

## Chapter 567 Marcus Skipped Work For A Secret Date

After a while, there was a knock at the door.

It was Melissa.

Marcus, absorbed in his papers, he nonchalantly invited her in, "Come in."

Upon Melissa's entry, Marcus remained engrossed in his documents, issuing a casual instruction without looking up. "The sofa's a bit cluttered. Tidy it up, please."

Melissa nodded in acknowledgment and began her task.

The leather sofa littered with magazines and Marcus' coat. A small box tumbled out as Melissa unfurled the coat.

As she reached to retrieve it, Marcus' voice stopped her.

"That's a sample from the partner. You should keep it."

Melissa, taken aback, hesitated, her instinct urging her to decline.

But Marcus insisted, taking the jewelry box from her and revealing its contents. It was a diamond bracelet of understated yet exquisite beauty. Each stone shimmered elegance despite their modest size.

Melissa, no expert in jewels, understood its significant worth and hesitated to accept such a lavish gift.

Marcus insisted, placing the box in her hands. "Accept it as a token of appreciation."

Melissa lowered her head. In a subdued tone, she asked, "Mr. Fowler, may I sell it?"

Marcus, with a dismissive snort, clarified, "It's not yet on the market. Selling it isn't an option."

Melissa ceased her questioning, expressing her gratitude softly before resuming her task.

As she leaned over the sofa, a glimpse of her delicate neck and fine hairs revealed her youthful vulnerability.

To Marcus, she resembled an innocent rabbit.

He watched her silently, a quiet observer. Their proximity escalated when Melissa straightened, inadvertently backing into Marcus' arms.

He retreated only a step, their bodies almost merging.

The contact of her silk stockings against his linen trousers sent a jolt of panic through him, compelling him to steady her by the waist.

Her slim, supple form felt unexpectedly right in his grasp.

Marcus stood at a towering height of at least six feet, whereas Melissa was petite, measuring just 5.2 feet in stature.

After spending an extensive amount of time together, this moment marked the closest physical contact they had ever shared. She detected a subtle, pleasant fragrance from his body and couldn't help but wonder which brand of men's cologne he used. In contrast, she herself smelt like a gentle milk-based face cream.

After a lingering moment, Melissa straightened hastily, an attempt to regain composure.

Yet, Marcus didn't release her.

He was still holding her waist, and his voice was deep and hoarse. "How come you still smell like milk? Tell me, when did you wean?"

She looked up, meeting his eyes.

Marcus' eyes darkened for a brief moment. The next second, he released her, and in a nonchalant tone, he said, "Just be more cautious in the future."

Melissa said nothing.

Marcus strolled back to his desk, aimlessly leafing through the papers before him. With a nonchalant tone, he remarked, "After work, swing by the supermarket for some groceries. I'm in the mood for mutton stew with carrots tonight."

Melissa nodded. "Okay."

Her expression was somewhat vacant. Marcus, setting aside the

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document he was holding, suggested, "If there's nothing else, feel free to leave for now."

Exiting the CEO's office and gently closing the door behind her, Melissa pulled out a small velvet box from her pocket, gazing at it silently, lost in thought...

To her, it was perhaps the most precious possession she'd ever had in her life.

Marcus had his moments of deliberately making things difficult for Melissa, yet he was among the rare few who showed her genuine kindness. Still, she knew better than to get too close to a man of his stature; he was leagues beyond her reach.

The thought lingered in her mind that maybe, just maybe, when he grew tired of her, this whole situation would come to an end.

And by then, she could still keep her job.

Approaching the door of the secretarial department, Melissa overheard her colleagues' sharp, disdainful gossip.

"Who does she think she is? Mr. Fowler's only interested because he's never encountered anyone as uncultured as Melissa," one sneered.

"Absolutely. Mr. Fowler's family is brimming with beauties, his sisters and cousins; and he has met with a lot of beautiful girls. Melissa doesn't even come close. He's bound to marry someone stunning, from a respectable family," chimed in another.

"And their worlds are poles apart. What on earth is she thinking? That cooking a few meals will make her Mrs. Fowler?"

"You're overthinking it. Mr. Fowler probably sees her as nothing more than a housekeeper. You do know that a housekeeper in the Fowlers' residence earns no less than fifty thousand a month, right? Melissa's selling herself short."

The women laughed.

Melissa, though stung by their words, walked in undeterred.

The office fell silent at her entrance, the women forcing smiles and returning to their work.

Settling at her desk, Melissa stored the velvet box in her drawer, closing it softly.

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She proceeded with her duties, unaffected, as she had done so many times in the face of such cruelty. She understood the difference between the malice of these women and the tough love from Marcus.

But thoughts of revenge or turning the tables never crossed her mind.

Reality didn't afford her such luxuries.

Her aim was simple, to survive and save money, having endured far harsher trials.

Yet her eyes betrayed a hint of warmth. She wasn't made of stone. Naturally, she felt hurt.

The office was eerily silent.

The women, still wary of Melissa possibly reporting them to Marcus, approached her with feigned gentleness, excusing their words as harmless gossip.

Melissa responded with a faint smile, putting the secretaries at ease, their dismissive attitudes unaltered.

They believed she hadn't truly won over Marcus, evidenced by her tolerating their continued bullying.

Just then, the office door swung open.

Marcus stood there, his voice level. "Melissa, I've got a video conference at my apartment. Pack up and come with me."

Melissa raised her head. "Are we leaving now?"

Her eyes still bore traces of tears, giving her the appearance of a forlorn rabbit.

Marcus chose to ignore her question, turning instead to address the three other secretaries. They promptly rose, acknowledging him with a respectful, "Mr. Fowler."

Marcus offered no acknowledgment in return.

Striding to Melissa's desk, he tapped it lightly, saying, "Yes, now."

In a seemingly afterthought gesture, he tossed his suit jacket towards Melissa, and then strode out ahead.

Melissa quickly gathered her belongings and hastened after him.

Inside the elevator, Marcus pressed the button for the 24th floor, and then turned to Melissa, her head bowed, and asked, "Do they often bully you? Why didn't you tell me?"

"No, it's not like that."

"Oh? So you just got something in your eyes?"

After a pause, Melissa looked up, her voice steadier. "Colleagues are merely that, nothing more."

Marcus adjusted his shirt collar nonchalantly, his tone casual. "And what about me? Am I just your supervisor?"

"No. You're my patron."

Her response seemed to please Marcus, who smiled softly.

When the elevator reached the 24th floor, Melissa's surprise was evident, but Marcus was already stepping into the HR department. His rare presence sent ripples of unease.

Indifferently, he commanded, "Replace the second and third secretaries of my office."

The director of the HR department looked at Melissa before asking, "What about Miss Brown?"

Marcus gave him a sharp look that made him shudder. Noticing the jacket in Melissa's hands, realization dawned on him.

Melissa was under Marcus' protection.

By the day's end, the impeccably groomed secretaries upstairs were jobless, all because of Melissa's tear-stained eyes.

In the car, Marcus offered no justification for his actions. Melissa, sitting beside him, ventured, "That wasn't necessary."

He glanced briefly at her, still busy with his phone.

"Are you teaching me how to do things?"

She wouldn't dare!

Yet Marcus casually remarked, "Perhaps it's not unthinkable. Only our relationship might need redefining in that case."

Setting down his phone, he rested his chin on his elegant fingers, musing as if contemplating a significant matter. "If you were my wife, you could have authority over all my young secretaries."

Melissa remained silent, too intimidated to speak.

Marcus observed her in silence, then chuckled, "But you're not and neither am I currently seeing anyone."

Melissa's silence deepened.

Sensing the moment, Marcus instructed the driver, Ross, "Please head to the supermarket across from the apartment. You're free to leave after dropping me off."

Ross grinned. "You haven't dined at home lately, Mr. Fowler. Your father has mentioned wanting to visit you here sometimes."

Marcus' lips curved slightly, yet he retorted, "You talk too much."

Ross just smiled, unperturbed.

Ten minutes later, the car rolled to a stop in the supermarket's parking lot. Melissa inquired, "Mr. Fowler, weren't you supposed to attend a video conference?"

"I've changed my mind. I feel like shopping at the supermarket. Is that a problem?"

No, it certainly wasn't.

Melissa swiftly exited the car, and Marcus, with a swift motion, snatched the coat from her grasp and tossed it back into the vehicle.

Then he asked her, "Did you bring any money?"

Melissa nodded, confessing, "I've got a little over 300 dollars in cash."

"Just that much?" Marcus' mood soured slightly. He declared earnestly, "You'll be handling the grocery expenses today. I might indulge in some afternoon tea here as well. Please arrange it for me."

Melissa was at a loss for words.

She glanced at his impeccably tailored shirt, his crisply pressed suit trousers, and the elongated legs that could rival a fashion model's.

She knew his style inside out. After all, she had been managing his

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"29 dollars? And what sort of afternoon tea can you get for that?"

Melissa just looked at him...

Moments later, they sat in a cafe. Marcus faced a cup of hot lemon tea and a slice of pie, totaling twenty-eight dollars.

Marcus, a man with a net worth in the trillions, had never experienced such a modest afternoon tea.

He gazed at the treat before him, lost in thought.

Melissa, with a warm smile, presented him with the pie, remarking, "Here, have a taste."

He replied with a hint of revulsion, "Sweet foods aren't to my taste."

Meanwhile, Marcus sipped his tea. It wasn't the exquisite blend he was accustomed to, but for Melissa's sake, he sipped it, albeit reluctantly. Observing other couples around them, he noted how men often seemed pliant towards their female companions.

Melissa's anxiety eased upon seeing Marcus drink his tea.

She nibbled on her slice of pie and inquired, "Are you sure you don't want to try yours? It's delicious."

Initially, Marcus' expression soured at the suggestion. However, contemplating that his indulgence might bring her joy, he decided to give in.

Clearing his throat, he said, "Help me unwrap it."

Melissa, accustomed to attending to his needs, thought nothing of his request.

After all, he was an influential figure.

Nearby, a few girls whispered, giggling, "Help me unwrap it... Why doesn't he ask to be fed directly? Men nowadays are so ordinary yet so arrogant."

Melissa's cheeks flushed with embarrassment...

Marcus' gaze was intense. Stretching out his legs casually, he countered, "Actually, why don't you feed me?"

Those girls were dumbfounded.

How was this possible?

But upon scrutinizing Marcus, their chatter ceased. They couldn't deny his striking looks, surpassing any celebrity gracing the pages of magazines.

His attire seemed out of place in a such a modest cafe, and the woman beside him, dressed plainly, resembled a secretary... A CEO and his secretary... on a date at a cafe?

Melissa didn't entertain him this time.

She murmured, "If you're not going to eat it, then don't."

Marcus studied her for a moment, noticing a hint of annoyance. He might have teased her further in the privacy of their apartment, but here in public, he chose to respect her dignity.

He set aside the pie and took upon himself the task of carrying two large shopping bags.

Gently patting her head, he offered, "Let's head back home."

The onlookers remained silent, their envy palpable.

Melissa trailed behind Marcus, her gaze lowered. As they stepped outside, she whispered, "This could lead to misunderstandings."

She reached for the bags he was carrying, but Marcus gently declined her offer, asking softly, "What kind of misunderstanding?"

Lifting her eyes to meet his, she found his gaze more intense, more earnest than usual, as if seeking an honest response...

After a pause, Melissa quietly responded, "They might mistake you for an eccentric."