracefully slipped into her car, ready to embark on her journey.

Minutes passed, and Ember found herself still seated in her car. A sense of frustration washed over her as she realized her vehicle had unexpectedly broken down. With a resigned sigh, she stepped out of the bustling community and hailed a passing taxi, hoping for a swift resolution to her transportation predicament.

As luck would have it, the bustling rush hour impeded her progress in finding a taxi. Undeterred, Ember made her way to a nearby bus stop, contemplating her options. While waiting patiently for the bus, she rubbed her right arm with her left hand, seeking warmth against the chilly air that enveloped her.

Unbeknownst to her, Alexander, an unassuming man driving a humble Volkswagen, noticed Ember's prolonged wait for the bus. Indifferent to his companion Robert's remarks, he slowly steered his car toward her, curiosity piqued.

Ember's parents' house was situated quite a distance from her workplace. Eager to reach the office on time, she had risen early, only to be met with a series of unfortunate events. Her own car's failure to start had been followed by a futile attempt to secure a taxi through a ride-hailing app. Finally, after a string of missed buses, she found herself on the brink of lateness, determined to squeeze onto the next overcrowded bus,

regardless of the odds.

As she alighted from the bus, she realized her shoes had been sacrificed in the battle for a spot on board. Frustrated yet resilient, Ember raised her spirits, leaping to retrieve her high heels, unwilling to let her tardiness extinguish her determination. With her attendance bonus of 200 dollars slipping away, her heart burned with a sense of injustice.

It was precisely at this moment, as her inner fire raged on, that a Volkswagen idled before her, offering solace. Though the car itself was unremarkable, the handsome man within ignited both surprise and gratitude within Ember.

"Alexander, why are you here?" she asked, her voice tinged with awe.

"Coincidence, my dear," he replied, a faint smile tugging at his lips. "I happened to pass by on my way to work."

Ember stole a glance at the bus creeping up behind her and nodded gratefully. Opening the car door, she settled into the vehicle, immediately enveloped by its comforting warmth. Today, she had ventured outside wearing thinner attire and had sneezed several times during her arduous wait for the bus. Little did she expect to find such respite from the biting cold within the car's confines.

"Since you haven't had breakfast yet, I brought you these," Alexander said, extending a container of fried dumplings that Robert had thoughtfully purchased.

Ember's senses were tantalized by the aroma emanating from the lunchbox before she even opened it. She eagerly accepted

the offering, her eyes lighting up in recognition. "Fried Dumplings? These are from the place near my university!"

Alexander nodded, pleased by her reaction. "Indeed. I heard from a colleague that these dumplings are delicious, so I thought I'd give them a try. I didn't expect you to be fond of them as well."

"Yes, I absolutely adore these dumplings. I remember having them near my university, and the memory has stuck with me ever since. I used to wake up before dawn just to join the long queues and savor their delectable flavor,"

Ember's reminiscence of the fried dumplings stirred memories of a certain someone-David Smith. He had known of her fondness for these dumplings and would queue up on her behalf almost every morning. With dedication, he would bring them straight to her dormitory, ensuring she never missed out.

But now, as Ember recalled those precious moments, a pang of sorrow gripped her heart. The silence inside the car seemed to reflect her inner turmoil. Alexander, engrossed in his driving, sensed her change in demeanor. His face momentarily hardened before he swiftly masked it with a gentle smile, reaching out to tenderly ruffle her hair.

"What did you say?" he asked, attempting to lighten the mood.

Ember snapped out of her reverie, a faint smile gracing her lips. "I said, I should eat them while they're still warm. They won't taste as good once they turn cold."

Acknowledging her response, Alexander refocused his attention on the road. Deep down, he couldn't ignore the shift

in Ember 's disposition. Nonetheless, he maintained his warm facade, determined to provide solace in his own way.

Swiftly navigating through the city's streets, Alexander steered the car towards Ember's workplace. Sensing her desire to disembark, he slowed down and pulled up in front of the building.

"Just drop me off here. I'll walk the rest of the way,"

