

Submitting 121

Chapter 121

Genevieve was taken aback. People around her turned their heads to look.

Walking away now would seem rude. She had even danced with him, so she thought putting on an act of concern wasn't much of a stretch.

Pausing momentarily, she had no choice but to turn back around. "Anthony, are you okay?"

She reached out to help him up, but Anthony sat on the sofa and didn't let go of Genevieve's arm. Instead, he grabbed it tightly. Genevieve couldn't pull away.

She thought, "What the hell? Is he faking it?"

Anthony furrowed his brow, his voice low and raspy. "I feel awful."

Jacinta came over when she heard the noise. She was stunned for a moment and then walked over to look at Anthony. "He's got an alcohol allergy. He needs to get to the hospital."

Genevieve was shocked for a moment. "How could he be allergic to alcohol?"

Jacinta said, "He won't have an allergy to just one kind of drink, but he's definitely had a mix, combining various strong liquors. He's had this reaction as a kid before. How could he not be careful today?"

She frowned and looked at the time. "Ms. Lawrence, could you trouble yourself to take him to the hospital? I'm swamped right now and can't spare anyone."

Genevieve said, "Is that appropriate?"

"What's the big deal? Our partnership is just around the corner, and we can't afford rumors of discord. This is for the best for all of us," Jacinta said in a low voice and helped Anthony up with a smile. "Better rush to the hospital before it gets worse, or he'll suffocate."

Genevieve was speechless.

Just when she was about to leave, trouble had found her. In full view of everyone, she had no choice but to bite the bullet, help Anthony up, and call back to Jacinta with a raised voice, "Don't worry, Ms. Sanders. I'll take care of Mr. Hoffman and let you know once he's at the hospital!"

She didn't want anyone to think she was willingly playing the good Samaritan.

A twitch at the corner of Jacinta's mouth betrayed her amusement as she watched Genevieve reluctantly dragging Anthony away.

Anthony was cooperative, leaning heavily on Genevieve as if he could barely stand. Genevieve assisted him into the car and firmly instructed the driver, "To the hospital."

The driver didn't dare waste a second, immediately hitting the road.

Anthony leaned against Genevieve, enveloped by her scent, thinking that even his discomfort was worth it for this moment of closeness.

Genevieve gave him a shove, a bit too forcefully. His head thudded against the side window-just the sound of it could show it was painful.

He winced in pain and weariness, lazily undoing his collar. In the dim light, Genevieve could see tiny red spots peppered all along his neck.

"Gen. I feel really awful," he murmured, his voice husky with pain, laced with a hint of restrained dependency.

Genevieve realized then that he might genuinely be at risk of suffocation. "Step on it, please," she urged the driver. She didn't want Anthony to die in the car.

Anthony, gazing at her plump lips and elegant features, felt his heart soften at her worried expression. In a sudden move, he grasped her waist, leaning in close- the sweet taste of the lips. he'd been fantasizing about all evening met his.

But the next second brought sharp pain. He tasted blood spreading in his mouth and involuntarily sucked in a breath of cold air, his deep eyes full of confusion and surprise as he looked at her.

"Gen..."

In the dimness of the car, Genevieve's expression was icy, her distance palpable. With a coolness that could freeze someone a thousand miles away, she spoke lightly. "Anthony, don't make me slap you."

Anthony hung his head, looking at her for a few seconds before settling back into his seat.

He suddenly reached out to clasp her hand, fingers weaving through hers in a familiar gesture. "Gen, come home with me. Let's stop fighting. Don't you want to vacation in the Miralaea? It's your birthday next week; how about I take you there, okay?"

Anthony's voice was warm but he was increasingly hazy. It was as if he had forgotten they were divorced, that they had been apart for ages.

He was lost in a past recollection where a thrilled Genevieve had excitedly talked about wanting a Miralaea getaway-an idea he had dismissed for being too far and troublesome.

Genevieve couldn't pull her hand away, her gaze fixed on his profile lost in shadows, stirring a sourness within her that she had long suppressed. His words effortlessly tore open old wounds. The past played out scene by bitter scene; not a single memory was soothing or worth recalling. Ridiculous.

Anthony continued to ramble beside her, but Genevieve couldn't take in a word he was saying. This ride felt like an endless ordeal.

Upon reaching the hospital, Genevieve, having called ahead, found that the doctors were already prepped for an emergency.

But Anthony wouldn't let go of Genevieve's hand, whining, "Gen, I feel terrible."

The doctor nearby quickly stepped in and asked, "Mr. Hoffman, what seems to be the problem?"

Clutching Genevieve's hand to his chest, Anthony, barely coherent, muttered.

"My heart hurts, Gen.

Give me a kiss, and it'll feel better."

His body was covered in rashes, with his neck looking particularly bad. Yet, there was a mocking playfulness in his half-closed eyes. He was flirting at a time like this.

The room fell silent, all eyes on Genevieve. What was supposed to be a tense moment had turned into a live-action drama, feeding the onlookers an unwelcome dose of public affection.

Genevieve was livid, unable to withdraw her hand. Hearing Anthony's nonsense only fueled her anger. She pinched the hand he'd injured, and Anthony broke out in a cold sweat from the pain.

He gasped, his eyes widening as his body shuddered. Genevieve seized the opportunity to yank her hand free and, with a swift movement, even kicked him from behind.

The doctor in front, shocked and dumbfounded, stepped forward to catch the "fragile" Anthony.

Genevieve, her expression unchanged, casually brushed her hair aside and offered a calm smile. "He's probably having an allergic reaction from mixing too many kinds of booze. Thanks for your help. He can pay the bills when he wakes up. I'm leaving now, goodbye."

With a wave, she didn't even bother entering the hospital lobby and just turned around and walked away.

Everyone was speechless.

Before Genevieve left, she took a picture of them and sent it to Jacinta. [Mission completed. Ms. Sanders, please remember to inform his family.] she added.

Jacinta was speechless..."

Two hours later, Daniel arrived at the hospital. As he looked at a miserable Anthony, all he could do was keep sighing.

The next day, Anthony finally woke up. His allergic reactions had subsided.

He remembered that Genevieve had brought him to the hospital the night before. He thought she couldn't bear to see him in pain and had made a special trip. Her care and love warmed his heart.

But as soon as he opened his eyes, instead of the person he'd imagined seeing, he saw a disheveled Daniel. Anthony's face darkened. "Why are you here?" he asked.

His voice was deep and hoarse, and his spirits were not high.

Daniel was startled awake, rubbed his eyes, and exclaimed, "Mr. Hoffman, you're awake! That's great!"

"Where is Genevieve?" Anthony asked, scanning the room and noticing no sign that anyone else had stayed. This made him a little disappointed.

Daniel paused and said, "Oh, Ms. Lawrence left last night. She had other things to take care of!"

Anthony frowned, suddenly realizing his injured hand felt even more painful than before.

Getting out of bed, he felt a sharp pain in his foot. Looking down, he noticed his right foot was swollen....

His frown deepened as he glared at Daniel. "Did you hit me when I was drunk last night?"

Daniel, looking like the incarnation of innocence, immediately waved his hands in denial. "No, no, it wasn't me! En.

I swear, I couldn't have done that!"

Anthony felt a tightness in his chest, waking up to old wounds getting worse plus a fresh injury. Everything just seemed so unlucky.

But he was convinced it couldn't have been Genevieve. He believed she couldn't love him more.

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Under the skeptical gaze of Anthony, Daniel was at a loss for words. It was an incredibly awkward moment.

He wouldn't dare to beat Anthony.

Yet, watching Anthony hobble out of the hospital room, Daniel's heart suddenly ached at the sight of his solitary figure. He couldn't bring himself to describe the gut-wrenching scene painted by the doctors.

Rushing to clear the paperwork, Daniel scampered away, avoiding Anthony's gaze, sharp as needles.

Anthony was outside on the phone with Jacinta, his voice a blend of warmth and cool distance. "Yeah, all's good now, thanks for your concern, Ms. Sanders. I owe Genevieve big time for getting me to the hospital last night. I was thinking about throwing a dinner to say thanks. Care to join us?"

There was a pause on the other end, and Jacinta finally declined gracefully. "Mr. Hoffman, no need to bother, really. I'm sure Ms. Lawrence isn't worried about it."

"Ms. Sanders..." Jacinta cut him off, "Anthony, I know what you're thinking. But I still have to tell you, don't push too hard."

Jacinta's words were filled with an unspoken depth before she hung up. She had seen last night's events all too clearly. Genevieve held no more space in her heart for Anthony. How could he not see the reality?

Divorced couples had better keep their distance.

Frowning at his phone, Anthony pondered over Jacinta's remarks. What exactly was she trying to say? he wondered. 'Genevieve loves me. I'm just going with the flow.'

Just as the driver arrived, Daniel finished up with the paperwork and jogged over, only to watch in shock as Anthony got into the car without waiting for him. Daniel muttered to himself, 'Could he be holding a grudge?'

Puzzled, Daniel dialed the driver's number and asked in a roundabout way. The driver coughed. before answering, "Mr. Simmons, Mr. Hoffman said you should handle the acquisition matters for now. No need to come back to the company just yet."

Daniel was taken aback. Collaborating with Jacinta on the first step was acquiring the AI company, which was akin to climbing up to the sky.

In the car, Anthony suddenly received a call from Brendan. "Anthony, should I delete the video. from Twitter?"

For the first time since last night, Anthony remembered the video of him and Genevieve dancing. 'It probably had everyone cheering, right?' he thought.

He adjusted his tie with a nonchalant and cavalier flair. 'Leave it up. Let everyone see what real chemistry looks like!'"

Brendan paused and asked, "Are you being ironic?"

"What are you talking about?" Anthony casually flipped through a contract with his slender fingers, his detached demeanor leaving Brendan confused.

Brendan suddenly asked him. "Anthony, you didn't check Twitter, did you?"

Anthony rarely looked at such things. Unless Brendan made a point to screenshot or share it with him. Anthony couldn't be bothered to even open it Anthony didn't say anything. Brendan coughed, "You should take a look first. If it's no good, we can get someone to delete the video. It hasn't gone viral. Just a few friends shared it. It can be contained."

After hanging up. Anthony opened Twitter on his phone. Brendan was naturally one of the most active people. There were several pages of comments under one of his videos alone.

Anthony's frown deepened as he scrolled, his expression growing darker by the second.

[Good thing this couple got a divorce, feels like they could fall apart at any moment!]

[Why did Mr. Hoffman step on her? Did he do it deliberately?]

[Genevieve looks like she's about to curse someone out!]

[This pair really defines "together but worlds apart" in the clearest way!]

The more Anthony read, the angrier he got, feeling the injuries on his hand and foot throbbing even more painfully. He opened Brendan's chat and sent two words: [Delete it!]

'Couldn't these blind people see the loving looks I and Genevieve exchanged? It's infuriating just to watch. Better to delete it! What was it about Genevieve dancing with Ian that had everyone raving? How am I any less than that guy?' he wondered.

Brendan replied immediately: [Okay.] They had shared the video for some laughs, but nobody dared to actually mock Anthony. A single night was enough for everyone to come to their senses. It was time to clean up the mess.

In under half an hour, all traces of the video from Twitter were scrubbed clean. The digital air felt clearer somehow. Anthony scrolled through, his dark gaze lifting slightly, his expression visibly lightening up.

Genevieve had discussed the details of the acquisition with Jacinta. The outset was as hard as it was crucial.

The AI company TuringTech Innovations had at one point set the gold standard for the industry, with its technology years ahead of the world's curve. However, due to mismanagement, issues like technological leaks and the selling of confidential data arose. With the executives too busy lining their pockets, the staff was gradually poached away.

As a result, Turing Tech Innovations was nearly a shell of its former self, its current revenue hinging

on early-stage patent fees.

Jacinta wanted to take all of the company's patents as the bedrock for their project. What they planned to build was a systematic approach to artificial intelligence, encompassing but not limited to the fields of medicine and psychology.

Medical technology had made huge strides, but it was still not mature enough to freely use AI to treat major diseases. Psychology was a unique field, largely untapped when it came to AI applications.

Jacinta had sent feelers out in the early stages, but TuringTech Innovations had huge demands, leading to very stiff negotiations.

So this time, Jacinta decided not to be involved in the negotiations and left the acquisition task to Genevieve and Anthony's people. Luckily for Genevieve, Anthony didn't decide to show up personally; he sent Daniel to handle it.

Genevieve breathed a sigh of relief. Avoiding a run-in with Anthony was good news to her.

But her people couldn't make an appointment with Johnson, the head of Turing Tech Innovations.

It took some digging, but they learned that Johnson was a regular at a bar named Midsummer.

Genevieve went straight to the bar in a black slip dress.

They had to at least meet face to face to get anywhere-or else, they were like headless flies, buzzing around aimlessly.

But the second she stepped into the bar, something felt off. All the patrons were male.

These guys were all eye candy, with sharp features and clean looks, carrying themselves with an effortless, clear charm that was refreshing to see.

Genevieve was tempted to whip out her phone and call her friend Selene over-to Selene, these guys were total heartthrobs!

As she wandered through the venue, a tall, handsome waiter approached her with a kind smile, his voice gentle as he inquired, "Miss, can I help you with anything?"

Genevieve paused and blushed. "No, thank you, I'm waiting for someone."

The waiter's warm smile didn't wane as he served her a glass of lemon water before leaving her to scout the crowd.

Circling the bar, she caught a familiar figure at the counter.

She walked over, tapped his shoulder, and with a smile said, "Ian, what are you doing here?"

Ian, startled to see her, stammered, "You-you-you... what are you doing here?"

He was shocked as if he shouldn't have seen her here.

Genevieve casually took a seat next to him, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear, her

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Genevieve casually took a seat next to him, tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear, her

delicate features poised and elegant. "I'm here waiting for someone to hit on me.

I'm attractive enough, right?"

She was confident. It didn't matter if she did not know Johnson. She'd wait for him to make the first.

move.

Ian's smile was stiff, and the corners of his mouth twitched unnaturally as he blurted out, "Yeah, but... this is a gay bar."

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After Ian finished speaking, Genevieve suddenly froze.

It was as if she had been frozen in place.

Blinking, she caught Ian's awkward yet polite smile, finding herself strangely silenced.

What the heck! No wonder everything seems off here! If word gets out, Selene would be the first to laugh at me! she thought.

Genevieve sat there, feeling like she was on pins and needles.

As the gazes of many fell upon her, she felt her beauty fading into insignificance.

For the first time, she had the urge to find a hole and bury herself in it.

Ian couldn't help but let out a chuckle, though he desperately tried to suppress it. "Well, Ms. Lawrence, of course you are attractive. Even the female stars in the showbiz don't hold a candle to you, but this place..."

Before he could finish, Genevieve cut him off, "So, you're here because you're gay too?"

Jan's face turned pale, and he immediately waved his hands. "No, no. Of course not."

Genevieve looked triumphant, lifting her chin defiantly. "Come on, you told me this is a gay bar. If you're not, then what are you doing here?"

It could be serious if word got out that a popular star like Tan was gay.

Ian's face turned pale. "A friend... a friend asked me to pick something up."

Genevieve didn't want to hear it, grabbing her purse to leave.

Ian panicked and hurried after her. "Boss..."

At the door, Genevieve paused and turned to look at him.

Ian pursed his lips and compromised, "I swear, I'm really not. Let's just pretend I wasn't here tonight, okay?"

Genevieve lowered her eyes and said, "And pretend I wasn't here tonight too?"

Both were clearly embarrassed by the encounter.

Understanding her intent, Ian nodded in agreement.

With that, they both turned and went their separate ways, as if the night had never happened.

Once home, Genevieve couldn't help but soak in a hot bath to ease the tension from the evening.

As soon as she was about to rest, Daniel called her. She thought, 'What's up with him, calling this late?'

After a moment's hesitation, Genevieve answered the call.

Instead of Daniel's voice, it was Anthony's on the other end. 'It's me, Genevieve, about Johnson of Turing Tech Innovations-don't bother with him, it's a waste of time.'

"Mr. Hoffman, what can I do for you?" she asked, patience wearing thin.

"Why did he suddenly tell me that it was a waste of time? Does he think I lack the ability?" she thought.

Anthony's voice was deep and serious. "He is not a good guy. A lot of women have been harmed by him. I'm just watching out for you, Gen. Don't fall for his tricks."

Genevieve couldn't stand it anymore. "Do you think I'm an idiot? Are you the only smart one in the world and everyone else fools?"

"Gen..."

"Call me Ms. Lawrence!" Genevieve interrupted with emphasis.

She didn't appreciate the over-familiarity. When they were married, it was "Genevieve" this and "Genevieve" that, as if he was afraid anyone would sense their closeness. And now it was "Gen. 'Doesn't he see how ridiculous that is?' she thought.

Anthony went silent for a few seconds before speaking with a touch of resignation. "You got me to the hospital, and I need to thank you. There's a cruise party tomorrow. Would you please come? Don't be mad all the time; it'll make you age faster!"

Genevieve hung up, fuming.

Anthony was unbelievable. He'd never say a nice word.

Staring at the ended call on his phone, Anthony grew silent.

Daniel, standing nearby, couldn't help but offer a word of advice in a hushed tone, "Mr. Hoffman, maybe you could've skipped that last sentence."

Anthony furrowed his brows. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No," Daniel said immediately.

'How could he be wrong? Anthony can never be wrong!' Daniel thought.

He thought for a while and sent her a message. After a moment's thought, Anthony decided to text her directly: [Johnson will be at the cruise party tomorrow. Are you going?]

Just as expected, Genevieve saw the message and replied: [I'll be there.]

For business matters, of course, she would attend.

Anthony's mood brightened. 'See? She just couldn't bear to reject me!' he told himself.

He reveled in this subtle yet profound affection.

Daniel said, "Tomorrow's cruise party is held by you for Ms. Lawrence. You could just tell her directly."

He meant Anthony didn't have to use Johnson as an excuse.

Anthony tossed the phone back with an indifferent gesture, meticulously adjusting his cuffs. "She's shy."

He still remembered how, before their divorce, he had mentioned taking her to a cruise party and then had to cancel last minute.

The disappointment on her face was palpable, but she still managed a smile and said it was alright.

He aimed to make up for all those regrets.

The next day.

Genevieve arrived at the port, graciously wearing a flowing white gown.

The cruise ship was massive, a behemoth rarely seen with more than ten layers towering over the docks.

The port was heavily secured, with facial recognition required for entry.

As soon as Genevieve boarded the ship, she noticed a man leaning casually against the railing on the deck.

Louis stood there with a presence that was powerfully commanding and impossible to ignore.

He saw her too and walked over with a smile to greet her. "If I'd known you were coming. I would've picked you up," he said.

"How's your health?" Genevieve vividly remembered how he nearly passed out from illness before.

Louis smiled and nodded. "Much better, thanks for your concern."

They exchanged smiles, and as the breeze swept over the deck, the lights flickered on them, casting a gentle glow around the pair.

Anthony caught sight of this from a distance, his face darkening with displeasure.

The smoldering emotion in his eyes churned, ready to erupt and overwhelm at any moment.

The next second, he strode toward them and wrapped an arm around Genevieve's waist as if staking his claim. "Why stand out here when the party's heating up inside?"

Genevieve attempted to struggle free, but Anthony had a firm grip.

"What's wrong with him again?' she wondered.

Louis's smile retracted, his brows and eyes losing their warmth, giving him a sharp, almost piercing look. "Mr. Hoffman, it's been a long time."

"I didn't intend to see you at all," Anthony snapped back..

Genevieve, feeling speechless, tried to push him away without success and instead stomped hard on Anthony's foot.

Anthony, whose foot was just on the mend, instantly turned a shade of puce, shock, and confusion written all over his face as he gazed at her. Genevieve turned around and left. When Anthony was about to catch up, Louis intercepted him. "Mr. Hoffman, there's something I'd like to discuss with you..."

Breaking free from Anthony's scrutiny, Genevieve made her way into the vast banquet hall.

The multiple floors connected in a grand manner, with glittering, opulent splendor and blinding and blinding lights

cascading from above.

Business bigwigs were making understated appearances, exchanging pleasantries, while their more flamboyant spouses, high-society ladies, mingled in their finery.

She immediately found Andrea, who was being fawned over in the center of the hall, Genevieve's gaze clinging to Quincey.

Andrea had forsaken her usual demure and graceful style for a daring look tonight, she was dressed in a fiery red gown that barely covered her long, straight legs, and her long hair cascaded loosely over her shoulders.

When Andrea caught sight of Genevieve, she navigated through the crowd with a drink in hand, and stopped before her.

Genevieve's aura was cool and radiant. Even without thick makeup, she effortlessly overshadowed Andrea.

She looked at Andrea indifferently.

Andrea flashed her a smile and raised her glass, gently swirling the liquid inside.

"Ms. Lawrence, welcome to our engagement party."

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Andrea's demeanor had shifted from her usual sweet compliance to a touch of defiance. A challenging glint played in her eyes as she gave Genevieve the once-over.

Genevieve glanced at her and, without a word, attempted to walk past. But Andrea stepped forward to block her path, a cold edge to her brows. "Ms. Lawrence, you are not welcome here. Make yourself scarce before anyone notices."

Genevieve let out a light chuckle, her eyes leisurely sweeping over Andrea, her voice loaded with implication. "I wasn't invited by you, and you certainly don't have the right to send me away."

The lights poured down upon them, casting a glow on Genevieve's radiant skin. She was breathtakingly elegant, a beauty that couldn't be concealed.

Andrea's smile faded as she leaned in and whispered, "Genevieve, whatever you did to my family, I'll make sure you taste the same."

"We'll see about that." Genevieve smiled dismissively, considering Andrea beneath her notice. Spoiled heiresses with more ego than ability were a dime a dozen in these circles.

True socialites who stood their ground had more than just their family's backing; they needed their own cunning and skills.

Just as she was lifting her dress to step down, she saw a dashing man in a suit approach her. "Ms. Lawrence, I've heard a lot about you. I'm Johnson Lewis from Turing Tech Innovations.

Genevieve was momentarily startled, then beamed. Mr. Lewis, nice to meet you!"

Genevieve had been looking for him for so long, and he finally showed up. However, considering Johnson was often spotted at gay bars, she guessed his preferences might not align with hers, but she always had a soft spot for LGBTs.

Johnson was nothing if not courteous, his gaze was gentle, not making Genevieve feel the least bit uneasy.

But when it came to the topic of the acquisition, Johnson's response was a bit hard to read.

They were in a crowded area, not exactly ideal for business discussions. People constantly came over to greet them, disrupting their flow.

They hadn't gotten far Genevieve looked to "their conversation when a small commotion started in the crowd.

Genevieve looked to see what it was: it was a staff member wheeling in an ornate multi-tiered cake with "A Lifetime of Happiness" written on it.

She paused and thought, 'Is the engagement mentioned by Andrea true?'

Quincey and Presley were front and center, with Andrea in a striking red dress standing by their side, the blush on her face saying it all.

And Anthony came over at the urging of Presley. There was a hint of irritation on Anthony's face as he scanned the crowd, not spotting the person he was looking for. Quincey pushed him to Andrea's

side and stood in front of the cake.

Andrea's hands trembled slightly as she picked up the cake knife, glancing towards Anthony who was furrowing his brows. But then he took hold of the knife's handle and made the first cut. The guests immediately erupted into applause.

Genevieve's gaze shifted. away, lost in thought. Johnson caught her eye and said with a grin, 'I heard today's cruise party was thrown by Mr. Hoffman himself, for a special woman. Could it be the lady he's rumored to be engaged to?'

Genevieve smiled and said, 'I don't know. Maybe.'

Johnson gave her a knowing look. "I can see that after your divorce, you've thrown yourself into your work. It's quite admirable."

Genevieve smiled and said frankly, "I just find careers way more interesting than men. The effort you put into your work pays off, but throw your feelings into a man, and it's like tossing a pork bun to a dog- it never comes back."

Their conversation was still in full swing when Anthony finally spotted her. He looked frosty as he saw her enjoying a lively chat with Johnson and approached with evident dissatisfaction. "Why are you here?"

Genevieve paused, her smile receding slightly. "I don't believe I need to check in with you about. where I am?"

The last thing she wanted was a public spat with him-talk about a humiliating spectacle!

Anthony completely ignored the sharp edge in her voice and suggested, "The auction upstairs is about to start; want to check it out?"

Genevieve frowned, not really willing to go up, but Johnson had already stood up, smiling: "Actually, I just spotted some acquaintances, I'll say hello, Ms. Lawrence. And we can catch up later!"

With a gentle nod that left no room for objection, Johnson excused himself. Without the desire to sit with Anthony, Genevieve decided to head to the second floor.

Upstairs was just as opulent and dazzling but with noticeably fewer people. The auction items were extremely pricey, hence only those truly interested in the bidding had ventured up.

Genevieve's gaze scanned the antiques and jewels encased in glass. The centerpiece, a deep blue gemstone named "Siren's Tear," was undoubtedly the showstopper of the night. But conspicuously, its starting bid was not listed, indicating tonight's top bid might just be for the "Siren's Tear."

Her eyebrows raised in curiosity. Anthony came up behind her and said, "Do you like it? I could buy it for you."

"No need," Genevieve pursed her lips. "I can afford it myself." Not that she wanted it, anyway.

At that moment, Andrea appeared, swarmed by a crowd. As the day's rumored fiancée, her every move was the center of attention. Standing there with the Hoffman family, cutting the cake, it sure looked like she was about to become part of the family for real.

more like a sure bet now.

Andrea came over with a smile. "Ms. Lawrence, don't be shy. Let Anthony here buy you whatever you fancy."

Her gracious offer made her seem all magnanimous, like she was already the lady of the house.

Anthony nodded in agreement his gaze fixed on Genevieve.

But Genevieve truly didn't want to get caught in the middle of these two-it felt like accidentally stepping in dog poop while walking down the street, utterly revolting. She forced a smile. "I'd feel guilty accepting gifts from others. I prefer buying things for myself."

Andrea couldn't help but laugh. "Ms. Lawrence, as the head of an entertainment company, you're the epitome of a strong independent woman. My family's always telling me to take a page out of your book!"

Her words were laced with an overt compliment but bore a subtle sting of satire and challenge. The crowd could definitely pick up on the underlying tension but silently revelled in the sharp exchange between the two women.

Genevieve maintained her calm demeanor, smiling naturally. "No need to take cues from me, we all have our strengths. After all, Andrea, your achievements piano are unrivaled, aren't they? You must have won tons of those international competitions, right? Like the Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Queen Elizabeth, or the Van Cliburn piano contests. So many accolades, you must've lost count!" Genevieve's innocently curious gaze fell on Andrea and she looked humble.

Andrea's face stiffened, her color draining from her lips. She had been playing piano for years, receiving accolades that were well; easy to exchange with money. Genevieve had listed some of the world's most prestigious piano competitions-contests Andrea had never even been a contender for...

Chapter 125

Andrea had spent years practicing the piano, thinking it'd be her golden ticket to marrying into a rich family. But a piano genius? That was never the plan.

With a forced smile, she turned to Genevieve. "Playing piano is about feeling the music, not chasing prizes or impressing others."

Genevieve couldn't hold back a chuckle. "Oh, please. Weren't you just hoping those piano skills. would snag you a wealthy hubby?"

That comment hit a nerve, and Andrea's smile vanished like a ghost. The crowd nearby couldn't help but sneak peeks at the drama unfolding.

Genevieve wasn't someone you'd want to mess with. After all, she was the one who left the Hoffman family in the dust after their divorce.

Furious, Andrea shot Genevieve a glare sharp enough to cut.

Genevieve, barely containing her laughter, put a hand over her mouth. "Oh, Ms. Thomson, don't be mad! It was all in good fun. Can't you take a little joke?"

Her eyes were sparkling, and she had the grin of someone who just got away with mischief. It was clear she had no interest in Andrea's drama. Genevieve wasn't about to play nice just for show. She had learned a thing or two from Rosalie about playing the villain.

Andrea was boiling over, her hands clenched into fists. Desperate, she turned to Anthony, her eyes welling up with tears. He just smiled serenely, completely lost in Genevieve's beauty, paying no mind to their spat.

"Mr. Hoffman....." Andrea tried to get his attention. She had a job to do today; she couldn't just be brushed off. Anthony gave her a brief, annoyed look. "Didn't you catch that she was joking? Let's break it up, folks. The auction's getting started." He tossed a soft glance at Genevieve. "Wanna head up to the front row?"

Genevieve ignored him and just breezed by, her dress swishing as she walked.

Anthony watched her, all googly-eyed. He was thrilled to see her put Andrea in her place. He figured Genevieve must be jealous. He mused, 'Why else would she be so ticked off? I promise I'll stop ruffling her feathers. We love each other! His mind was racing, but the auctioneer was already diving into the details of the first item up for bid.

Andrea sidled up to him. "Mr. Hoffman, I'm expecting a little thank-you gift from you. We had a deal.

Anthony just shrugged. Money was no object to him—he walked off after a nod.

Andrea became glad, and she mingled back into the crowd, watching as Genevieve zeroed in on the items, clearly hooked.

But Genevieve only started bidding when the "Siren's Tear" came up.

Andrea's eyes brightened. Her competitive edge was sparked, but the price was way steep. The starting bid was 4 million dollars. And the priciest thing before had only gone for like 4 million. This "Siren's Tear" was on another level.

Not too many people were bidding, but a few hands were going up.

Once it hit 8 million dollars, it was pretty much just Genevieve.

Andrea shot Anthony a frosty look but kept her smile sweet. "Mr. Hoffman, I'm setting my sights on that 'Siren's Tear. How about you win that bid for me, would you?"

Anthony's brows furrowed slightly as if he was lost in thought, his gaze briefly shifting to Genevieve.

She overheard Andrea's request and couldn't help but be speechless. It seemed pretty clear that the engagement between the two was legit. 'Maybe I should contribute a gift?' The thought crossed her mind.

Anthony raised his paddle and said, "9 million dollars!" The crowd was stunned and thought, "Was Anthony actually willing to drop that kind of cash for Andrea?"

A surge of elation washed over Andrea; she hadn't expected Anthony to agree so readily to her remark! She couldn't resist stealing a glance at Genevieve, her eyes glinting with triumph. She was eager to see Genevieve flustered, resentful, maybe even furious.

But no such luck. Genevieve remained calm, even with a smile on her lips.

Genevieve somehow looked happy. And it irked Andrea to no end; she was sure it was all an act!

Then, the next second, Genevieve raised her paddle and said, "10 million."

Anthony countered without missing a beat, "11 million."

The two seemed locked in a showdown, and for a moment, silence enveloped the room.

Genevieve said, "12 million dollars."

"13 million dollars!"

Genevieve said, "14 million dollars."

"15 million!" Anthony threw her a casual glance as he bid. To him, the money was just a string of numbers. Its true value depended on whom it was for.

People began to sense the tension solidifying in the air. Many looked at Genevieve with a mix of sympathy. An ex-husband outbidding his ex-wife for his current fiancée was a pretty humiliating scenario.

The bidding war escalated until Anthony said "19 million dollars." Then, Genevieve went silent. She didn't raise her paddle again; instead, she just looked at Anthony with a smile playing on her lips.

Finally, the auctioneer's gavel came down decisively. "The Siren's Tear goes to Mr. Anthony!"

Every clap was like a burst of fireworks in the room. Envious glances drifted towards Andrea. Her excitement was impossible to hide as a smile took over her face. Anthony stepped forward to sign the paperwork.

Andrea, basking in her victory, sauntered over to Genevieve and said, "Sorry, Ms. Lawrence, for snagging your little treasure. I never imagined Anthony would outbid you for something you wanted. Guess this must be what true love looks like!"

Genevieve couldn't help but give Andrea a look as she chuckled, "True love, indeed. Thanks for your generosity-you've just given a ton of warmth to the less fortunate."

Andrea chuckled and said, "You don't have to force a smile..."

But she was interrupted as the auctioneer walked over, bursting with excitement to shake Genevieve's hand. "Ms. Lawrence, thank you for EP

donating the Siren's Tear. I never dreamed it would fetch a whopping 19 million dollars! What an incredible surprise."

Andrea's face froze and she said in a sharp tone, "What? She donated it?"

The auctioneer nodded and said, "Yes, indeed. We have Ms. Lawrence to thank for her contribution. Without it, today's revenues would've been pretty bleak!"

Genevieve laughed nonchalantly, "Oh, that gem was the least valuable thing in my safety deposit box. Bought it for 4 million dollar's, and was almost toe embarrassed to let anyone else take a loss on it. I planned to bid on it myself. But then, who could've predicted Ms. Thomson and Mr. Hoffman's overflowing generosity?"

Andrea's face fell instantly, a mix of anger and embarrassment swirling together.

She thought in anger, I've been played by Genevieve! But it's okay, I still got Anthony.

Anthony descended from the stage, a m

server carefully holding a gift box trailing behind him. The m. The server handed the box to Andrea. Before she could grasp it, Anthony snatched it up and placed it directly into Genevieve's hands. "It's for you. You like it, don't you?"

His smile carried a hopeful warmth as he looked at her. 'She must've been deeply touched by my gesture! She just has to leap into my arms now, right?'

Anthony mused.

Chapter 126

Anthony's move stunned everyone into silence, especially Andrea. Her face switched between red and pale, and she struggled to breathe steadily. It was like a slap right to her face, knocking both her pride and dignity to the floor. Hot with fury and embarrassment, she barely contained herself.

The auctioneer caught the tense vibe and shot a knowing look to a server, who quickly apologized and excused themselves. The auctioneer, who had known Genevieve for quite a while, attempted to diffuse the situation with a joke. "Well, it was yours and now it's back with you. Seems like you and the Siren's Tear are really meant to be."

Genevieve's brows knit together, her face void of any excitement, her gaze toward the Siren's Tear in her hand indifferent. She gave a half-smile and pushed it back into Anthony's hands. "This is your possession now. Give it to your fiancée, consider it an engagement gift," she said coolly.

If Genevieve really wanted it, she wouldn't have forfeited the bid. She mused, 'I had intentionally driven the price up, aware that Andrea would fight for it, and knowing Anthony wouldn't lose face by being outbid by a woman. And Anthony did exactly what I expected. But he had turned around and handed it to me. What is going through that jerk's head?

Anthony's expression darkened. There was anger in his eyes and he said in an icy tone, "What engagement? Who do you mean my fiancée? That's nonsense. This was always meant for you."

He thrust the Siren's Tear back into Genevieve's hands, a clear edge of anger in his voice, but Genevieve wasn't taking any of it.

She curved her lips in a mocking smile as she thought, 'Everyone had seen them cut the cake together and Andrea herself had admitted it. Are they playing me for a fool?'

Genevieve didn't want to come off as jealous or confrontational, so she just smiled, peacefully handing the Siren's Tear to Andrea. "Ms. Thomson, congratulations. This is your engagement gift." Her smile didn't reach her eyes, which sparkled with a sharp, cool beauty.

She laughed carelessly, ignoring Andrea's visible shame and discomfort. To Genevieve, it no longer mattered. That which she didn't want could be claimed by anyone else who desired it.

What started as a coveted jewel had now become a proverbial hot potato. "Was Genevieve deliberately making me uncomfortable?" Andrea thought. She was livid, itching to lash out, but she bit down hard on her lower lip, tightly reigning in her emotions. She couldn't embarrass herself in front of so many people.

Genevieve's lips twitched into a smirk; she had achieved her goal and didn't want to stick around the lovebirds any longer. Hoisting her dress, she made her way upstairs. Each floor promised its own thrills, and she wasn't just here to see Johnson-no harm in a little fun, right?

Before anyone could even process the scene, Anthony marched over to Andrea, his face grim. His voice dropped into an uncontrollable chill. "Engagement? When did I ever pop the question to you? Did you forget why you're here tonight?"

His eyes carried a glint of cool intimidation, causing Andrea to shudder slightly, a mix of dread and guilt in her stance. "Mr. Hoffman, I didn't say anything about the engagement. It may be that Ms. Lawrence misunderstood me. I will explain it to her later."

Anthony anger, his expression stormy. He was on the verge of saying something when the auctioneer, unable to hold back a chuckle, interjected, "Before the auction started, I heard so many celebrities and ladies congratulating Ms. Thomson on her engagement to Mr. Hoffman. You didn't deny it at that time. I thought it was true!" He took a meaningful look at Anthony and said, "Don't you know, Mr. Hoffman? Then why did Ms. Thomson come here?"

He reeled from Genevieve's words, barely containing himself. The second he spoke up, every socialite in the room perked their ears, their interest piqued. This was shaping up to be more enthralling than any reality TV drama they'd seen.

Andrea's heart skipped a beat, her complexion shifted subtly as she tried to respond. But Anthony, with a stern face and a furrowed brow, snatched the Siren's Tear from her hand and turned on his heel, leaving her with his cutting parting shot, "She's just a regular guest, don't overthink it."

His words rippled through the silence like a boulder dropped into a still lake, sending shockwaves through the onlookers. Everyone might have missed his last remark, but they all clearly understood Andrea was "just a regular guest."

Andrea's face drained of color, the emptiness in her palm echoing the hit she'd just taken, looking ready to crumble.

As Anthony strode away, all the elite ladies hesitated to approach Andrea, they rather enjoyed the spectacle from a distance. Andrea had never really been part of their circle, riding the Hoffman family coattails was the only reason they tolerated her, and their hidden disdain was no secret.

"Anthony bought that jewelry for his ex-wife?"

"She really likes to deceive herself and others. I thought it was really an engagement party tonight, but Anthony denied it himself. Why is she still pretending

"The Hoffman family won't be so insensible?"

Whispers and chatter trickled into Andrea's ears, grinding her patience thinner with each word.

The third floor was where the high-rollers played. Some were dealing cards, others playing poker, a mini-Vegas right in the heart of the city, scaled down to a personal playground.

Genevieve casually surveyed the area and settled down in a quieter spot, bored as she watched others gamble away. A stack of chips slid her way, and as she looked up, she saw Louis with his warm, inviting smile.

"Feel like playing?" he offered gently Genevieve shook her head. "No, I'm not interested."

Louis raised an eyebrow, all politeness. "Hungry at all? Want something to eat?" His thoughtfulness shone through-a gentleman through and through.

Genevieve patted her stomach and felt hungry. "A bit, I guess. I'll go grab a bite at the restaurant," she said, standing up. Once she filled up, she'd go find Johnson to discuss business.

Louis paused and said, "Just now, I saw Anthony's parents heading to the restaurant.

Genevieve stopped dead in her tracks, her appetite vanishing. The last thing she wanted was to have the Hoffman family kill her mood even at dinner.

Grinning, Louis offered, "How about you stay here, and I'll bring back some food for you?"

Genevieve's eyes sparkled as she readily agreed, "Thanks! I'm in the mood for some lobster and pasta."

Louis said, "Got it."

As Louis left, Genevieve felt much better. She thought, 'Louis is the MVP in clutch moments, not doubt!'

Johnson comes over with a glass of wine and puts it in front of Genevieve. "Ms.

Lawrence, shall we talk about the acquisition?"

His sudden shift to business took Genevieve off guard. She instinctively accepted the drink with a smile, "Sure thing."

Johnson's demeanor was relaxed but to the point, "Jacinta approached me before, but we couldn't agree on the price I know you guys are looking to hit big, so here's the deal-I want ten percent of your company."

Genevieve tensed up slightly, her casual gaze sharpening in an instant, "Mr.

Lewis, we can't agree to those terms."

Genevieve, Jacinta, and Anthony had found a delicate balance in their three-way partnership any dilution of shares now could collapse the entire project.

Johnson's smile briefly froze before he resumed his carefree air, swirling his wine and clinking his glass against hers, "For your sake, Ms. Lawrence, I'll revise my offer-triple the price."

Chapter 127

Genevieve mulled it over for a second. Johnson knew how to drive a hard bargain.

Chances were his second condition was his real aim all along.

He asked for a lot of money, but Turing Tech Innovations wasn't worth that kind of money right

ΠΟΥ.

But if Genevieve could keep all the patents and tech, it would save her a heck of a headache down the road. So, maybe there was room to negotiate after all. Genevieve smiled and said, "We'll need to hash out the specifics."

That was her way of tentatively agreeing to his terms, with a clear message: she had conditions of her own that needed to be met.

Johnson smiled and raised his eyebrows, raising the glass in his hand. "Here's to a fruitful partnership!"

They were surrounded by swarms of people. Genevieve didn't overthink it and took a polite sip from her glass. The fruit wine packed more of a punch than she expected, but she swallowed it down anyway.

Johnson was beaming as he stood up, "Ms. Lawrence, my secretary is also here. Why don't we take this to her room to go over the finer points?"

He seemed pleased to reach an agreement. Whipping out his phone right in front of her, he dialed up his secretary to get her room number, eager to get going.

Genevieve was stunned for a few seconds. She knew Johnson was gay, so she hadn't really been on guard around him. She figured she might as well strike while the iron's hot and hammer out the contract details, so she didn't decline the offer.

She sent a quick text to Louis to keep him in the loop and followed Johnson upstairs, remembering that the secretary's room was 602. What she didn't realize was that her message was never sent, Riding the elevator up, Genevieve exited onto a floor that was all rest and relaxation, the plush carpet making it a quiet zone.

But as soon as she stepped off, a heavy fog seemed to weigh down on her head.

Taking a few steps, something felt very off. Leaning on the railing, she let the ocean breeze hit her face, trying to clear her head.

Seconds later, her body started to heat up, a warning siren blaring inside her head. She fumbled for her phone only to realize the signal was jammed-she couldn't make a call to save her life.

A dark suspicion crept up from the depths of her thoughts. 'Could it be the drink that Johnson handed me?'

Genevieve realized something wasn't right, clenched her fist tightly, and was just about to turn and

leave when the door opposite her flung open.

Johnson grabbed Genevieve's arm and pulled hard into the room.

"Ah!" Genevieve let out a sharp scream. Her whole body felt weak and her mind was groggy; she had no strength to fight back, Her struggles did nothing as Johnson dragged her inside, threw her to the floor, and locked the door behind them.

The pain brought a moment of clarity to Genevieve, and with a pale face, she tried to get up. looking at him. "Johnson, have you lost your mind?"

There was no so-called secretary in the room. 'Could this all have been a trap set by Johnson?' Genevieve couldn't understand. 'Why would he do this?'

Johnson towered over her, shedding any pretense of his normally cordial demeanor, taking on a chilling air. He took off his watch with a smirk that was far from friendly, no longer pretending to be the amiable man everyone knew.

He picked up an item from a nearby cupboard, a whip....

Genevieve's expression tightened. "If I go missing, people will start looking for me."

Johnson let out a soft chuckle, his eyes dripping with disdain as he walked over to the bed and switched on a camera. Then he turned to Genevieve, "Ms. Lawrence, just bad luck on your part. Someone offered a pretty penny for a video of us together, and I took the deal. All that talk of cooperation was just a game, that company's been sold off a long time ago..."

He began to unbutton his shirt, greedy as a gambler eyeing his chips, looking as though he wanted to devour her and claim the rest of his payment.

Genevieve felt a burning heat throughout her body, her eyes misting over. She dug her nails into her palm to stay alert. "I can give you any amount of money you want, just name it. I'm the daughter of Lawrence Group; I have money..."

"Ms. Lawrence, do you think I'd fall for your act just because you bear the Lawrence name? If you were the Lawrence heiress, would the Hoffman family have turned their backs on you? Ston struggling, no one here can save you. Today's Anthony's engagement and everyone's focus is elsewhere. Don't be scared, I'm quite gentle with women..." He tugged at the whip in his hand, faking a smile that did nothing to hide the cruelty in his eyes.

The next second, he raised the whip, lashing it viciously towards her....

Outside at this moment, a massive firework burst open in the night sky, illuminating half of the sky. It was brilliant and colorful.

Beautiful patterns slowly transformed into an extravaganza of multicolored lilies, precious and bright.

Then, as the lilies gently descended, at the very moment they were about to fade away, they suddenly burst again to reveal a message: "Genevieve, I love you."

The message lingered in the sky longer than any other part of the display, a feast for the eyes that no one wanted to end. Out of the scintillating message appeared an array of beautiful, intricate patterns. People spilled out onto the decks of the cruise ship, gathering to watch the exclusive firework show put on for just one person.

This fantastic display was something Anthony had meticulously planned. A cruise, fireworks, gifts- every bit of his sincerity was tucked into these grand gestures. Yet, he had scoured every deck high and low and still couldn't spot the one person he desperately wanted to see.

Suddenly, a sinking feeling set in his gut.

With such a commotion, Genevieve couldn't possibly have no reaction. If she were thrilled, she'd be out here hugging and kissing him by now. And kissing her if she weren't pleased, at the very least, she'd have come to chew him out for it. But she was nowhere to be found.

Quickly, he got a hold of Daniel and ordered him to have the bodyguards search for her immediately. The fireworks show would captivate the crowd's attention for nearly an hour-but Anthony had no time to wait.

Quincey angrily found Anthony and said, "What the heck are you doing? Has that woman put a spell on you? Call off whatever this is now! You're making a fool of yourself!"

Anthony helped Andrea's father some time ago. Quincey thought that he had a crush on Andrea, so she accepted her again. Seeing this scene, she was so angry!

Anthony's face turned to stone, his worry evident beneath his cool exterior. Without a second thought, he shoved Quincey aside, his tone icy and detached as he said, "It's not stopping. This entire cruise party is for Genevieve."

He strode towards the deck, his face a mask of dread. Daniel had checked the security footage and hurried over to whisper something urgent to Anthony. Without wasting a moment, Anthony's face sank into a gloom as he and his entourage hastened to the sixth floor.

They arrived at the door of room 602. Anthony banged on the door with an alarming intensity. But there was no response inside.

He took a step back and kicked the door open. Inside, two figures were in the throes of what could only be described as "intense intercourse," clutching the bed sheets with shock at the intrusion.

Anthony barged in with a darkened face. His bloodshot eyes darted around, barely containing the brewing storm of emotions.

His body was wound tight, coiled like a spring ready to snap.

In the next second, he sent Johnson flying with a kick, and the woman underneath screamed.

Anthony's gaze hardened as her face came into view. It wasn't Genevieve.

A moment of relief washed over him, and then, just as quickly, his heart constricted in fear.

Just moments before, Daniel had told him, "Genevieve exchanged some words with Johnson and then went upstairs..." And Johnson, that guy was never up to any good!

Chapter 128

nan Anthony paced the floor, restless as a panther on the loose, his entire being shrouded in ominous chill. Johnson scrambled to his feet from the ground, his trembling hands clutching the blanket to his body. "Mr. Hoffman, what are you doing?"

Anthony's bodyguards stood ready, not showing any sign of leaving. Anthony approached step by step, terrifyingly like a demon straight out of hell.

Gripping Johnson by the hair, Anthony's eyes were undisguised in their fury, his voice deep and icy as he said, "Where's Genevieve?"

Johnson panicked for a moment and said, "I... I don't know! Why would I know where Ms. Lawrence is?"

Daniel stepped forward and cut him off, "The security cameras caught you sticking a signal jammer on Ms. Lawrence's phone. She came looking for you. After she got off the elevator on the sixth floor, she disappeared. Where are you hiding her?"

Johnson's face turned a shade paler and he shook his head vigorously, "I didn't, you can search all you want. I've been with my secretary the entire time!"

The crying woman in the bed was his secretary.

With a look from Anthony, Daniel had the bodyguards start to search the room, paying no mind to the naked secretary.

Johnson swallowed hard, his face still laced with shock and fear. "M-Mr. Hoffman! I haven't congratulated you on your engagement yet."

Anthony's gaze grew even colder as he tightened his grip and smashed Johnson's head against the corner of the bed.

"Aaah-" Johnson screamed in pain as Anthony held fast to his hair, his expression severe. "Who told you I got engaged today, huh?"

Johnson trembled violently. "It's your fiancée, Ms. Thomson!"

A dark glint passed through Anthony's eyes, "So, it was her who had you set up Genevieve?"

Johnson's eyes widened and he began to shake his head fiercely, "No, no, no, it really wasn't me, I swear, Mr. Hoffman!"

He was already regretting it, but even in regret, he dared not reveal the truth. If Anthony cared about Genevieve, revealing the truth would only make things worse for him. It was better to bite down hard and never admit to anything.

After the bodyguards finished searching the room, leaving no stone unturned and even checking the adjacent rooms, they found nothing. Daniel's face grew grim as he shook his head at Anthony.

Anthony's eyes frosted over, and with a surge of rage, he slammed Johnson's head into the corner of the bed again. This time, blood started to ooze from Johnson's head.

His screams filled the room, and his face turned deathly pale as Anthony, unapologetically stern, pressed on with a frosty tone, "Stop pretending, I know it was you. Hand her over. You owe billions in gambling debts; I will clear them for you. If you don't cough her up, don't wait for this cruise to dock. I'll have you swimming with the fishes."

Johnson trembled violently. He could feel Anthony's intense protectiveness towards Genevieve. That cold, penetrating stare was too much to bear-it seemed to strip bare all his lies and deceit.

Inside, he struggled with his dilemma, but ultimately he didn't dare to come clean.

Gulping, his body quaking in a mess, Johnson denied, "I honestly don't know where Ms. Lawrence is!"

Anthony's eyes suddenly turned frosty, as he abruptly stood up and spoke in a low, ominous tone, "Throw him overboard."

"Yes, sir." One of the bodyguards stepped forward, sealed Johnson's screaming mouth with duct. tape, then they hauled him away.

Anthony's gaze was dark and ominous as he swept a look over the woman on the bed; he patted his hands together as if he'd touched something filthy. "And what about you? Want to join him?"

The secretary, white as a sheet, didn't care about her fame anymore. She scurried down, pleading and in tears, "I don't know anything! He told me to book two rooms. I was waiting for him in the next one. He dragged me over here. I didn't see Ms. Lawrence when I came..." She blurted out everything she knew in her panic.

Anthony withdrew his gaze and turned to leave, making his way to the railing.

Standing there, his eyes were like pools in the night, and his voice brooded darkly, "No one gets up on this floor. Search every room, one by one!"

"Understood."

The fireworks continued to blaze brightly in the night sky. But his initial excitement was gone, replaced by a growing unease.

When Anthony's men arrived, Johnson's mad antics came to an abrupt halt.

It seemed he had a strong sense of alertness but wasn't about to let her go. He tied Genevieve's hands with a ready rope and gagged her mouth, then in a rush, he hung her over the railing outside the window.

Throughout the whole process, she was too weak to resist.

This room led to nowhere outside-the cruise ship was designed to taper upward, which meant no one from outside would spot Genevieve if they didn't look up from their windows.

Johnson, the sick freak, had whipped Genevieve into a foggy consciousness. However, the delayed searing pain, combined, with the chill from the wind blowing against her shaky frame, slowly brought back some of her strength.

Genevieve's hands were tied, and she was hanging in mid-air. If she fell, it would be into the ocean to become food for the fish or onto the deck below, potentially leaving her crippled.

She couldn't even make a sound, the entire ordeal leaving her desperate and agonized.

The cold night breeze was chilling, sending shivers down her spine.

Below, the sea roared fiercely, as if ready to swallow up every sound and scrap of hope in the night.

Genevieve's thin party dress fluttered in the wind as she hung there, goosebumps covering her body. Panic-induced fear made her shake uncontrollably.

She desperately wanted to call for help, to survive, to escape this nightmare. Her life had been a blur, losing what mattered most and making too many wrong choices. But now, her biggest regret was trusting Johnson-that sick freak!

Genevieve could only hear Johnson's through?

cries of agony from the room. Was someone coming to rescue her? A surge surged through her, her hands in excruciating pain, but the rush of blood, couldn't let her guard down. Soon, the noise from the room stopped, and no one peered out of the windows. Her heart grew colder.

Unable to see the splendid fireworks above, her mind was blank. She tried to shake the rope to draw attention but to no avail. Though her legs could still move, she pushed herself up with her arms. and crashed against the wall, trying to kick downwards with all her might for as many times as she could.

Her arms raw and bleeding, her stomach pained from the impact, unable to touch the deck below, and feeling entirely powerless, she wanted to cry. Suddenly, faint voices from downstairs reached her. It was Lauraine's voice. "I swear I just saw a pair of feet at the window. So creepy!"

Andrea asked, "Are you sure you saw it right?"

"I'm positive!" Lauraine walked to the window, looked up, and screamed.

"Someone's really there!"

Upon hearing Lauraine's voice, Genevieve kicked her legs frantically, as if seeing a glimmer of hope. After a moment, Lauraine mustered the courage to open the window and look up, only for her face to change dramatically. "Genevieve?"

Chapter 129

The joy Genevieve felt at being discovered was indescribable. Andrea joined Lauraine and looked up, her expression subtly shifting. She didn't react as strongly as Lauraine, simply asking, "How did she end up

there? Louis has been going crazy looking for her. She didn't just accidentally hang herself up there, did she?"

Lauraine frowned with displeasure on her face. "I'm going to check upstairs," she said, darting up the stairs.

Anthony's bodyguards were still looking for Genevieve. But Lauraine had no idea who they were after. She had been told earlier that no one was allowed upstairs, and she stood there, chin high, eyeing them defiantly, "I'm Anthony's little sister. Do you dare to stop me?"

Her words left no room for argument.

Lauraine reached room 602. The room had been turned upside down and searched numerous times; no one would come again. She pushed open the window and saw Genevieve, her face streaked with tears.

This was the first time Lauraine had seen Genevieve so disheveled. Usually, she was poised and indifferent, always so refined and radiant that even Lauraine, the Hoffman family's beloved daughter, felt overshadowed.

But the current distress of Genevieve was hard to watch. She was gagged, her face deathly pale. Remembering how Genevieve had donated bone marrow to her, Lauraine couldn't bring herself to just stand by and began to untie Genevieve's bonds.

Hope lit up in Genevieve's eyes, tears shimmering with gratitude.

But before the rope was untied, Andrea's voice chimed in from below, her gentle tone carried on the night breeze to their ears. "Lauraine, you're not thinking of saving her, are you? Have you forgotten the way she humiliated you? How she climbed over you to gain power, playing your brother and Louis like they were pawns in her game? If you save her, she won't be grateful, she will only despise you more. But without her, no one will compete with you for Louis. He'll be yours alone."

Lauraine's body jolted, her expression shifting subtly, a hint of hesitation in her eyes. Andrea's words had struck a chord.

Genevieve's pitiful, glistening eyes were always so captivating. But Lauraine remembered the cold disdain in those eyes the last time Genevieve had humiliated her in the restroom during Jacinta's party. "How proud Genevieve had been, piercing my pride as she exposed my attempted emulation!" Lauraine's gaze hardened as she mused.

Genevieve, hearing Andrea's words, noticed the subtle changes in Lauraine's expression. The warmth in her heart gradually cooled. Her heart felt as if it were being crushed by a massive stone, heavy enough to suffocate her with despair.

Her life was in Lauraine's hands.

Unconsciously, Lauraine tugged at the rope, her grip tightening slightly. Suddenly, the knots gave way.

Genevieve's body started to fall, her entire frame shaking violently.

But the next second, she hit the wall. She looked up in alarm to see Lauraine had instinctively yanked back on the rope. Lauraine's face showed a mix of panic and hesitation.

Andrea's tone became urgent as she couldn't help but push her. "Lauraine, this isn't your fault. If you can't pull her up, just let go, and pretend nothing happened. Don't forget, Louis is also on this cruise. If she shows up again, do you think he will even glance your way? She tied herself up. Maybe it's just a ploy to get sympathy from the guys. You're too kind-hearted; don't fall for it!"

Listening to Andrea's words, the confusion on Lauraine's face began to ease. The fireworks continued relentlessly.

The dim and bright lights intermingled, casting a glow on Genevieve's face. She looked pitiful and beautiful. 'Andrea was right, as long as Genevieve is around, Louis would never give me a second look. Even if I dressed exactly like Genevieve! Lauraine mused.

"Let go, it's not your fault. It was all Genevieve's fault. She deserved it. Lauraine, no one will blame you. No one will know what happened here..." Andrea's words echoed in Lauraine's ears like a curse.

Lauraine seemed persuaded, the mention of Louis making her heart tremble violently. But in the end, guilt prevailed.

"I'm sorry..." She somehow loosened the rope in her hand.

The next second, Genevieve fell into the sea like a fallen leaf.

The ripples she created expanded ring by ring before being swallowed by the dark and deep ocean. The cruise remained a hive of activity. The fireworks show was far from over. The surprises meant for Genevieve went unseen by her.

As Genevieve plummeted into the chilling, dead silence of the ocean, she felt certain she was going to die.

Surrounded by darkness deeper and more terrifying than hell itself, her panic and fear spiked to their peak.

She hadn't even had the chance to say goodbye to her family when endless suffocation consumed everything...

Her hands were bound, with only her legs free to struggle as she desperately tried to swim upward. But the waves kept dragging her down, deeper into the abyss.

She felt like she was falling into another silent world, hearing only the muffled roar of the waves, the cruise ship getting further and further away.

Helpless and gasping for air, the feeling of suffocation and powerlessness seemed to tear her apart.

As her breath was slowly stolen away, feeling the waning hope within her, Genevieve slowly closed her eyes....

On the cruise ship, the moment Lauraine let go, she regretted it. I've killed her... How could I do such a thing? It was like I was possessed, she mused in panic.

But then, in the next instant, Lauraine caught sight of a familiar, graceful silhouette plunging from lower deck window.

Lauraine knew it was Louis! He disappeared into the sea, vanishing without a trace, resolute and detached.

Her body trembled uncontrollably as reality hit her like a cold splash of water. 'How could Louis so decisively jump to save Genevieve? He could die in the ocean!' Lauraine thought in despair.

Lauraine screamed in terror, clinging to the window frame, half of her body leaning out. "Louis!" Her voice was hoarse with a sobbing tone, and tears fell in an instant. She'd lost control, completely terrified.

Her worst fear had come to life. Louis had seen it all-every dark part of her. She began to sob hysterically, as if there were two souls inside her tearing each other apart.

She used to resent the world for giving her a frail body, but now she despised her own venomous soul more than anything.

The bodyguards rushed in, hearing the commotion, and exchanged bewildered looks at the scene.

Anthony pushed through the crowd, his expression stern and his eyes chillingly cold. "Did you see her?"

Where is she?" He grabbed Lauraine's shoulders tightly, his gaze sharp as a hawk's.

Terrified and panicky, having done something so guilty, Lauraine trembled all over and collapsed to the floor, covering her face and crying out loud.

She was like a wilted, sullied rose. She was afraid-terrified of Anthony's gaze and his questioning.

Anthony looked out to the sea, where the dark and mysterious waves rolled menacingly, serene yet dangerous. His unease grew heavier.

Behind him, Lauraine managed to stand, clutching at Anthony's clothes with a broken voice. "Save him, Louis fell into the sea....."

Chapter 130

Anthony's eyes suddenly turned stern, and he looked at Lauraine coldly.

His indifferent aura was intense and dangerous.

Lauraine dared not to raise her head. She covered her face with her shoulders trembling violently. She felt severe pain in her heart and said, "Louis jumped into the sea. Tony, save him! There's still hope to save him!"

In sorrow and struggle, she was immersed in the scene of Louis leaping into the sea, unable to extricate herself.

Lauraine thought, 'I also regretted it. I didn't mean it. I just accidentally loosened the rope. What will Louis think of me? The man I like has witnessed my sin, but I don't want him to die. Genevieve may not live, but Louis can be saved!'

She felt a piercing pain in her heart, making her suffocated.

Lauraine grabbed Anthony's arm tightly with tears on her face. Her face was full of fear and worry. "Tony, ask someone to save him. He can't die! If he dies, I won't live either..."

Anthony's heart skipped a beat when a bad thought emerged. He stared at her with a gloomy look and asked, "Did Genevieve fall into the sea, too?"

Otherwise, he couldn't think of any other reason Louis jumped into it.

Lauraine trembled, and her face went pale.

She shook her head in a panic. "I don't know-"

Before she could finish, Anthony pushed her away and ordered the bodyguards, "Get ready to save her!"

That bad thought in him was becoming increasingly burdensome.

Lauraine staggered after being pushed and trembled harder. She cried and shouted from behind, "Tony, save Louis first. Please! He still has hope to live!"

Lauraine knew that Genevieve had no hope to live as her hands were tied, and her mouth was gagged. She would only slowly die in the sea.

Genevieve didn't even have the chance to survive.

Lauraine regretted it, but after seeing Louis jump into the sea, the regret was slowly replaced by a faint sensation in her heart.

She was more worried about Louis.

Everyone indulged in luxury and dissipation by the first half of the night.

And they spent the other half of the night in fear and solemnity on the cruise ship.

The party then ended in a hurry.

Many people had no idea what was going on.

But they vaguely knew that something happened to Genevieve.

Quincey was reluctant to see Anthony make such a big fanfare for Genevieve, so she always brought Andrea along to show everyone that her ideal daughter-in-law was not Genevieve.

That was her attitude.

Anthony's men sent the guests on the cruise ship off one after another, including Quincey and Presley.

Although Presley was dissatisfied, he wouldn't question his son in public. After all, Anthony had been able to take charge of himself independently.

Meanwhile, when Quincey left cursing behind the bodyguards, Andrea held her arm and reassured her softly. "Mrs. Hoffman, it doesn't matter. Let's go back early and have a good sleep. It's good for your skin..."

Lauraine staggered and followed behind. She had just cried and couldn't even stand still.

Quincey never cared about her sickly daughter, so she didn't notice that something was wrong with Lauraine. When they were about to get on the speedboat, the bodyguard suddenly received a call. After hanging up the call, he said, "Ms. Thomson, Mr. Hoffman asked you and Ms. Hoffman to stay."

Andrea's expression changed subtly.

But soon, she smiled gently again and said, "Why? I'm thinking of going back with Mrs. Hoffman."

The bodyguard's expression changed slightly. "This is Mr. Hoffman's order."

Quincey was a little unhappy initially, but she quickly reacted and patted Andrea's hand. "I knew it. He must be interested in you, so he asked you to stay here. I'm fine with it as long as you can make him care about you. You should seize this good opportunity!"

With that, she went on the speedboat with Presley one after the other.

In the night, the white light on the cruise ship shrouded Andrea.

Her face turned even paler at that moment.

Her smile was stiff and unnatural.

Watching Quincey leave, she couldn't help but get nervous.

Meanwhile, Lauraine panicked utterly. She grabbed Andrea's arm, and her lips trembled. "What should we do? Did Tony find out?"

Andrea was slightly annoyed but still held her hand with a smile. "You didn't say you did it, right?"

Lauraine shook her head violently.

Andrea breathed a sigh of relief and smiled. She held Lauraine's arm and whispered as she walked,

"Don't worry. Don't say anything. She should be dead by now and won't No one will know as long as we don't tell anyone."

Lauraine stated, "But Louis knew it and still jumped into the sea..."

"Did he come up?" Andrea asked calmly.

Lauraine froze, and her face turned pale.

me back to trouble you.

Andrea smiled. "Lauraine, I hope you learn to love yourself more than the person you love. He chose that woman; you should learn to care for yourself. We should pray they never come out of the sea. Or you'll spend the rest of your life in prison..."

Andrea smiled and gently combed Lauraine's messy hair with gloomy eyes.

Lauraine suddenly felt that Andrea was scary, That chill Andrea exuded made her feel uncomfortable.

Lauraine found Andrea had been calm all the time. She calmly m om persuaded her to let go of her hands, convinced her to shut up, and advised her not to overthink it.

Andrea had bewitched Lauraine, but m at that moment, she remained detached from the entire situation, quietly observing Lauraine go through all that.

Even if Lauraine was foolish, she sensed that Andrea was not simple.

She looked up at Andrea's gentle and calm face and smiled stiffly.

Andrea didn't say anything but slowly went back to the cruise ship, holding Lauraine's cold hand.

Instantly, the whole cruise ship went silent.

Only the cold breeze and the sound of waves could be heard.

Anthony stood on the deck, tall and imposing. He exuded a gloomy and cold aura. The wind was so strong that it folded his clothes.

And in front of him was Johnson, who was covered with wounds.

He was beaten so severely that he lay on the ground like a puddle of mud under Anthony's feet, twitching occasionally.

Who's he questioning? It must have something to do with Genevieve!"

Seeing the scene, Andrea's and m Lauraine's expressions changed, especially Lauraine's. She covered her ears and screamed in horror.

But she was surrounded by the bodyguards behind.

She finally sensed Anthony's indifference.

He had always cared for her as an elder brother, pampered her, and let her receive the best treatment abroad.

He even agreed to marry an unknown woman he didn't know so that she could have the surgery.

In those years of grappling with death, Anthony was the only beacon of warmth for Lauraine in the Hoffman family.

But at that moment, looking at the coldness and gloom in Anthony's eyes, she suddenly felt strange.

Lauraine thought he might have been covering himself up well all that time. She finally admitted she was wrong, standing still and screaming out of control...