

Surprise 236

Chapter 236 An Unscrupulous Man

“No, thank you. But, I appreciate your kindness, President Crane,” Courtney declined politely because she could sense the underlying threat in his words.

I can help you, but that means you have to do something for me in return.

Whatever it was, Courtney wasn't interested.

Tobias placed his hands in his pockets. He wasn't angry at Courtney for being ungrateful, but he didn't intend on moving aside. “Those who know me usually call me Mr. Crane or Toby; President Crane sounds strange. Miss Hunter, if you don't mind, how about going out for a drink with me? There are too many people here.”

Courtney frowned. The provocative implication of his words was barely disguised.

“I'm sorry.” Courtney shot him a glance, restraining herself from rolling her eyes at him. “I'm busy tonight. Maybe next time.”

With that, she turned around and was ready to walk in the other direction.

However, Tobias was faster than her as he moved to stand in front of her. “Miss Hunter, now you're just humiliating me. Personally, I don't mind much, but I value my reputation. If you don't show me respect, I'm afraid you won't be able to get what you want.”

Courtney found the situation getting increasingly absurd. How did she end up meeting such an oddball?

“What I want doesn't seem to have anything to do with you, President Crane. I don't know how I've offended you, but if you're here to find fault with me, you might as well make yourself clear.”

“You didn't offend me,” Tobias said with a smile. “I've taken a fancy to you. Aren't you trying to score Sakura Group's order? As long as you go out and have a drink with me, I'll just need to have a word with Mr. Willis and the order will be yours. Tell you what; I'll even place an order for Amethyst Group's staff uniforms for the next season. What do you say?”

“You've taken a fancy to me?” Courtney nearly burst out laughing. “I'm sorry. I'm not desperate to the point where I would prostitute myself to get business.”

Almost instantly, Courtney's expression turned cold. She went straight past Tobias and headed in the opposite direction.

Behind her, Tobias sneered, “Miss Hunter, you have one night to consider my offer. If you regret your decision, come find me in room 419 at White Moon Hotel.”

Courtney did not turn back. In her mind, she was giving this disgustingly wretched man a million slaps.

It's sickening that such shameless men exist in this world.

On the other side of the room, a pair of stony eyes had witnessed the entire scene.

Just as he was about to step forward, the wireless earbuds in his ears gave a buzz, and Josh's clear voice sounded. "President Duncan, James is on the rooftop talking to a woman. Judging from her figure, she looks like Miss Price."

Alexander's brows furrowed. When he saw that Courtney, who was in the near distance, had gotten rid of Tobias, his expression relaxed slightly. "Got it."

There were many people in the banquet hall, so he knew without a doubt that nothing serious would happen, but when he thought of what that scoundrel said to Courtney, a thick layer of frost instantly gathered in Alexander's eyes.

After getting rid of Tobias, Courtney subconsciously looked around the banquet hall in search of Alexander. After walking a whole round, she glimpsed him heading toward the rooftop from a distance, and the hand that was lifting the edge of her gown stiffened.

She figured that she was just being sentimental by clinging to thoughts of him. After all, he seemed to be moving on just fine.

Halfway through the banquet, the sound of a microphone being tested came from the direction of the champagne tower, and everyone began to gather around. Swept forward by the tide of people, Courtney followed.

"Today, we would like to make a grand introduction of President Willis from Sakura Group. We are greatly honored by your gracious presence."

The head of the organizing team, a young man in his thirties, introduced Dominic to the crowd.

Finding the action a bit strange, Courtney felt puzzled and found Leila in the crowd. To her surprise, upon seeing her confused expression, Leila exchanged a look with her and shook her head.

Dominic took the microphone and greeted the crowd with a smile. "Today, I'm here on behalf of Sakura Group to attend the cocktail party held for Shanghai and Melrose City's clothing companies. I'm mainly here because an old friend invited me, so I came to join in on the fun. Nevertheless, I am also here because I have some good news to deliver. Sakura Group would like to place an order for a batch of staff uniforms, and we hope that a majority of the companies here will bid..."

The moment these words left his mouth, the entire room was in an uproar.

Leila managed to squeeze her way through the crowd and was standing beside Courtney with a frown on her face. "Didn't Dominic say that he will work with Citron Apparel? Why is he starting a bid all of a sudden? That old fox. This is unacceptable."

Courtney mirrored her frown. "I might know why."

Her response caught Leila by surprise. "Why?"

Following Courtney's gaze, Leila saw a figure standing lazily in the near distance, appearing out of place among the other guests. At this moment, he was away from the crowd, leaning against the sofa as he raised his wine glass in Courtney's direction.

"Tobias Crane?" Leila's brows furrowed.

“You know him?” Courtney looked at her. “He asked me to have a drink with him just now. I refused, then he said something that I didn’t understand at that time. But now, it seems that the sudden change in President Willis’ arrangements has something to do with him.”

Leila’s face turned bitter. “That pervert. There’s no one in Shanghai who doesn’t know him. He acts wildly just because his father is a well-known man. God knows how many young girls he’s provoked. In a way, he is sort of acquainted with Dominic. His father is well-connected, and everyone in Shanghai respects him. I think you’ve offended Tobias.”

Courtney looked perplexed. “Looks like he’s messing with me on purpose. Is there any room for redemption? Should I approach him now and tell him that I’ll have a drink with him?”

“Don’t.” Leila immediately rejected her proposal. “If Elijah knows that I let you go off to have a drink with someone, I’m afraid I’ll be the one to blame. This matter still has to be given careful thought and consideration. Even though Dominic is showing Amethyst Group respect, at the end of the day, he’s just a professional manager. He has to make practical considerations for the company and would only go with the bids if the situation necessitates it.”

At that point, Leila glanced at Courtney. “I’m just worried that Tobias will create more trouble. He’s an unscrupulous man who would do anything to achieve his goal.”

Upon hearing this, Courtney’s heart sank.

How could she be so unlucky? It wasn’t easy for her to land this order, but because a spoiled son had taken a fancy to her, the opportunity was going to slip through her fingers. What bad luck!

Room 419 at White Moon Hotel. Tobias’ voice echoed in her mind. What an awful person! Was he afraid that I didn’t understand his intentions? He had to go and choose this room number?

As she looked at the nasty figure in the distance, Courtney’s fists clenched.

So what if I go with him? She wanted to know who the hell Tobias was and how capable he actually was.

When the reception ended, Alexander left the banquet hall with a graceful figure chasing after him in a hurry. “Alex, wait for me! It isn’t what you think it is!”

Britney ran with such urgency that her high heels were making loud clicking sounds on the ground.

Josh had already opened the back door of the car. As if he didn’t hear the sound of someone calling after him, Alexander got into the car without turning back.

After the door closed with a sharp slam, Britney finally reached the car. To her dismay, Josh stopped her before she could go any further.

Chapter 237 How Rough Was It?

Josh stood by the car door and perfunctorily gestured for Britney to take her leave. “Miss Price, please leave.”

Britney protested, “I need to talk to Alex—”

“President Duncan is currently occupied,” he interrupted as politely as he could.

There were others who were passing by the hotel and since she did not want to cause a scene in front of everyone, she stepped aside. She watched as the silver-grey sedan sped off without any further delay, leaving only dust in its wake.

Just then, a man dressed in a suit and leather shoes approached Britney from behind. “Like I said, my cousin has little regard for anyone else when he’s working on something important. If he could cast his own mother out of the Duncan Family when he was thirteen, what made you think he’ll treat you any differently? After all, you were only his fake girlfriend for the past couple of years and he saw you as nothing more than a shield.”

“Shut up,” she snapped with an icy expression. “You knew he’d be here today, didn’t you? Did you deliberately set me up so that he’d catch me talking to you?”

“Do you take me for a psychic?” James Duncan asked with a glint of amusement in his eyes.

“Don’t flatter yourself. As far as I’m concerned, you can’t even begin to compete with Alexander. Scheming was the only way for you to get to where you are now,” Britney countered without any reservation.

Upon hearing that, his eyes darkened as a thought seized him. He scoffed and gave her an unreadable look before he drawled, “Just you watch. Duncan Group is now under my control and it would thrive under my leadership more than it ever did under Alexander’s. I couldn’t be much worse off than him and should I fall, it would be much harder for him to rise again.”

Britney’s face blanched at his words. “What are you going to do?”

“I’m not going to do anything. Let’s just say that I’m planning ahead.”

The fallen leaves that were scattered by the hotel entrance rustled as the night breeze swept them along the pavement. She looked at James and she could not help but shudder at the deadly calmness in his eyes.

Courtney went around several times in a secluded bar district in Shanghai before she finally saw the elusive sign which read ‘White Moon Hotel’. The building was tucked behind a dive bar and upon entering, she was met with an odd look from the receptionist at the front desk. She frowned and went upstairs to discover that one of the room doors was left open while the room service attendants were cleaning inside.

Courtney then glanced into the room without much thought, but when she caught sight of what lay within, her face paled.

The room was basked in a strange purplish-red glow and a red-and-black contraption—which measured up to the waist and resembled body-building equipment—stood right in the foyer. There were leather whips and candles littered all over the floor; all of them were used and stained with unknown liquid substances.

Courtney felt a shiver down her spine at the grotesque scene before her as she began to understand why the hotel operated in such a seedy neighborhood. In retrospect, the receptionist at the front desk

was dressed up in a provocative manner and appraised with what could only be described as a habitual sultry gaze.

It made her cringe. After all, Tobias was from a wealthy family. Who could have thought that he has a fetish for something as distasteful as this?

She circled the entire fourth floor of the hotel, but failed to look for Room 419. She started to think that he had made a fool out of her when she heard the loud wail of sirens resonating throughout the hallway.

The hotel seemed to erupt into chaos and before she could react in time, a couple of people who resembled managers were running past her.

“Something happened on the top floor! Quickly call the boss!”

“Someone’s about to die! There is blood everywhere upstairs!”

“Call the police!”

“Are you stupid? We can’t call the police over to this place! Quickly get security and call the ambulance!”

The panicked voices died down as the people went further down the hallway. No one noticed Courtney in the midst of the chaos; she looked too plain for anyone to take a second glance at her. Just to be on the safe side, she had deliberately chosen to wear a suit that made her look like an insurance agent before coming over to the place.

When she heard that somebody was dying upstairs, a chill of fear swept over her. How rough did they have to be to cause someone to get hurt? Are these people really not going to call the police?

With that thought in mind, Courtney felt for her phone and called 911. “Hi, is this the police? I’m calling from the White Moon Hotel. Somebody’s injured.” She paused as she listened to the response to the other line. “Yes, that’s right. Please hurry! It’d be great if you could get an ambulance to come over as well.”

After she hung up on the call, she went around the fourth floor once more to ensure that there was nobody around before heading over to the stairway. She made her way up the stairs on her own, hoping that she could take photos to use as evidence for when the police questioned her later.

The shady establishment was obviously a brothel operating in the guise of a love hotel that was undoubtedly run by unethical groups who profited from the sex trade. Now that Courtney had arrived, how could she be expected to ignore something as flagrant as that?

The incident took place on the top floor. The building was well-hidden despite its size; there were fifteen floors in total, the last of which being where the incident was. When she arrived on the fifteenth floor, she saw that a crowd—mostly made up of members of the hotel staff—had gathered outside the room at the end of the hallway. A large man stood among them with his hands on his hips. When he spoke, it was with a gruff Northeast Otharian accent. “Oh, for goodness’ sake, what are you all standing here for? Go and pull them apart!”

“Sir, we’re not going in there while they are fighting like this. We’ll wait for security.”

“Can somebody tell me what the hell is going on? I was trying to sleep when the ruckus broke out. Why should they fight in a place like this when they can sit down and work things out like adults?”

By the time Courtney reached the room, the entrance was entirely blocked off from view and there was no way for her to see what was going on in the room. In exasperation, she turned to look at the large man, who was watching the fight with keen interest. “Excuse me, sir, but what’s going on in there?” she asked.

The man from Northeast Ortharia was a friendly character. He gave Courtney a bemused look as he answered, “Apparently one of them was caught sleeping with the other man’s wife and now they’re fighting it out. What are you doing here, miss?”

Courtney’s eyes widened and she waved her hand dismissively while sputtering, “Oh, no, don’t take this the wrong way, sir. I’m here to look for someone!”

The man chuckled lightly. “I think you’re the one who has taken this the wrong way. My wife and I couldn’t find a hotel nearby and since it was getting late, we decided to crash here for the night instead.”

She raised a brow. Of all places, this is where you decide to crash for the night? She pressed her lips into a thin line since she did not have time to indulge in polite conversation with him. She swiped on her phone display screen and turned on the video-recording feature on her camera before tiptoeing as she tried to record the footage in the room.

“Oh, no, you’re far too short to do that, miss! Here, let me help you.”

After he said that, the large man plucked Courtney’s phone out of her hand. She looked up to see him pushing his way into the room with the phone in his grip, ready to record the fight.

When they saw his actions, the hotel staff grew frantic. “Sir, you can’t take photos here.”

The man let out an impatient huff. “Well, it’s not my phone. The miss over there wants to take a video of the fight, but she can’t see because she’s tiny! I’m just helping her out,” he retorted and ignored the staff as he turned his bulky physique toward the room to begin filming in earnest. The employees were all far too skinny to barricade him, so all they could do was make a fuss on the other side of the threshold.

Courtney felt awkward as she stood to the side. This man is something else altogether, she thought.

While the hotel staff argued with the man, the crowd at the door began to disperse. She managed to catch a glimpse of what was going on inside—to say that the room was trashed would be an understatement; the appliances were all smashed and fragments from broken lamps were littered all over the floor.

Meanwhile, through the layers of sheer purple drapes, she could see that there were two men wrestling on the bed as both of them were engaged in a violent fist-fight. She could hear herself gasping at the dull thudding sound of fists pummeling mercilessly against soft flesh.

Courtney’s mouth felt dry as she kept her eyes on the man who was delivering the punches. She suddenly realized that there was something familiar about him. Wait! Isn’t that...

“Alexander,” she gasped before she hurriedly pushed her way through the crowd to enter the room. She pulled the sheer drapes that obscured her view and her eyes widened when she saw the man on the bed. “What are you doing here?” she asked in astonishment.

At the sound of her voice, Alexander froze with his fist in mid-air. The man beneath him seized the opportunity and forcefully punched him. Alexander grunted as he fell off the bed and the dynamics of the fight changed almost instantly.

“I’m going to f*cking kill you!” Tobias flipped over and grabbed the lamp by the headboard before he swung it toward the back of Alexander’s head.

Chapter 238 I Killed Someone

Tobias wondered whether the universe had a bone to pick with him. He had not even managed to have the one night stand he wanted before he was beaten up out of the blue. He was blinded by fury and the weapon in his hand felt like an extension of him. He knew he could not afford to offend Alexander, but by that point, he couldn’t care less.

He was sure that the back of Alexander’s head would crack open if he struck him hard enough.

He was already thinking about the glorious moment when Alexander’s head would split open. He would then boast to others about how he had defeated the almighty Alexander Duncan by beating him into a pulp in an act of self-defense.

However, reality was often far less merciful than one would imagine.

Before Tobias could even strike Alexander on the head with the lamp, he heard a resounding crack and felt the back of his own head caving in. It was then followed by the sensation of warm liquid trickling down his nape, which caused his body to turn cold.

Courtney was standing behind him with a steel pole in her grip; her face was a ghastly shade of white.

Tobias was startled at the impact and he mechanically turned to look at her in disbelief.

The pole clattered to the floor noisily and rolled over to the corner of the room, joining the pile of destroyed s*x toys. Tobias opened his mouth to speak, but before the words could come out, he blacked out and fell from the bed.

“I-I killed someone...” Courtney stuttered, staring at her own hands as her face was drained of color. She could not so much as move an inch forward; her legs felt as though they had turned into lead.

“There’s so much blood...” There was an intense ringing in her ears and her vision was also blurring. She was trembling all over and she could not stop murmuring the word ‘blood’.

However, before she could regain her senses, her whole body was pressed against the warmth of someone’s chest. A strong pair of arms encircled her and held her tight; it nearly suffocated her.

Alexander held her in a tight embrace, as if she was something precious that he had lost and found. He buried his face into her shoulder until he was convinced that she was real and only then did the panic in his eyes fade away.

Up until the moment she showed up, he had thought that he would never see her again. Tobias had made it sound as though something terrible was about to happen to the woman he loved the most.

The police siren was wailing outside the window. It did not take long before the police came up the stairs to seal the crime scene. As they brought out all the witnesses, Courtney exited the room with Alexander holding her in his arms. She was shaken, but before she could get a word in with him, she was brought away by the police for questioning.

“Name?”

“Courtney Hunter.”

“Your age?”

“Twenty five.”

The police officer continued to ask her questions and when he was done, he pulled up her profile from the database. Upon scanning the information, he looked up at her in surprise. “You’re not Otharian?”

Courtney nodded and explained, “I grew up in Otharia, but I migrated to America five years ago. The incident has little to do with me, so it won’t trigger the embassy’s involvement. Ask me anything that you need to.”

If there was a serious infraction on her part throughout the incident, the police in Otharia had no jurisdiction to deal with her due to the fact that she held an American citizenship.

Upon hearing that, the police nodded somberly. “Please proceed with your side of the story.”

“It went like this...” Courtney began to speak and told the police officer everything that led to her being involved in the incident—down to the very last detail. “I don’t know why he asked me to meet at the hotel and I’ve never heard of this hotel before. Oh, right—I was also the one who called the police,” she concluded.

“So, how are you related to the man who beat the victim up?”

Courtney paused as she was slightly caught off guard by the question. “He’s...”

Just as she trailed off in hesitation, a knock came from the other side of the door and one of the more senior police officers opened the door. “Courtney Hunter can leave now,” he informed with an air of authority.

The police officer who was in charge of the questioning was taken aback by his senior’s statement. “But, Officer Andrew, I haven’t taken her statement.”

“There’s no need for that. The investigation is over. She can leave now.”

The officer had an unreadable expression on his face and the officer who was in charge of the questioning was not a fool. He immediately understood what his senior was trying to say and turned to look at her. "You can go now, Miss Hunter," he said as he stood up from his seat.

The intervention did not surprise her. She knew that she would not be here for long. After all, Alexander was also around and a man of his stature would not be in a police station for an extended amount of time.

As Courtney walked out of the station, she saw Alexander standing in the lobby.

His face was injured and there was a black-and-blue bruise at the corner of his mouth. It was probably where Tobias had punched him after she had distracted him by calling out his name during the fight.

She gritted her teeth as she crossed over to Alexander. As she felt so small and awkward, she did not know what to say to him.

Now that she thought about it, she had not seen him for a while. They maintained their distance since the break-up and religiously avoided each other even during cocktail and dinner parties in Melrose City. Who would have thought that we would meet again under such disastrous circumstances?

"Come on. Josh will send you back to the hotel. He's already at the entrance," Alexander said in a gravelly voice before he turned to stride toward the exit.

Courtney blinked and she fell in step behind him after hesitating for a few seconds.

The car drove away from the police station and steered into the busy Shanghai traffic. The urban scene in Melrose could not even begin to compete with the congestion there.

"Where are you staying?" Alexander asked the moment they entered the car.

Courtney was reluctant to answer and her eyes fell on the dry blood on the corner of his mouth. "We should get you to the hospital."

"No need." Alexander frowned. "It's not a big deal—"

He broke off into a violent coughing fit before he could finish his sentence, as if his body decided to contradict him at that very moment.

Josh kept his eyes on the road as he drove, but upon hearing the coughs, he glanced into the rearview mirror and pointed out hastily, "It is a big deal. Miss Hunter, President Duncan got into a brawl with Elijah a while ago and he ended up with two broken ribs. He was supposed to be recovering in the hospital, but being the brilliant man that he is, he decided to pick a fight with someone before his injuries could heal."

"What?" Courtney raised her brows in shock. "Was he badly injured the last time?"

"Of course he was. President Duncan—"

"Josh," Alexander coldly interrupted him and the air in the vehicle grew still. "Less talk, more driving."

Josh clamped his mouth shut and dutifully set the GPS to locate the nearest hospital. He then stepped on the accelerator as he began to weave through the traffic to head there.

Alexander's brows furrowed at that, but he was too exhausted to argue with Josh. I can't believe he's bold enough to ignore what I said, he thought grimly while he glowered at the back of his assistant's head.

The silence in the car stretched out for what seemed like a long moment. Courtney dipped her head and rubbed her knee absentmindedly before she took a deep breath and asked, "By the way, how did you end up picking a fight with Tobias at the hotel?"

She did not think that Alexander even knew Tobias in the first place. After all, Tobias' family had its powers confined only within Shanghai while Alexander's extended far beyond that.

Alexander's frown then deepened. He did not look like he would offer an explanation.

"Were you following me?" She looked at him imploringly, trying to get an answer out of him. "You went into the hotel around the same time as I did. If I hadn't gone up to the wrong floor, then I might have arrived at the room first."

She could not help but be thick-skinned about her suggestion. After all, the Northeast Otharian man who had blocked off the doorway back in the hotel mentioned that Alexander was in a fist fight with Tobias over an alleged dispute concerning his 'fiancée'.

If she was the so-called 'fiancée' in that scenario and had been the one to arrive at the room first, then the fight between Alexander and Tobias would make a lot of sense.

"You're overthinking this." Alexander looked stubborn.

Courtney glanced over at him and felt mischief rising within her. She then mused with mock pensiveness, "Well, President Duncan, if you weren't following me, then I wonder what on earth you could be doing in the love hotel in the first place."

Chapter 239 Save Yourself Before It's Too Late

Alexander's face turned a shade of green, but he remained adamant on not answering.

Further emboldened by his reaction, Courtney continued to tease, "I understand if you have certain fetishes and your sexual preferences have always been a mystery to the entire Melrose City. There's nothing to be ashamed of, you know. I'm just curious as to what could have caused two grown men to wrestle in bed in the first place."

His expression darkened as he tried to show some restraint.

"Could it be that the first round wasn't rough enough for you? Or was it because neither of you could decide who would be on the top? Was that why you guys fought?"

Her theories were getting more ridiculous by the minute. He glowered at Josh's reflection in the rearview mirror; the man was trying so hard to suppress his laughter that his face reddened with the effort.

At that point, Alexander's face was thunderous. "I'm sure you know my sexual preferences and fetishes more than anyone else."

The bass in his voice reverberated throughout the car, swiftly putting an end to her mischief.

Upon hearing that, Courtney felt as though her face was on fire. She was rendered speechless and she did not dare to lift her head to meet his gaze. What a shameless rogue!

She appeared to have shrunk into herself after Alexander's retort. The look in his eyes softened as he cast a sidelong glance toward her; he was amused at how she could be so thick-skinned and forthright at one moment before clamping her mouth shut in the next minute.

No one was speaking and the air in the car grew stifling. The silence was suffocating.

Alexander seemed to have realized that he had been too blatant for Courtney's comfort and he began to regret his choice of words. He also realized that it did not matter how upset or angry he was with her actions, because at the end of the day, she held a special place in her heart that could never be replaced by anyone else.

When they arrived at the hospital, the doctor efficiently treated the wounds on his face and made arrangements for him to undergo chest radiography in order to make sure that his ribs were still intact.

After that, the doctor headed out to attend to other patients while Josh went to collect the prescription from the dispensary, leaving both Courtney and Alexander to keep each other in silent, awkward company.

Courtney clutched her bag closer to herself and pursed her lips. She hesitated for a moment and finally said, "Since you're alright, I'm going to make a move."

She had barely taken a step when Alexander—who wore a stoic front as he stood next to her—demanded icily, "Are you not going to explain yourself for what happened today?"

She paused. "What do I have to explain myself for?"

"For the fact that you actually intended to join Tobias at the hotel after he asked you to do so. Don't tell me that you showed up there solely for business purposes."

There was suspicion in Alexander's tone and it pricked Courtney's heart with an aching familiarity.

She was initially moved by his act of showing up at the hotel to defend her honor and virtue despite his stubborn refusal to admit it. However, whatever sentiment she had for him now came crashing down by his sharp line of questioning. There was hurt in her eyes as she gazed at him. What else did he think I showed up at the hotel for if it was not for business?

Both of them knew exactly what he was trying to imply.

"That's my business," she coldly answered while she glared at him. She hated herself for always being moved by him. "You never told me why you showed up at the hotel either. Why should I be frank with you when you clearly don't intend to reciprocate the favor? I have things to attend to, so I'll head off now."

Upon having said that, she turned on her heels and stormed toward the exit.

“Do you really not know why I was at the hotel in the first place? Are you that ignorant, Courtney?” Alexander questioned incredulously from behind her. His voice echoed from the walls of the emergency unit.

Courtney stopped in her tracks but she did not turn to face him. She sarcastically answered, “Thank you for being so thoughtful, but seeing that I saved you from getting your head cracked open by Tobias, I’d like to think that we’re even now, President Duncan.”

“What if I wasn’t there? What would you do then?”

“I would have done what I needed to, but you already know that, don’t you?” she answered in cold defiance as she turned her head so that he could see her side profile. Her back was facing him, but from where he stood, he could tell that her gaze was distant.

The rage that was burning within Alexander was further stoked by her indifference. Without a second thought, he reached out for her wrist and pulled so that she spun toward him. She let out a yelp of surprise and struggled to pull away from him, but he ignored her efforts as he roughly pinned her down onto the surgical bed in the treatment room.

“What are you doing? Let me go!” She snapped as she struggled against him, although she was discreet in her effort to escape, fearing that someone would hear her.

His strong arms were braced on both sides of her shoulders, trapping her between himself and the bed as he hovered above her like a broad shadow that barricaded her. She swallowed convulsively; she could not move at all.

Alexander stared at her, feeling a sense of helplessness coursing through him despite their current physical dynamics. “You keep pushing my limits like this, Courtney. I must have been blind to have ever fallen for you,” he spoke forcefully through gritted teeth.

Upon hearing that, Courtney could feel her heart racing, but she put up a tough front as she retorted, “You won’t stay blind forever. You could do yourself a favor and save yourself before it’s too late.”

“It’s already too late.”

Alexander now gazed at her with his dark orbs and grabbed her shoulder. He tightened his grip and heard the air pop in her joints with the strength in his fist threatening to crush her bones. She winced in pain, but he ignored her as he snarled above her, “It hurts, doesn’t it? It hurts a thousand times more for me whenever you say things like these. It’s hard to imagine that I can feel this much pain over a woman, but tell me what you were doing when I was hurting so badly? Were you screwing around with that guy who gave you a green card? Building a new and happy family-of-three?”

Courtney bit on her lip to keep herself from crying out in pain, but she was tearing up with the effort. She hated him with a burning passion. The man was clearly too stubborn to realize that he was the cause of all his misfortune and instead convinced himself that he was a victim. He continuously dwelled in self-pity and he was oblivious to the pain that everyone else was feeling.

“Are you done humiliating me? If you are, you can let me go now,” she hissed through her teeth. Cold beads of sweat were rolling down past her temples and it fell on the snow-white pillow behind her head; they sank into the fabric and evaporated just as quickly.

Alexander, on the other hand, did not appear to want to let her go. He wanted her to retaliate against him and struggle. He longed for her to curse at him. However, she did none of those and instead remained as indifferent as she had been before he pinned her down into that vulnerable position. He was infuriated; fighting with her was like throwing a forceful punch against cotton, but the person who was hurt was still himself.

“Does this humiliate you?” he asked menacingly. His eyes were cold as he regarded her. “What’s going to happen after I let you go? Are you going to call the police? Are you going to charge me for assault?”

Reliving the past after a painful break-up was like peeling a scab off a wound, leaving little space for reminiscence. All that would be left was an open, bloody gash—one that made the both of them miserable. Presently, Courtney stiffened beneath his weight, afraid that he would do something terrible out of spite as genuine fear flashed in her eyes.

The fluorescent lighting above her brought out the look of fear in her eyes. Upon seeing that, Alexander snapped out of his rage. He was instantly seized with regret and he began to sit up as his grip on her shoulders loosened.

He once thought that he was the only person who could keep his emotions in check and that no one else could make him feel anything that he did not want to. However, ever since he met her, the life that he had intricately woven for himself was completely turned upside down.

Alexander was at the dinner party when he heard that Tobias had asked to meet Courtney at the White Moon Hotel. After that, it was as though the party had melted away and he spent the rest of the night wondering whether she would be crazy enough to actually oblige with Tobias’ request for the sake of the project. After all, it was a woman who was once crazy enough to marry anyone for a green card.

The more Alexander thought about it, the angrier he was at himself. How could he ever allow a woman like that—a woman who would do anything to achieve her goals—to take up so much of his headspace?

“Get out,” he said suddenly. His voice was hoarse and there was a painful loneliness that coated his tone.

Courtney sat next to him. She had been tightly clutching her bag, but upon hearing what he said, her eyes softened and she began to calm down.

Chapter 240 Am I Interrupting?

Something seemed to click into place in Alexander’s mind at the last moment and he restrained himself before he could hurt her any further.

With that in mind, Courtney calmed down and she began to think about their continuous friction. She then realized that there was an immense need for the both of them to talk things out before they could start the healing process.

After all, there was no rule that required break-ups to be ugly.

“The only reason why I agreed to meet Tobias in the first place was because I wanted to see what he was up to. Even if you hadn’t shown up, I wouldn’t have just waltzed into his room without a second thought. It wouldn’t make sense for him to come after me for something so trivial; someone must have misled him on purpose, which is why he went to such lengths to ruin my partnership with Sakura Group.”

Thinking that her explanation was clear enough, she turned to carefully appraise Alexander, but saw that he was frowning. She could not tell whether he heard anything she said.

Nonetheless, she continued speaking, “So, you could have just told me that you followed me to the hotel because you were worried about my safety. It would have been easy enough for me to thank you for it. There’s no need for us to fight like this.” She paused before she added. “Break-ups don’t have to be ugly, you know. We can still be friends the next time we meet.”

“That’s enough,” Alexander barked coldly as impatience tainted his tone. “Seeing that you have so much to say, does this mean that you’re not leaving?”

Courtney’s brows furrowed. “I’m just saying that we haven’t been able to talk things out after the last time. We haven’t been communicating like two calm and proper adults.”

She felt her heart wrench when she said ‘the last time’. The memory was something too painful for her to revisit, as though she had not quite mastered the courage to peel the band-aid off a serious wound.

Upon hearing her words, his expression shifted and his eyebrows slightly twitched before he resumed his grim façade.

“I admit I have kept things from you in the past, but that was because I didn’t feel the need to disclose my marriage to Elijah, seeing that no real emotion was ever involved in the first place. I brought Tina over to the States without a green card, which would make me a smuggler. I would have to hide from the Census Bureau all the time because that makes me an illegal immigrant,” she further elaborated, imploring for him to understand the dilemma that plagued her at that time.

However, Alexander seemed less than inclined to sympathize with her. “Are you saying that you would have married any man just to get a green card?” he asked pointedly, though he could feel himself relenting now that she had voluntarily offered an explanation.

“No, I wouldn’t have married just any random guy for the sake of getting a green card,” Courtney denied before she elaborated. “Elijah does not believe in marriage and he’s a chronic workaholic. He lacked money and I needed citizenship. I didn’t think there was anything wrong if we married for convenience. Plus, there was no stipulation that we must live together after marriage. Tina and I barely see him other than on Christmas and certain bank holidays.”

She was perceptive; she knew exactly what set Alexander off and it was not hard to empathize with how he felt.

Any man would have resented his other half’s past relationships and they would have been equally hostile if they were in his shoes. As far as he was concerned, he had every right to be angered about it because she was still legally married to Elijah.

On the other hand, if Alexander was not hurtful and demanding, she would have told him the truth at the moment when he asked about Elijah.

Alexander currently regarded her with an unreadable expression and he clenched his fist as he tried to overcome the shock that washed over him. "Was it really just a marriage of convenience?" he asked to seek confirmation.

Courtney nodded solemnly in response.

It was a massive misunderstanding and things could have gotten out of hand because they had refused to compromise with each other, but if the incident was anything to go by, she could not deny that a myriad of differences existed between the both of them.

Alexander thoughtfully gazed at Courtney, as if he was trying to process the sudden turn of events and the mishap that caused it.

After what seemed like an eternity, there appeared to be a defeated look in his eyes. He slowly bent over and raked his fingers through his hair. His fingertips poked out from beneath his locks as he lowered his head and he kept quiet for a long time.

Upon seeing him like that, Courtney was confused as she remarked, "I'm sure Gale knows about this because I was the one who explained it to him. Did he not tell you about it?"

Alexander lifted his head; his face was pinched as he tried to suppress the anger he felt. He sounded certain as he answered, "No, he didn't."

He made the words sound as though they were a curse and she felt a chill run down her spine at the tone of his voice.

She cringed inwardly, wondering if she had landed Gale into big trouble.

Now that the misunderstanding was cleared up, Alexander regained his composure and he seemed to be in better spirits. The both of them sat next to each other on the surgical bed as they engaged in a pleasant conversation; it was something that they had not done in the longest of time.

Toward the end, Alexander felt that there was no need to beat around the bush any longer. He told her about everything that led to the incident tonight and kept it brief. "I overheard him giving you the address to the White Moon Hotel during the party. I asked Josh to stop the car when I saw you on Bar Street and I followed you all the way to the hotel. I told myself that I wouldn't barge in if you came out after ten minutes." He sounded surprisingly sheepish as he said that.

"So, you thought something happened to me when I didn't come out after ten minutes?" Courtney guessed.

"Yes," he replied.

She cleared her throat. She figured she should explain why she had not been in the room in the first place. "I was lost. Tobias kept saying that he would be waiting in Room 419 and I thought that would be on the fourth floor. I went around the entire floor looking for the room, but I couldn't find it. I didn't think that the White Moon Hotel would be so twisted as to name the largest suite on the top floor as Room 419—I mean, doesn't that just sound ridiculous to you?"

After a series of mishaps, the both of them ended in their predicament at the police station.

Talk about a twist of fate, she mused dryly.

Josh returned from the dispensary and was surprised to see the both of them in a friendly conversation. He was more surprised to learn that they had not ripped each other's throats out. Pausing by the doorway, he suddenly felt self-conscious as he asked hesitantly, "Sorry, am I interrupting?"

Alexander shot Josh an icy gaze, causing the latter to feel the hair on the back of his neck standing to attention. It caused Josh to stammer. "I-I think I left something out from the prescription. I'll go and get it now. You may continue—"

Courtney called out for him and stopped him in his tracks. "It's fine. We've known each other for a while now, so there's no need for this. I really do have to leave—there are some things that I need to attend to."

Alexander immediately rose to his full height. "I'll drop you off."

"You don't have to," she said quickly while she looked at his chest. "You should rest; the doctor said that you didn't recover well enough from last time. My hotel is just around the corner, so I can make my way back. I guess... I'll see you when we meet again."

As she said that, she tightened her grip on her bag and gave him a polite smile. "I'll take my leave, then."

Alexander remained in the same spot as he watched her leave and the warmth in his eyes was slowly dissipating with every step she took. When she was out of view, he reached for his phone and made a call. "Gale, why didn't you tell me that Courtney only married Elijah for convenience?" he yelled into the phone as soon as the line was picked up.

It was as if a loud thunderclap resounded throughout the ward. Even Josh—who thought he had seen every one of Alexander's tantrums—was shocked. His hands trembled and the box of medication would have clattered onto the floor if he did not catch it in time.

Seeing Alexander lose his temper over the phone, Josh snapped into action and quickly closed the door to the treatment room before the other patients took notice of it. After that, he shrunk into the corner behind the door as he quickly fired a text message to Courtney. How angry does he have to be to abandon his image altogether? How much stimulation did he receive? he thought with a wince.

Meanwhile, Courtney had only just walked out of the hospital and was standing beneath the starlit sky when she heard her phone 'ding' with a new text message.

Pulling her phone out from her pocket, she opened the text message from Josh, which read, 'What did you say to President Duncan? He's on the phone with Mr. Langley right now and let's just say that things are not looking good for the latter. Drop me a hint before I become the next victim of his tantrum!'