

Capturing the Millionaire's Heart on Divorce Day

Chapter 31-35

Chapter 0031

So what?

Was he expecting her to call out his full name?

"Others might think it disrespectful of me, right?" Madison always had a subconscious habit of considering other people's feelings.

The car doors had been opened, and the two of them got into the backseat one after the other.

This time, Ethan initiated the privacy divider between the front and back seats...

William rolled his eyes in the front seat. Did they really need secrets between them now?

As soon as the divider came down, Ethan spoke, "Why concern yourself with those who bring you no benefit? As long as I don't feel disrespected by you, isn't that all that matters?"

Madison tilted her head, her voice tentative as she asked, "May I inquire what exactly would make you feel... disrespected by me?"

Silence filled the car, punctuated only by the hum of the road

eneath them.

Just when Madison thought she might have asked the wrong question, the man replied, "If you were to show any leniency towards that reservist ex-husband of yours, I would take it as a lack of respect

towards me."

???

How were the two even connected?

Madison was baffled.

+25 BONUS

Truth be told, she had many questions.

Like, how did her boss come to nickname her reservist ex-husband so casually?

And why was her boss so concerned about her personal affairs?

But Ethan didn't offer any explanation on this topic.

He gazed out the window, his voice slow but pointed, "The dinner may or may not include a drinks reception. If you can't handle your liquor, don't pick up a wine glass. Sticking to soft drinks is fine."

After a pause, he added, "Don't worry about what others might say. Not today, nor any other day. As long as you're with me, you needn't have any concerns."

Madison's normally steady heart skipped a beat at his words.

She wasn't so naive as to have never experienced romance before.

This kind of protectiveness....

It seemed to go beyond the usual boss-subordinate relationship.

But Madison, clever as ever, didn't ask. She adhered to the role of a good subordinate, "Got it."

smiled faintly, absentmindedly tucking a stray lock of hair her ear, "Good girl."

dison instinctively turned her face away, feeling her ears grow explicably warm.

Later, the privacy divider was raised again.

William, ever tactful, didn't look back, instead sharing, "Jingzhou issued an earthquake warning signal this morning."

Ethan's demeanor instantly turned serious, "Inform the company

+25 BONUS

now, cancel all flights to Jingzhou for the next three days. All crews currently stranded in Jingzhou should return immediately, even if it means flying empty planes back."

William had anticipated this response and was already drafting the company announcement.

Madison touched her earlobe, "It's the second time Jingzhou has had this problem."

Ethan nodded, "The last time was over a decade ago. Delayed

actions then resulted in one of our planes being damaged, and three crew members never made it back."

Jingzhou, notorious for frequent tsunamis and earthquakes, had rarely seen flights in its direction over the years. Yet, it couldn't be denied that its urban development was exceptionally well-done.

"President Grant, I anticipate we'll need to head there tomorrow or the day after. The city conference has over two thousand pre-booked passengers. We can't just return the flights empty."

Normally, such circumstances would see the company's executives rush to the scene, but Ethan never allowed his pilots to venture into such peril personally.

"We'll go the day after tomorrow," Ethan declared.

lison glanced at him.

She remembered a conversation with an old pilot who mentioned that a certain airline owner would personally rush to the scene.

whenever his staff faced any danger

Could they be talking about Ethan?

Unsurprised, Ethan confirmed, "Set it for the day after tomorrow."

+25 BONUS

Outside the red carpet event.

Celebrities and big names arrived in waves, clad in dazzling formal attire, all vying for the chance to present their most glamorous selves in front of the cameras for that brief moment on the carpet.

“Sophia! Sophia!”

“SophiaSophia!”

Fans shouted Sophia’s name passionately from behind the barriers.

Sophia, who had just appeared, donned a black evening gown. Not too form-fitting, to conceal her slightly rounded belly, her style leaned towards an elegant and noble demeanor-consistent with her public image of being well-read and sensible.

But only Sophia knew, the fans chanting her name were people Lucas had paid to rally support, fearing no one would recognize Sophia and cause her embarrassment.

The walk down the red carpet was organized by the celebrity’s status, with various well-known figures from all fields taking the

finale.

“I’ve heard Mukino International’s boss might be here today,” Sophia mentioned casually.

LUC:

d at her, “Have you met them?”

I’ve heard they’re quite young,” Sophia replied, adjusting

the outside, the stars stood at various points, some exchanging greetings in a pretense of cordiality.

When the time came, organizers began ushering celebrities inside.

Lucas had spent over ten million to ensure Sophia’s entrance was

+25 BONUS

timed just right, placing her in the middle of the procession.

Small stars, rising stars, A-listers, and international award winners-

everyone made their successive entrances,

Sophia deliberately lingered on the red carpet longer than most, striking poses in every direction, desperate for the cameras to capture her.

Yet for someone of Sophia's status, the paparazzi were reluctant to snap more than one shot-that was already a boon.

After over a hundred celebrities had walked the red carpet and

settled inside, the renowned figures from various industries began to appear.

Inside the venue.

Even the current top actress was inquiring quietly, "Has the

Chairman of Mukino International arrived?"

"Doesn't seem so yet."

The front row seats remained vacant, the number of empty spaces quite low.

Those arriving tonight all had their companions, mostly agents or ssistants of the stars in attendance.

"Sophia, did you change assistants?" a lesser-known celebrity inquired.

Sophia laughed it off, "No, he's an old friend of mine, been

supporting me for years. He came especially to cheer me on today."

The crowd didn't think much of it; after all, if there was anything

The crow they wouldn't dare bring them out so openly.

“Here they come!”.

+25 BONUS

“That one leading the way is the boss of Hongxing Media, right?”

murmured someone, “The company that’s launched eighteen award- winning actors?”

“And the one behind is...”

“Their boss is here too?”

Envy and jealousy shone in the eyes of the actresses as they admired the female companions of these powerful men.

These influential figures were now making their way into the venue, taking their seats in the first row.

After about seven or eight chairpersons had sat down, a buzz of excitement began to spread.

An established actress sitting in the second row remarked, “The Chairman of Mukino International has arrived.”

Nearby stars craned their necks to see, some even stretching forward.

From afar, at the entrance, there was a sparkling cascade of lights.

A tall man was visible among the crowd, dressed in a black suit. much like the other chairpersons.

And by his side was a woman with a delicate and graceful silhouette.

Sophia could only make out the general figure, “The woman by the side of Mukino International’s Chairman must be someone special, right?”

Lucas, sitting beside her, scoffed quietly to himself.

Chapter 0032

As the paparazzi swarmed in, the bodyguards stepped up to block their path, while William was also on the lookout for any cameras.

that might catch Madison's face.

"Sorry, we've already stated, no photographs," William's voice took.

on a grave tone.

Hearing William's directive, the press reluctantly withdrew their cameras.

Throughout this, Ethan was shielding Madison behind him.

Madison, unaccustomed to wearing such long dresses, feared tripping over her hem and becoming the subject of ridicule at Ethan's expense.

Ethan's public appearances were so rare that even without the possibility of snapping photos, the media were keen to catch a glimpse of this luminary of the business world.

Indeed, when they got a close look at Ethan, even the male journalists had to admit that the man was strikingly...

Dazzling.

His

ence didn't strike one as effeminate, nor was he

achably aloof, but from the first glance, he gave off an aura

ng out of one's league.

Naturally, this made the woman by Ethan's side all the more enigmatic to them.

Amidst the growing crowd, Ethan instinctively wrapped an arm around Madison's waist, "Just stick with me, don't be afraid. Stand tall, puff out your chest. If you feel like smiling, smile; if not, keep your

**25 BONUS*

face cool. Nobody dares say a word against you."

With that, Ethan shifted his grip, taking her hand firmly in his.

Under countless flashing lights, Ethan led the mystery woman by the hand, entering the venue amid the stares of celebrities and guests

alike.

Lucas had not intended to pay attention.

But when he overheard the surrounding female stars whispering," Who's that woman?"

"What a pretty profile."

"She has a nice figure too."

"I bet she's gorgeous head-on. The leading actress in the first row said she's prettier than some ice queen in the circle, just a bit less smiley."

These comments made Lucas look up.

And that glance almost had him standing up on the spot.

It was Madison!

Even from a seemingly insignificant profile, he could recognize her!

uld it be???

ould it be Madison???

w had she come to be mixed up with the chairman of Mukino International?

For a moment, Lucas couldn't help but speculate.

Had Madison been secretly liaising with other men all this time?

Is that why she had agreed so readily when he suggested divorce?

+25 BONUS

Blinded by the dazzling lights of the inner venue, Sophia failed to notice the change in Lucas' expression.

"She's beautiful. Worthy of being the woman that the chairman of Mukino International personally escorts. I heard the chairman rarely attends such events. Could this be his first official appearance? Maybe she's his girlfriend or fiancée?"

"Nobody knows for sure."

In the front row.

Ethan personally adjusted Madison's gown before letting her sit down, only then taking a seat beside her.

The chairmen on either side, who knew Ethan well, wasted no time in striking up conversations.

"President Grant's companion has quite the presence, a perfect match for you."

"Remember to let us know if you have any good news, President Grant."

No matter what the others said, Ethan responded with a polite thank you.

ed towards Madison, explaining who had said what just efore.

on nodded, slightly dazed.

t this moment, the large screen in the venue shifted focus to the undreds of seats below.

As Ethan whispered in Madison's ear, this intimate scene was captured for all to see.

+25 BONUS

"Wow!"

Whispers of astonishment rippled through the crowd.

First, they were amazed at the youthful and handsome image of Mukino International's chairman, and second, they were captivated by the woman in the black velvet dress, so gentle and elegant in her profile.

It was that very glimpse that finally allowed Sophia to recognize her.

It was... it was Madison?!

Sophia's eyes were wide open in shock as she instinctively turned to look at Lucas next to her.

There he was, fists clenched so tightly they creaked, with a blaze of fury in his eyes.

Sophia gritted her teeth; she couldn't confront Lucas about this here and now.

Was he still preoccupied with that Madison?

Clearly, Madison must have hooked up with some wealthy man behind the scenes!

And at the same time, Lucas was consumed with thoughts of Madison's betrayal!

Ho

e!

she betray him?!

that no one knew was that on the screen, Ethan was actually *not* Madison, “At this moment, your ex, that reservist, will definitely see you, along with that woman called Sophia. If you appear happy, it’ll drive them mad.”

Madison took this to heart, maintaining the most dignified poise she

+25 BONUS

could muster.

She had never attended such an event before and felt as if eyes were upon her from all directions..

Indeed, the celebrities were looking at her, curious about the woman beside Mukino International’s chairman.

Then came a series of award presentations, the stars delivering their magnanimous acceptance speeches, followed by the conclusion of the ceremony.

The last segment was the interview.

The host was a professional, glancing at the script in hand before delivering an opening speech and saying, “Let’s ask a random audience member a question.”

The large screen moved swiftly, breezing over each celebrity’s face.

Sophia’s heart leaped when her own face appeared on the big screen, fearing she might be asked something awkward.

The host smiled, “Miss Sophia Xu.”

Sophia greeted the camera with a smile, her voice tinged with nerves, “Hello, everyone.”

“May I ask...” said the host, “is the gentleman accompanying you tonight your boyfriend?”

Sophia shook her head quickly, denying, “No. He’s a good friend and a college classmate.”

The host chuckled, "Is that so? Maybe I misunderstood, because just before entering the venue, I saw you hugging each other. After all, the gentleman beside you is quite well-known. Isn't that Mr. Zhuo, the chairman of Huanmei?"

At his words, the crowd buzzed.

+25 BONUS

Madison watched silently as Lucas's face appeared on the big screen, and heard Sophia's denial, a cold smirk forming within her.

Knowing Lucas's character, he would not tolerate being kept in the shadows for long, and eventually, their relationship would sour.

Sophia was flustered by the host's probing, "Ah, yes. I came to attend the red carpet event, and as a long-time friend, he came specially to support me."

"Wonder if Mrs. Zhuo would mind that?" the host queried with a smile.

At this, the female stars around Sophia cast her strange looks.

Sophia gripped the microphone tightly, managing to say, "No, it won't be a problem, we all know each other."

At this point, Ethan signaled William across the way.

Soon after, the host's earpiece seemed to receive a whisper, and he followed up, "I heard that Mr. Zhuo is in the process of getting a divorce? May I ask Miss Sophia, what role do you play in this?"

Normally, interviews wouldn't delve into such personal matters, but...

Sophia had a sense of being targeted, yet in this moment, she was powerless to react!

Today's Bonus Offer

Chapter 0033

For a moment, the spotlight shone on Sophia and Lucas on the big screen, their faces depicted like a pair of lying clowns.

The arena was soon filled with whispers and murmurs.

In the world of showbiz where specters and monsters were not uncommon, what couldn't happen?

Even the most chaotic things could take place.

Thus, the celebrities present didn't seem surprised, nor did they indulge in rampant gossips. They didn't find it too unusual, and feared being caught on camera.

Sophia, however, felt played.

also

"It's someone else's personal matter, I shouldn't comment too much. Besides, my friend is an outsider to this industry, it's okay to talk about our peers."

The host seemed understanding, "Indeed, I was being too nosy. My apologies. Speaking of peers, as the recent award winner, you seem to be quite close to Director Chin. Is there a new project on the

horizon?"

Upon hearing the host mention Director Chin, Sophia felt her heart about to explode.

How did they know everything?!

But she quickly composed herself and nodded subtly, "Yes. We're discussing a project, which, if all goes well, should start filming soon."

"We're looking forward to your collaboration with Director Chin then."

the host said.

TH

Sophia graciously smiled, "Thank you for your wishes."

“However, I would recommend you to maintain your figure for the camera. After all, Director Chin’s projects are always high standard and high demand. But I see you’re confident, your face seems to be glowing with prosperity.”

The celebrities below began to applaud and laugh.

But Sophia couldn’t laugh.

Because the words implied she had put on weight!

She self-consciously touched her belly, forced a dry smile, and quickly handed the microphone back to the staff.

As if fearing further questions to come.

Next, the big screen rotated a few times, indeed spotlighting other stars. But the questions were not tricky, just casual chit-chat.

During the final random capture, it was Sophia again!

This time, some veteran actors speculated that someone was deliberately messing with Sophia.

But they wouldn’t say anything.

First, Sophia’s previous award was somewhat undeserved, which

arked resentment among many. Moreover, there were rumors. Doubt her being particularly close with a certain director.

So Sophia’s face turned pale, but she had no choice but to take the microphone.

Th This time, it was a different female host..

Up Upon seeing her, many celebrities changed their expressions.

Nc Not for anything else, but because this host was known for her

+25 BONUS

straightforward questions, not caring about the interviewee’s feelings. She knew precisely what the fans and audience wanted to

know.

This host was called Yan Fang, nicknamed Sister Yan. With her sharp eyes and short hair, she could ask the most challenging questions with the most affable smile, leaving people unable to vent their frustration.

Yan Fang didn't even have a script, just held the microphone, "Nice to meet you, Miss Sophia. I'm honored to be the first person to interview you on stage."

Sophia was sweating cold, she swallowed her saliva, "The honor is mine."

Many eyes in the venue were focused on Yan Fang.

Who wouldn't enjoy a show?

Especially when it's Yan Fang interviewing someone.

Yan Fang went straight to the point: "There are rumors that you, Miss Sophia, have been secretly married for several years. Is that

true?"

Wow!

at's a bombshell question to kick off with!

Sophia was almost suffocating, she clutched the microphone.

Some people could already see her changing complexion, any other interviewer might choose to sidestep this question.

But not Yan Fang.

First, her interviews were always like this, and second....

Someone had offered a lot of money to let her ask whatever she

+25 BONUS

wanted, and they assured her they would cover her no matter what happened afterwards. So, what did Yan Fang have to be afraid of?

She was all set to ask.

She had prepared many questions in advance.

“Those are just groundless rumors, not to be believed.” Sophia answered.

Yan Fang was not surprised by this answer and asked another question, “I heard from some colleagues that they once saw you and a director entering and exiting a hotel. What do you have to say about that?”

As soon as these words came out, the entire venue was about to explode.

No one would ask questions so blatantly.

But if it was Yan Fang, it was more than usual..

Mostly, they were amazed that Sophia, who had just won the award, would have such a thing happen?

Wasn't she always portraying the image of an independent and elegant woman?

Sophia's eyes were red due to the restraint.

If it wasn't for the occasion, she might have stormed off after throwing the microphone.

Not only that, even Lucas next to her looked at her.

No matter what, Sophia would never admit it, “I also heard these rumors, but I didn't clarify because that director is my mentor. I don't want to tarnish his efforts to nurture me with these scandals. I also hope to work hard to repay my mentor's help.”

+25 BONUS

Yan Fang didn't pursue further and switched the topic, "Before coming here, I just found out something. I don't know if Miss Sophia would be upset."

Sophia forced a smile, "No, please go ahead."

Yan Fang seemed to deliberately raise her voice, "I have a colleague working at the USCS who casually mentioned seeing you at the USCS. Were you there to handle divorce procedures with a gentleman?"

Suddenly, there was an uproar around.

The sounds were chaotic, but most of the chatter was from the low-profile stars.

The big names didn't bother with such a small actress.

Especially a talentless one who only knew how to use backdoor channels.

In the front row.

Madison was staring intently at the expressions of the two people on the big screen.

Seeing their wonderful expressions, Madison felt the resentment pent up in her heart finally eased a little..

st then, a soft voice whispered into her ear, "Feeling better now?"

madison suddenly turned her head.

Ethan was leaning on the chair, his face illuminated by the light. She saw the gentleness in his eyes.

He...

"You...it wasn't you..."

ELEthan noticed a furious gaze from the back row, then deliberately moved closer to Madison.

So from Lucas's perspective, it seemed like the man was kissing Madison!

"Bang!"

Sophia had just finished answering Yan Fang's tricky questions that nearly skinned her alive when she heard Lucas slamming the

armchair in anger.

He got up furiously, strode through the seats, disregarding Sophia, and left alone.

Sophia didn't even get to call him back.

The mocking and gloating gazes from nearby made Sophia nearly collapse, but she had to stay seated

Leaving would only mean she was scared!

However, Lucas didn't leave, he just stepped out of his seat and stood by the exit, staring at the big screen.

Chapter 0034

The big screen swiftly switched to Ethan, silencing the array of stars present.

They were well aware of the chairman, although unfamiliar to them personally, recognized for investing in numerous grand shows, films, and dramas a major player in the investment world.

The host looked towards the front row, and the big screen zoomed in on Ethan and the woman beside him, Madison. But in the next second, Ethan, taking the microphone, deliberately turned the camera away, until Madison's face vanished from the screen, and then he withdrew his hand.

"Do not film my companion; she is under state protection," Ethan's voice resonated, deep and steady.

The crowd was stunned.

Under state protection? What kind of person warranted that?

At the exit, Lucas frowned.

Madison, protected by the state? Nonsense!

It must have been some flashy statement by the chairman of Mukino International, a façade to add luster to his own image.

Madison, a mere housewife with a gentle demeanor, couldn't possibly be of significance, could she?

Lucas snickered inwardly.

The female stars, though green with envy, were quiet, waiting for the host's question.

"It's rare to see President Grant attending events in person, and even

+25 BONUS

more so with a companion. May we know the nature of your relationship with your lovely lady here?" the host inquired.

Even Ethan hadn't anticipated this question.

He had only given the production team a hint: be casual.

And right now, even though Madison scarcely believed it, she felt Ethan was genuinely defending her, getting even with Sophia. No wonder he had brought her to this red carpet event.

A wave of gratitude washed over her.

It was then the big screen caught Ethan tilting his head to the side, his voice neither too soft nor too loud, "May I say?"

His respectful demeanor, his tender and indulging tone, combined with his looks and status, nearly drove the female stars to a fit of

envy!

Whether out of a lingering gratitude or caught by Ethan's gaze, Madison's heart skipped, and she unexpectedly nodded.

Ethan's smile was faint, barely noticeable as he turned back, his voice serious, "There's no relationship right now."

The host paused, taken aback.

*uickly, the man added, "But in the future, I hope we will share a
tionship that everyone can bless"*

*Wasn't that clear enough? The chairman of Mukino International was pursuing
the woman at his side!*

Madison was dumbfounded, her gaze fixed on Ethan beside her.

ThThe host quickly said, "Then we wish President Grant all the success.

"T"Thank you," he responded with a smile that shattered the hearts of

+25 BONUS

countless female stars.

Envy! Jealousy!

*Who was this woman who had captured the pursuit of the chairman. of
Mukino International?*

Lucas was already agape, his brows furrowed in disbelief.

Impossible!

Had he mistaken her?

Was she really Madison?

Beyond her looks, what was attractive about her?

*How could she catch the eye of the chairman of Mukino
International?*

Lucas was restless, his heart filled with rage and anxiety.

*He had clearly forgotten that he and Madison were in the midst of a divorce,
and that it was because of his infidelity.*

Following that, under countless envious gazes, Ethan took Madison's hand and left the venue early.

Lucas wanted to confront that woman, to see if it really was Madison.

But he was informed they had already departed through the back door.

Lucas cursed under his breath.

Leaving the red carpet event and arriving back at Ethan's mansion, they did not speak.

+25 BONUS

Only once inside did Madison ask, "Ethan, did you do that... for me?"

She wasn't vain, but she wasn't foolish either.

The man, untying his necktie while ascending the stairs, paused.

"If I said yes, would it please you?"

For reasons unknown, Madison nodded, perhaps because it had been so long since someone cared about her feelings.

In the dim light, Ethan's neutral voice said, "Then it is."

It was for you, to vent your anger, so I arranged today's interview.

Returning to her room in a daze, Madison looked down at her gown.

It felt as if she could see through it, to the heart within slowly thawing.

After changing out of the gown and planning to send it to the cleaners before returning it to Ethan, she took a bath.

Exiting, she answered the ringing phone, "Hello?"

"Is this Miss Madison?"

"Yes, it's me."

is is Chen, head of Mukino Aviation Training Base. Please arrive

ore nine o'clock next Monday at Mukino International Training ase for retraining. It will last twenty-five days."

The unexpected news thrilled Madison, "Sure, I'll be there on time!"

The call filled her with eager anticipation.

When Ethan emerged from the study, he detected a savory aroma.

+25 BONUS

He followed the scent to the kitchen.

There, he found Madison cooking.

"What are you doing?"

Startled, she turned, "I got a bit hungry, so..."

Uncertain if deliveries reached this isolated spot and after futile attempts to locate the service, she ventured to the kitchen in search

of food.

Finding fresh vegetables and meat, she prepared a little.

"I'll pay," she said immediately.

Ethan, leaning against the kitchen's glass door, freshly showered with his hair still damp, asked, "Do you really see me as someone who would let employees starve?"

Madison's smile was instant: "Of course not, you're incredibly kind!"

Evaluating the pot, Ethan inquired, "Did you cook enough for me too?"

"Ah?" She was surprised, hurriedly adding, "Yes, yes, I did!"

Ten minutes later

They sat at the dining table.

Ethan quietly ate, acknowledging each dish, "This tastes more authentic than others I've had."

"Did you add sugar to this?"

Upon Madison's affirmation, he nodded, "The sugar made it better."

Madison's spirit lifted with each compliment; her eyes sparkled.

Lucas, though not overly critical, often found fault with at least half of her dishes.

When she adjusted them according to his preferences, he'd still find something wrong.

That's when Madison realized it might not have been her cooking he disliked, but simply her. No matter what, he wouldn't be satisfied.

Sated by the impromptu dinner, they soon retired to their respective rooms.

The next day.

Monday, eight in the morning.

After sending Ethan a message about where she was headed, Madison was ready to leave.

"Wait."

She turned.

Ethan, in his pajamas, stepped out from the main entrance.

Even in casual sleepwear, his appearance was striking.

As bracelet was fastened to her wrist, Madison asked in

sion, "What's this?"

than gently ruffled her hair, "You can't leave the training base during your recovery. This bracelet was given to me by my mom during my college entrance exams. Now, I'm giving it to you, hoping you'll..."

He paused, "Achieve what you wish for."

+25 BONUS

Later, Madison walked away, her heart fluttering.

After a while, she heard Ethan calling her name and turned back.

The autumn wind brushed between them.

She heard Ethan say, "I can't be at your side all the time. But if you need help, call me. No matter where you are, President Grant will be there."

As the falling leaves drifted past, tears welled in Madison's eyes.

Since her father's passing, she had been alone, with no one showing her such concern.

Ethan awaited a response, but none came.

Taking a slow drag from his cigarette, he lazily called out, "Did you get that?"

Today's Bonus Offer

GET IT NOW

+25 BONUS

hapter 0035

As the sun's rays breached the clouds and descended through the endless sky, forming an iridescent barrier that hindered her view of him, scenes of Lucas and Sophia's time together unfurled atop that shimmering wall.

The tender embrace between him and Sophia, his protective gestures, and his unabashed public appearances with Sophia, despite. still being married, along

with his denial of their past two years together-each memory incrementally encased Madison's heart in a layer of frosty indifference.

Unbeknownst to her, the warmth she once held was dissipating with the remnants of her farcical marriage, replaced by a newfound sense of liberation.

At that moment, the last vestiges of her trepidation were scattered by the sunlight, as if she was shedding her old self.

She turned to face Ethan, striking him with a question so unexpected it caught even the pajama-clad man off guard: "Ethan, are you this kind to all your employees?"

he question sliced through the air like the first gust of autumn,attering words like leaves and distancing them by more than mereeters.

Though the sun's glare obscured her view of his face, she caught the mirth in his voice, "What do you think?"

He lobbed the question back to her

Perhaps it was Lucas' provocations that had whittled away her timidity, "I'm asking you."

+25 BONUS

Even Ethan hadn't anticipated such candor from Madison.

Later, as the hazy morning light drifted around them, his towering. figure approached her. Despite his disheveled sleepwear, his

presence sent an inexplicable shiver through Madison's core.

She had never experienced romance, not even with Lucas. Theirs. was a whirlwind marriage; they'd never courted like lovers but jumped straight into matrimony, which had been as placid as still water until it reached the tumult of the present.

Thus, Madison's heart was unusually sensitive now, aware that Ethan's every move seemed to cross the line between a boss and an employee.

Her kindness was not a sign of naivety.

This time, Ethan faced her squarely, no evasion in sight, "Ask me again, what you want to know."

Suddenly, Madison remembered a saying.

A real man faces all questions head-on, never choosing to hide.

Lucas wasn't that man, but Ethan was.

"Do you act this way with all your staff?"

"In what?"

ed, protective, advising," Madison articulated each word ately.

Her gaze wasn't its usual soft self but edged with a hint of sharpness, brimming with assertiveness.

Ethan, tall as he was, looked down intently into her eyes.

After three seconds, he said, "No."

+25 BONUS

He was not this way with every employee.

"Why me?"

Madison couldn't understand her own sensitivity, perhaps a consequence of emotions yet to find release.

Did she serve some purpose to him?

Like how Lucas chose her for a rushed marriage because she seemed fit for domestic life?

The turmoil in Madison's eyes was fully visible to Ethan.

He seemed to see a small, prickly creature, a tiny beast baring its spines in defense.

When the man gently embraced her, Madison instinctively took a half step back, yet did not escape his assertive hold.

Ethan's arms enveloped her, one hand at her waist, the other soothingly patting her back as his voice floated to her left ear.

"To be honest, I was afraid I'd scare you. If you need an answer, you can consider me nosy. But what I can tell you is, I'm not like this with everyone. If you don't believe me, why not talk after you've finished your recovery training?"

Talk?

Madison felt Ethan's warmth, scorching, sincere, even cautiously gentle.

Then, a pat on her head, so light.

The man chuckled, "If it gets too much, and you want out, call me."

"I'll come for you, come rain or shine."

Those eight words brought tears to her eyes.

"Don't overthink it. I'm just letting you know that you're not alone in this world. With President Grant here, there's nothing to fear. If you don't want to do it anymore, just go home."

Ethan released her, placing his hands on her shoulders, turning her around, and nudging her, "Go chase your dreams."

As she turned, those burning tears fell and were embraced by the world below.

Each step she took was backed by sunlight and his support.

Madison lifted her head, her back to the dawn, facing the distant horizon.

Ethan remained still, watching her get into the car and slowly drive away.

Finally, William came over and after a long gaze asked, "You like her?"

"What does 'like' even mean?" Ethan wasn't sure himself.

All he remembered was that Madison's words had once carried him through tough times, mere whispers that held boundless strength.

Now that he had the means, he too wanted to lend her a hand from the mire, to give her the courage to reach afar.

hed, he couldn't help but instruct, "Take it easy on her at base."

mam raised an eyebrow.

Deny it all he wanted, but his actions spoke of affection.

For Madison, he'd broken rules time and again.

"A female pilot at the training base?" Charlie was astounded by the news.

Hadn't Mukino International's policy been against female pilots?

Even if they did accept women, weren't they supposed to be retired military pilots?

And she was the only one transferred from military flight to become Mukino International's sole female pilot.

Could this new woman be from the military too?

Charlie signaled her co-pilot, "Go find out."

At the training base.

Madison arrived with a complexion that wasn't quite right.

On her way, she'd stumbled upon a news article.

The one about the red carpet event.

Ethan... Ethan was Mukino International's chairman?

Wasn't he just an executive?

Madison was stunned.

She never imagined the man who'd been protecting her held such significant influence.

"Miss Clark?"

Someone at the base noticed her standing motionless and approached to inquire.

Madison shook off the barrage of thoughts, "Yes."

475 BONUS

The person greeted her warmly, "We've been waiting for you. Come on in."

Following him into the base, Madison received Mukino

International's exclusive pilot uniform.

When she donned the outfit, standing before the mirror, her heart. raced.

After years, she was once again clad in this attire.

A crisp white shirt, black trousers, the company's emblem on the tie and the lapel.

Madison's grip tightened, and a fierce glint of determination rose in her eyes.

No one could obstruct her path anymore.

Absolutely no one.