

HELP! MY ONE-NIGHT STAND IS EXAMINING ME?!

Chapter 151 Her reaction

Chapter 151 Her reaction

Alana's breath caught. "So...what was your mom's reaction?"

Stephan chuckled, "She didn't have any reaction. She just told me to bring you home to visit."

Does she want him to bring her home so she can talk to her privately and convince her to leave him?

Alana felt a heavy weight in her heart.

She wanted to tell him about her concerns, but then she thought better of it.

They'd only just started dating, and she didn't want this little thing to affect their budding relationship.

She'd take it one step at a time.

The night passed.

Alana didn't sleep very soundly that night.

Perhaps what she thought about during the day found its way into her dreams.

In her dream, Stephan's mother and his blind date actually threw ten million dollars at her, demanding she leave her son alone.

When she refused, his mother and the woman he was dating subjected her to all sorts of humiliation.

Alana woke up. When she did, she wiped the corner of her eye, it was a little moist. The dream felt so real.

So real that she was still shaken by it.

But she tried to reassure herself, it was just a dream. After all, they say dreams are the opposite of reality.

She hadn't even met Stephan's mother yet, so she couldn't let what happened in the dream spill over into reality.

She took a few deep breaths to steady her breathing, and only then did she realize that the spot where the man had been lying beside her was already cold.

Alana propped herself up and slowly sat up.

The blanket slipped off her, revealing the white shirt she was wearing. The shirt belonged to the man; it was very baggy.

Last night, she had intended to rest in her nightgown, but Stephan had said it was uncomfortable to wear.

"Either wear nothing at all, or wear my shirt."

How could Alana dare to wear nothing? Wouldn't that make it easy for a man to take advantage of her?

So she put on his shirt.

However, perhaps because she'd been tossing and turning all night, the buttons that had been fastened tightly had suddenly come undone.

The collar had loosened, revealing her fair, rounded shoulders, and even the curve of her chest just below her collarbone was faintly visible.

Alana felt a dull ache in her chest. She pulled the collar open slightly to take a look, and instantly, her face flushed crimson.

How did all those bite marks appear?!

That rascal, Stephan, could he have taken advantage of her while she was asleep, undone her shirt buttons, and done something inappropriate to her?!

That pervert!

Even fully dressed, with every button fastened tight, she couldn't keep him at bay!

Alana's face flushed with embarrassment as she looked down, unaware that the tightly closed door had quietly swung open.

Stephan had just finished his workout; now bare-chested and wearing only gray shorts, he slowly walked into the room.

The moment he entered, he saw Alana's shirt wide open at the neckline.

Her full breasts were fully exposed to his gaze.

The girl's bashful expression and delicate body were like a budding flower, with a pointed pistil peeking out and an alluring hue that made one want to ravish her...

His gaze gradually darkened, and a burning heat rose in his throat.

Damn it, he couldn't resist again!

Alana seemed to sense something. She looked up and met the man's burning,

intense gaze, startling her into quickly covering her chest. "Oh, how did you get in here?!"

She saw it too, the man's bare torso, freshly worked out, his muscles taut and pulsing with intensity.

Eight-pack abs, each one tight and powerful, brimming with solid, masculine strength. Seeing this so clearly, Alana's face flushed even deeper.

Stephan walked toward Alana step by step. "I just finished working out, so of course I wanted to come in and let you inspect the results of my training."

He walked right up to her without hesitation, letting her take in the sight up close.

"Do you like it?"

His abs were right before her eyes, and the scent of male hormones was overwhelming.

Alana blushed so fiercely she couldn't even look at him. Even though they'd been open with each other many times before, she still...

"Stop being so inappropriate!"

"I need to get up..."

Alana hurried to get out of bed, but the man grabbed her slender waist. A low, husky voice echoed in her ear, the air thick with innuendo.

“Sweetheart, aren’t you going to let me touch you?”

“We’re boyfriend and girlfriend now, so we can touch each other openly...”

Alana’s waist was firmly gripped by the man’s hand; she couldn’t escape.

Her delicate body was forced against him, and the air she breathed was thick with the scent of his male hormones after exercise, overwhelmingly strong.

Her face flushed bright red. “Stephan, it’s early in the morning, stop messing around...”

Stephan found it amusing. “How am I messing around?”

“We’ve been this open with each other before, why are you so timid about me touching my abs? Be a little bolder.”

Alana blushed and protested, “It’s not that I don’t dare to touch them, I’m just afraid that if I do, you won’t be able to handle it.”

How could he possibly not handle it? That would be a reward for him.

The man curved his lips into a smile and whispered seductively, “Then go ahead and try. Let’s see if I can handle it.”

Alana swallowed.

She really couldn’t stand him, why was his mind so fixated on getting her to touch his abs?!

But how was she to know that the man loved the way she looked so shy when she

touched his abs? Her soft fingers gently caressing him, teasing him, it gave him a unique kind of thrill.

Hmm, anyway, it felt amazing.

Alana couldn’t help but glance down at the man’s abs.

To be honest, with such a gorgeous set of eight-pack abs, it would be impossible not to feel even a little flutter in her heart.

After all, she had a naughty side to her. And was a huge sucker for abs.

Still, she felt a bit shy.

“If I really do touch them, you can’t take advantage of me!”

The man asked, “What kind of ‘taking advantage’ are you talking about?”

Alana shot him a playful glare, he knew exactly what she meant.

Stephan curved his lips. “Be a good girl. Go ahead and touch.”

“I just finished working out, it’s still steaming hot.”

What do you mean, “still steaming hot”?

Did he think his abs were steamed buns?

Alana bit her lip, but she couldn’t resist the tingling urge deep inside her. She couldn’t help but extend a tiny finger and gently poke him.

It had to be said, that single little poke was enough to send a shiver of pleasure through him.

He stared at the girl’s bashful, adorable expression, his Adam’s apple bobbing slightly.

“How does it feel?”

Alana’s ears turned so red they seemed ready to bleed. She answered honestly,

“It’s... it’s so hard...”

Stephan’s eyes darkened. “Right now, there’s a place that’s even harder than my abs.”

She didn’t want to get it right away, but her gaze drifted downward involuntarily, and she understood instantly.

Her eyes widened in shock.

She’d only poked his abs, how could this have happened.

She hurriedly pushed the man away and darted off.

“Ah, you, you there... I...I won’t touch it anymore!”

Stephan couldn’t help but chuckle at the girl’s flustered reaction.

Look at her, all talk and no action.

He hadn't even done anything to her, and she'd already fled in a panic.

For his own future benefit, he'd have to train her properly. Alana ran into the bathroom, quickly turned on the faucet, and splashed cold water on her face to cool the burning heat.

But her mind was spinning as if possessed, and she could already picture something unspeakable.

"Stop, stop!"

"I absolutely mustn't let myself be corrupted!"

When Alana finished washing up and came out, she discovered that Stephan had already taken a shower and changed into a fresh set of clothes.

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Chapter 152 Kind of treatment

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He was wearing a black suit, every button fastened with meticulous precision, exuding an air of cool, restrained elegance.

Who would have thought that deep down, this man harbored a sly, mischievous streak?

At that moment, he was looking down, preparing to tie his tie. And the tie he was tying was the very one Alana had bought for him yesterday.

She paused in surprise. She hadn't expected him to be ready to wear it on the very next day she'd given it to him.

She had assumed he'd merely said he liked it out of politeness, only to set it aside to gather dust in some corner.

But it turned out... he genuinely loved the gift she'd given him.

He truly touched her heart with all those little details.

For a moment, Alana's heart felt warm.

It felt so heartwarming to be cherished by a man.

Noticing her gaze, the man looked up and beckoned to her, "Come here, help me tie it."

Alana walked over instinctively, stood in front of him, took the tie from his hand, and tied it with great care.

This was the first time she had ever tied a tie for a man.

Although she had never tied one before, she had seen it done.

As if she'd completed a monumental task, her serious expression softened once it was tied, and she couldn't help but smile.

"All done."

The next moment, the man's thin lips pressed against her forehead.

"My girlfriend tied it beautifully. From now on, you'll be in charge of tying my tie."

His unhesitating praise made Alana, who was tying a man's tie for the first time, feel a little giddy.

She nodded instinctively. "Okay."

Stephan curved his lips and seized the moment to ask, "So, are you thinking of moving in with me?"

If she didn't move in, how could she take on the job of tying his tie?

Alana gasped.

Oh no, this is a trap!

And a huge one at that!

She bit her lip. "I haven't made up my mind yet. Let me think it over first."

Stephan stared at her intently, "I've even prepared clothes for you. You still haven't

made up your mind?”

At the mention of clothes, Alana couldn't help but pout. “Where did you get clothes for me? You ripped my clothes last night and said you'd compensate me. You still haven't...”

Before he could finish, the man grabbed her wrist and led her to the walk-in closet.

The moment the walk-in closet opened, she was surprised to discover that it contained not only men's clothes but also women's clothes.

Men's clothes took up half the space, and women's clothes took up the other half.

And they're all brand-new, the tags were still on.

Alana was completely taken aback. “W-when did you get these ready?”

“Yesterday. Before you even arrived, I'd already had someone prepare clothes for you.”

It was all premeditated.

“Then why didn't you say so earlier?”

Now she'd spent the whole night sleeping in his shirt.

And she hadn't been wearing anything underneath, just like that, completely bare, sleeping next to him all night.

Stephan wouldn't admit to his little scheme; he curved his lips and said, “If I'd told you earlier, it wouldn't have been a surprise.”

“So, are you surprised now?”

Facing such a dazzling array of beautiful dresses and clothes, it would be impossible for Alana to say she wasn't even a little surprised.

After all, she had never seen so many clothes in her entire life.

If she hadn't been able to earn her own money to buy clothes, most of her wardrobe would have consisted of hand-me-downs.

Abandoned by her parents, she didn't even dare to ask anyone for new clothes.

When she went to school as a child, she wore hand-me-down clothes, shoes, and bags every day, envying her classmates who could come to school in different new outfits every day.

She, too, wanted to be like the other girls, to have her own, many, many clothes, not just hand-me-downs.

And in this moment, Stephan, this man, had made that dream come true for her.

Alana's eyes grew slightly moist. She didn't know what to say; a thousand words swirled in her mind, but in the end, she managed only one sentence.

"Thank you."

Seeing her reddened eyes, Stephan frowned slightly and couldn't help but cup her face. "Why are you crying? I didn't give you these clothes to see you cry."

It was simply to make her happy.

Alana bit her lip and said, her voice slightly choked, "Stephan, you're so good to me. I just can't help it."

Not even her own parents had ever treated her this well. He was just her boyfriend, why was he being so kind to her?

Wasn't he afraid she wouldn't be able to repay him?

Stephan gazed intently at her beautiful eyes and brows, saying earnestly, "I'm your boyfriend. Isn't it only natural for me to be good to you?"

Besides, he wanted to take her home. If he didn't treat her well, how could he succeed?

He wasn't like those freeloaders who take advantage of their girlfriends without treating them well.

If you don't cherish your own woman, are you just waiting for another man to do it?

In this regard, he was specifically referring to Alana's ex-boyfriend who was always away on a business trip.

Alana didn't know what was going through his mind, but his words touched her heart.

Perhaps it had been too long since she'd felt someone's tenderness toward her; her chest grew warm, and her eyes stung with tears.

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him of her own accord. "Thank you. I really like that."

Stephan's eyes darkened as he gently wiped the tears welling up at the corners of her eyes with his fingertips.

“Then why are you crying?”

Alana blinked, trying hard to hold back the stinging sensation in her eyes.

“It’s tears of joy.”

Stephan curved his lips, affectionately kissing the tear-stained corner of her eye, his voice gentle.

“You little crybaby, don’t cry at the drop of a hat. There will be plenty more moments like this in the future. And from now on, I, your boyfriend, will take care of all your clothes!”

It was a bold yet heartwarming reply.

Alana couldn’t help but smile.

He was so doting, and she loved it.

Who wouldn’t love this kind of domineering, forceful adoration? It turns out that being pampered felt so sweet.

It was impossible to put into words.

Alana got dressed, then had breakfast with Stephan before he drove her to work.

This time, she had gotten the hang of it; before getting out of the car, she gave Stephan a parting kiss.

Stephan’s lips curled into a smile; he was thoroughly enjoying himself. His training had clearly paid off; his girlfriend was getting better and better. In high spirits, he hummed a tune all the way as he drove to the office.

As he walked into the office, he strutted in with confidence.

Many employees could tell Stephan was in a good mood and greeted him warmly. Stephan returned their greetings with a faint smile.

Just as he stepped into the elevator, Vance happened to walk in as well.

With his keen eye, he noticed that the CEO looked a little different today.

Upon closer inspection, he saw that the CEO was wearing a flashy, eye-catching red tie. It was clear that this wasn’t the kind of tie the CEO usually wore.

Even stranger, the tie was slightly askew.

He stepped forward with good intentions,

“CEO, your tie seems to be crooked. Let me fix it for you...”

But before he could get close to Stephan, the CEO gently stepped aside.

“Don’t touch it! My girlfriend tied it for me. Don’t mess it up.”

Vance gasped.

Another crushing blow!

Stephan glanced at Vance and said casually, “She bought this tie for me too. Looks good, doesn’t it?”

“Ahem, ahem, yeah, it’s nice...”

Stephan’s lips curled into a smile. “It’s great to have a girlfriend, she buys you ties and even ties them for you. Life sure is wonderful.”

And at night, they can snuggle up together under the covers...pure bliss.

“Oh, and she cooked dinner for me last night. It absolutely delicious.”

Vance forced a smile.

“I get it. The CEO’s girlfriend is quite the homemaker.”

Stephan replied nonchalantly, “Wrong. She isn’t just a good wife-to-be, she’s just special to me. Other men don’t get that kind of treatment.”

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Chapter 153 Rubbing it on his face

Vance sighed.

What a disaster!

Why was he so masochistic, getting on the same elevator as the CEO?

The CEO was sure rubbing it on his face that he was single to stupid.

A little show-off every other day, a big one every three days, who can take this?!

He was going to be sick of all this bragging!

“Notify all departments to prepare their materials. We’ll have a meeting in the conference room at 9:00.”

Vance grimaced.

What was the matter now?

The boss couldn’t only show off in front of him, so now he wanted to do it in front of all the employees?! CEO, don’t be such a jerk!

What an unfortunate day to be single!

Meanwhile.

When Alana arrived at the office, many of her colleagues were stunned by her stunning appearance.

Today she was wearing a blue dress with puffed sleeves, a blue ribbon tied around her neck, and a flower pinned to it.

Her demeanor was gentle and refreshing.

Stephan had picked out this dress for her, saying she looked like a little fairy in it, so beautiful he couldn’t take his eyes off her.

She remembered telling him, “Isn’t it a bit inappropriate to wear such a pretty dress to work?”

Stephan smiled and asked, “Why not? Who says you have to wear boring clothes to work? Girls shouldn’t let themselves be held back by rules and regulations, and they shouldn’t try to please others, just be yourself.”

Alana smiled.

That’s right, who doesn’t love wearing pretty dresses? Girls should feel free to express themselves and do what makes them happy.

She just never expected that Stephan, a man so prone to jealousy, would actually let her go out all dressed up.

She'd assumed he bought her all those pretty dresses just so she'd stay at his place and wear them only for him.

Carla reacted dramatically, "Wow, Lana, you're wearing a new dress again today! I've noticed you've got so many new dresses lately, you hardly ever wear the same one twice!"

Alana smiled, her lips pressed together, and suddenly felt no need to hide it anymore.

"My boyfriend bought them."

Carla was stunned. "Holy crap?! You really have a boyfriend?!"

Alana nodded. "Yeah, just started dating."

This was such a surprise!

Alana was the most beautiful woman in their company. Many male colleagues have tried to pursue her, but she's turned them all down.

Many people at the company even called her an innocent, pure-hearted girl.

Now she's suddenly got a boyfriend, how could that not be shocking?

Carla's curiosity got the better of her again. She batted her eyes and asked,

"Who's your boyfriend? Can you tell me?" Alana winked back at Carla, "It's not convenient to say just yet."

After all, Carla was the company's go-to source for gossip. If she were to share any

details about her boyfriend with her, it would be all over the office within a day. She didn't dare take that risk.

Carla was a bit disappointed, but she didn't press the issue.

She might be a gossip, but she didn't go overboard.

If others didn't bring it up, she wouldn't pry, she knew when to stop.

"Lana, I'm so jealous of you, you actually have a boyfriend who takes care of your dresses every day!"

“And your boyfriend has such great taste, every dress he picks out for you is so pretty! Why haven’t I met a boyfriend who likes to buy me dresses?”

Alana smiled. “You’ll meet one too.”

Cole arrived at the project office and was also stunned by Alana’s outfit.

Just as he was about to approach her, he overheard her mention that she had a boyfriend, and that the dress she was wearing was actually a gift from him.

Cole felt as if his heart had been struck by a heavy punch; a dull, aching pain gripped him.

Suddenly, he realized he couldn’t accept the fact that Alana had a boyfriend. How could she be dating another man?

He clenched his fists tighter and spoke with a grim expression, “Alana!”

Alana and Carla heard the voice and turned around in surprise.

Carla gasped, “Manager Cole?”

Ignoring Carla, Cole fixed his gaze on Alana and said, “You, come to my office immediately. I need to speak with you!”

Without giving her a chance to refuse, he turned and walked away.

Alana frowned. What could he possibly want with her?

Carla was a little worried about Alana’s situation. “Lana , Manager Cole doesn’t look too happy. Did you do something to offend him?”

Alana shook her head. “It’s fine. I’ll be right back.”

Carla let out, “Be careful. I think he might have it out for you.”

“Mm-hmm.” Alana nodded, then got up and walked toward Cole’s office.

Cole returned to his office, feeling agitated.

His mind was filled with the happy smile

that had spread across Alana’s face just moments ago when she mentioned her boyfriend.

The more he thought about it, the more it pained him.

He never imagined that the little girl who used to follow him around like a shadow would end up dating another man.

And after all that time he'd spent trying to be close to her again, he finally got the opportunity...

Just then, there was a knock at the door.

As if sensing who was at the door, Cole took a deep breath and walked back to sit in his chair.

"Come in!"

The door swung open, and Alana walked in.

She walked up to the desk, glanced at Cole, and asked in a businesslike tone,

"Manager Cole, you called?"

Cole resented her aloof attitude toward him now.

"Lana, is there a problem? Can't I just call you in?"

She pressed her lips together and remained silent.

Cole took a deep breath. "Tell me, do you have a boyfriend?"

He wanted her to confirm it herself, right in front of him.

She frowned. "Manager Cole, this is my personal business."

Cole curled his lips. "Lana, am I not even allowed to know about your personal affairs anymore? Do you know that ever since we broke up, I was worried about you, worried that without me by your side, you'd get bullied. Only when I see you again, vibrant and radiant, will I finally be able to rest easy."

Alana lowered her eyes, unsure of what to say.

He had certainly helped her a great deal.

Back then, she wasn't just bullied by his sister, she'd also faced scorn, ridicule, and even humiliation from many others.

Just because her parents had abandoned her, because her life was different from theirs, she was mocked.

Time and again, it was Cole who stepped in to save her.

During her high school years, Cole would always step in to defend her, encourage her, and offer her warmth.

That was why she'd often stick to him like a little shadow.

Young and naive, she couldn't help but fall for a boy who stood up for her, a gentlemanly and kind boy.

But at the end, he didn't hesitate to hurt her as well.

Alana raised her eyes; her gaze had grown much calmer.

"Manager Cole, I'm very grateful for how you looked out for me back then. But now, I've grown up, and I don't need it anymore. I'm doing just fine without you, maybe even better, so there's no need to worry about

me. Save your concern for someone who needs it more."

Cole clenched his fists tighter, unable to bear listening to this.

"Lana...You won't tell me because you don't have a boyfriend, do you? You were lying to that coworker of yours, aren't you?"

Alana shook her head. "No, I do have a boyfriend, but I didn't think it was necessary to tell you."

Cole's breath caught in his throat; he hadn't even heard the detachment in the second half of her sentence.

All he heard was Alana admitting she had a boyfriend!

Chapter 154 In a row

Chapter 154 In a row

It felt as if his brain had been struck by a sledgehammer; it was buzzing. “Who is it?! Who is that man?! How long have you been seeing him?”

He fired off three questions in a row, betraying his inner turmoil.

Alana spoke up, “Sorry, I can’t comment on that.”

Cole was suddenly overcome by a helpless sense of panic.

It was as if the girl before him was drifting further and further away, so far that even though she was right within arm’s reach, he could never touch her again.

“Break up with him. Right now!”

Cole didn’t know what tone he’d used, but he’d said it.

Alana looked at him in shock.

She didn’t understand what gave him the right to order her to break up with Stephan. “Manager Cole, you’ve overstepped your bounds.”

Cole knew he had overstepped his bounds, but he no longer cared.

He stood up, his tone no longer gentle, but instead filled with an air of dominance and an attitude that brooked no resistance.

“He’s not right for you. Break up with him!”

Alana frowned. “You haven’t even met him...”

His expression turned stern. “Lana, do as I say! He really isn’t right for you!”

Alana smiled and asked calmly, “Then may I ask, who is right for me?”

His cheating ass?

Cole’s lips twitched, the words “I’m the one for you” on the tip of his tongue.

But it was abruptly cut short by a knock at the door.

The door hadn’t been closed properly; Grace knocked and walked right in.

When she entered and saw Alana there, she paused for a moment.

Seeing Grace appear, Alana turned to Cole and said,

“Manager Cole, I’ve got everything you asked for. I’ll step out for now.”

She then gave Grace a polite nod and walked out.

Seeing this, Cole had no reason to keep her there and could only watch her leave.

He tugged irritably at his gray tie and looked at Grace. “What do you need from me?”

Grace glanced at Alana’s retreating figure, then looked at the slightly irritated Cole, sensing there was something fishy going on between the two of them.

Still, she got straight to the point.

“Manager Cole, we have a morning meeting at nine o’clock. I just came to remind you.”

Cole replied dismissively, “Okay, I know. You can go now.”

Grace wanted to say something else, but seeing that Cole didn’t seem interested, she excused herself.

As she walked out, she took a special look at Alana, who had already returned to her desk. After a moment’s thought, she decided to instruct others to prepare tea for the meeting.

The morning meeting began.

Everyone trickled in one by one.

Alans sat in the back with a pen and paper in hand.

The meeting didn’t officially begin until Cole arrived.

The morning meeting focused on project planning for new product development.

The new product currently being developed in collaboration with Green has entered a critical phase and requires data from market research to support it.

For example, clarifying the new product’s core positioning, target audience, and key benefits.

After briefly outlining the requirements, Grace began assigning tasks. Who would conduct the market research, who would handle the data analysis, and who

would compile the final report, everything was clearly assigned.

Almost everyone had been assigned a role, but Alana was not on the list of assigned personnel.

It was clearly thanks to her efforts that this partnership was successfully secured, yet it seemed few people took notice.

Alana didn't mind; it seemed that interns were only suited for menial tasks.

Things like serving tea and water, printing documents, and assisting others with their work, and so on.

After Grace finished making the arrangements, she paused, as if she'd forgotten someone.

She looked at Alana in the corner. "Alana, if anyone else needs help, you can lend a hand."

She nodded. "Okay."

Grace turned to Cole, waiting for his instructions. "Manager Cole, is there anything else you'd like to add? If not..."

Cole paused for a moment. "I'm in need of an assistant. I'd like to promote someone to work for me."

After speaking, his eyes, hidden behind his glasses, cast a subtle glance at Alana.

At his words, many of the female employees couldn't help but get excited.

Manager Cole was young and handsome, a gentleman with refined manners. He had only been there a few days, yet many female employees had already secretly set their hearts on him.

If one could become his assistant, wouldn't that mean more opportunities to interact with him?

One particularly bold young woman even raised her hand high. "Manager Cole, may I be your assistant?"

Although the other female employees didn't have quite that much courage, their eyes betrayed a palpable eagerness.

But Cole ignored them all. He looked directly at Alana and said, “Alana, you’ll be my assistant.”

The moment the words left his mouth, everyone turned to look at her.

Manager Cole actually handpicked Alana to be his assistant?

What gives?

Alana was just an intern, she had no real skills.

She’s got nothing but a pretty face, how could she possibly be Manager Cole’s assistant?

Alana, having been called out, froze for a moment. Actually, she’d been a bit distracted just then.

But when she looked up and saw so many people staring at her intently, their expressions all different, she didn’t know how to react.

And... what did Cole just say?

He wanted her... to be his assistant?!

The bold female employee spoke up, “Manager Cole, isn’t it wrong to have Alana as your assistant?”

“Exactly. After all, she is new here and just an intern, she doesn’t know anything.”

“How could she possibly know as much as us veteran employees who’ve been here for a year or two, or even several years?”

Cole replied, “It’s precisely because she’s an intern that I want to keep her close to train her. It’s settled then.”

With those words, he silenced all objections.

Even if the others were unhappy about it, there was nothing they could do.

After all, Manager Cole had specifically named Alana for the job.

Grace couldn’t help but glance at Alana and Cole again; her intuition told her there was definitely something going on between them.

Throughout the entire process, Alana, the person directly involved, wasn’t even

consulted.

She frowned and couldn't help but say,

"Manager Cole, I don't think I'm the right person for this."

It wasn't that she lacked ambition or wasn't capable of handling the position; it was simply that this wasn't the right time for her.

She could feel the disapproving glances all around her. So she knew exactly what she needed to do at this stage.

Plus, she didn't want to work directly under Cole.

He looked at her. His tone was gentle, yet it carried a sense of firm resolve.

"Lana, I believe in your abilities, and I hope you believe in yourself."

Alana sighed.

What else could she say?

She clenched her fingers tightly; she was in a bind.

Yet she had no choice but to agree.

Because she could tell that Cole wouldn't easily change his mind.

"Alright."

Hearing her agreement, Cole's lips curved into a slow smile. "The meeting is adjourned."

Alana walked out of the conference room, her heart heavy.

Carla tried to reassure her, "It's okay, it's okay!"

"It's just being an assistant, it's not that hard. If you don't have any experience, just ask your coworkers for advice! Or you could just ask Manager Cole directly."

But Alana wasn't worried about that. What troubled her was: Why did Cole want her to be his assistant?

Did he really want to promote her?

Or did he have some other motive?

But since things had come to this, she'd just have to take it one step at a time.

After all, as an intern, all she could do was work hard and accept whatever came her way.

She smiled at Carla. "Okay."

That bold female employee, Danielle, walked past Alana and Carla and suddenly said in a sarcastic tone.

"I'm not going to teach her, so don't come looking for me!"

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Chapter 155 With resentment

Chapter 155 With resentment

Carla instinctively shot back, "Lana never asked you to teach her, so don't get too full of yourself."

Danielle scoffed.

She was filled with resentment. "Carla, why are you taking Alana's side? Everyone knows she's the least capable one here! What qualifies her to be Manager Cole's assistant?"

"Because Manager Cole personally chose her, not you! So don't just say the grapes are sour because you can't have them, okay! Look at that sour, spiteful look on your face, it's really scary!"

Danielle was burning with rage at Carla's words.

Alana couldn't help but chuckle.

You have to admit, Carla has a sharp tongue.

Danielle, unable to think of a good retort, stormed off in a huff.

It was true that Cole personally requested Alana to be his assistant, it wasn't Alana who asked for the job.

But some people just couldn't help but resent her for it.

Alana was so beautiful that everyone focused on her looks and overlooked her abilities.

Everyone assumed she was just a pretty face with no real talent.

But so what if they were unhappy?

The die has been cast; the decision was final.

They'll just have to swallow their resentment. Alana looked at Carla, gratefully. "Carla, thank you for speaking up for me."

Carla waved her hand dismissively. "Oh, come on. We're all colleagues, wouldn't it be better if we got along peacefully?"

"It's just that some people can't help but stir up trouble! Danielle is just jealous of you. Don't forget, you were the one who secured the Green collaboration project back then, you deserve the most credit. Now that the project is finally moving forward, they're suddenly questioning your

abilities."

Alana smiled. "Then I'll work even harder to prove myself again."

Carla nodded vigorously, "I believe in you! You graduated from a top-tier university, there's no way you're completely incompetent. You must just be playing it close to your chest!"

Alana blinked.

Not exactly.

Don't put her on a pedestal.

No matter how prestigious the university, once you enter the workforce, everyone starts from the same starting line.

Others have been in the workforce a few years longer, so they're certainly more capable and experienced than she was, she couldn't deny that.

All she could do was work hard and strive to surpass them.

No sooner had Alana sat back down than she received a file from Cole via WeChat.

[Check the data. Need it by tonight.]

Alana tapped open the file. The dense array of data inside made her scalp tingle.

By tonight?

Looks like she'd have to work overtime.

Cole waited for quite a while before receiving Alana's emotionless reply. 【Got it.】

He furrowed his brow, but quickly relaxed.

She'd probably have to work late tonight.

He would stay with her.

No matter what, he was determined to win back the Lana who used to cling to him, whose heart and eyes were filled with nothing but him.

Before the end of the workday, Alana still hadn't managed to finish her tasks. Fearing that Stephan might come to pick her up early, she sent him a message.

Alana: [Um, I'm working late tonight, so you don't need to come pick me up.]

He replied quickly.

Stephan:[Until when?]

Alana thought for a moment.

Alana: [I'm not sure yet, probably an hour or two more.]

Stephan: [Okay, let me know when you're done, and I'll come pick you up then.]

She bit her lip and replied, "Okay."

After replying, she went back to work.

Little did she know that a tall, slender gray figure was gradually approaching her, standing right behind her.

But Alana, intently cross-checking data, didn't notice a thing.

Cole stood behind Alana, his gaze resting unabashedly on her. The girl stared at the computer screen, her slender fingers gripping the mouse as she moved it gently.

Her rosy lips were slightly pursed, and her eyes and brows betrayed her concentration. Her fair complexion, bathed in the soft glow of the screen, appeared even more delicate and innocent, like a freshly peeled egg, white and tender, as if glowing with its own light.

He couldn't help but move closer, his tall, slender frame slowly drawing near to her.

Alana sensed something and let out a startled cry, "Ah!"

All her colleagues at their workstations had left; she was the only one left.

She felt a sudden chill on her back and thought there might be something dirty there. But when she turned around, she saw that it was Cole standing behind her.

Even though he was a living person, his sudden appearance behind her was enough to give her quite a scare.

Her face went pale.

Cole watched her reaction. "What are you so nervous about?"

Alana was still shaken. She thought to herself, How could she not be nervous when a man that big suddenly appeared behind her?

She clenched her teeth. "Manager Cole, it's after hours. Why haven't you left yet?"

Cole retorted, "Aren't you still here too?"

"I haven't left, and I have no idea who to thank for that."

If it weren't for him insisting she finish verifying the data by today, she wouldn't be stuck here working overtime all alone.

Cole detected the resentment in her tone. He curved his lips, choosing not to argue, but instead offered kindly.

"How much is left to verify? I'll help you."

She replied coldly, "No need to trouble yourself. I can handle it on my own."

"I'll be the one checking it all anyway. If I help you verify it now, it'll save you from making mistakes, won't it?"

Alana fell silent for a moment, then pressed her advantage, “Since you have so much time on your hands, why don’t you just go ahead and check the rest of the data for me? I have something else to do in a bit and need to head back.”

Cole choked on his words, feeling deeply uncomfortable. “Is that how much you don’t want to be with me?”

“No, I just think we should maintain a proper distance between us.”

“Is that so?”

Cole tugged at the corner of his mouth. “Then why didn’t you keep your distance from me before?”

“Back then, I was stupid...”

“Enough!” Cole didn’t want to hear any more. “Since you don’t want my help, then forget it.” His expression turned cold, and he turned to walk away.

Alana huffed.

It was baffling.

He showed up out of the blue, then flew off the handle and left just as suddenly.

But she didn’t think much of it and continued checking the data.

She had to finish the reconciliation before heading home, so she had no time to think about anything else.

After returning to his office, Cole reflected on his behavior and felt a pang of regret.

His original intention had been to get closer to Cole and gradually mend their relationship.

But he hadn’t expected that, unable to control his temper in the moment, it’d end up backfiring.

He sat there for a while and gradually calmed down. Realizing that Alana was working late and probably hadn’t eaten dinner, he picked up his phone, made a call, and ordered two takeout meals.

Meanwhile.

Far away at the Hudson Group, Stephan was having the same thought.

Since Alana was working late, he also stayed back at his company to wait until she gave him a call that she was done.

After hanging out for a while, he realized she might not have had dinner yet since she was working late, so he started wondering if he should order her some takeout.

Stephan: [Have you eaten yet? If you haven't eaten yet, I'll send you some takeout.]

Alana didn't reply; she was probably busy.

But Stephan still had Vance order takeout for her.

Vance sighed, heavily.

Being forced to work overtime was bad enough, but having to order dinner for the CEO's girlfriend was just too much!

If they don't give him a raise, he wouldn't keep doing this job!

Even though he was seething inside, he resigned himself to the task and went to order dinner.

Halfway through her overtime shift, a delivery guy showed up at Alana's door.

"Hello, is this Ms. Alana Martin?"

"There's a food delivery for you."

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Chapter 156 Taken aback

Chapter 156 Taken aback

Alana was taken aback. Someone had ordered takeout for her?

Who could it be?

She instinctively glanced at her phone and realized that Stephan had sent her dinner. A warm feeling washed over her.

Working overtime was when a person was at their most exhausted. At a time like this, to have someone genuinely caring about her and thinking of her, how could that not be a form of happiness?

Alana smiled, took the takeout from the delivery person, and signed for it.

After the delivery person left, she couldn't resist opening the takeout box; the food was still steaming.

The warmth seemed to soothe her heart. She curved her lips into a smile, picked up her phone, snapped a photo, and sent it to Stephan.

Alana:[Thank you for the takeout you sent me. I really like it.]

After a moment's thought, she sent a cute "kiss" emoji.

On the other end.

Stephan received the message from Alana, and the corners of his mouth curled

upward involuntarily.

But when he tapped on the photo, the smile in his eyes vanished instantly.

This... didn't look like the takeout he'd ordered for her, so who exactly ordered it for her?

A man, or a woman?!

Stephan's eyes darkened. He could no longer sit still; he grabbed his coat and left. Alana was just about to dig into her takeout when suddenly, another delivery guy showed up at the door, saying someone had sent her dinner.

Alana froze. Someone else had sent her a meal?!

Who could this be?

When she asked the delivery guy, he didn't know either; he just set down the dinner and left.

Alana opened the dinner box. It was clearly more substantial than the one she'd just opened, and it was filled with the exact dishes and flavors she usually loved.

It finally dawned on Alana: perhaps this meal was the one Stephan had sent her. So, the meal she had been about to eat just now...

Alana frowned, turned around, closed the first dinner box, and walked toward Cole's office.

She placed the takeout box in front of his desk and asked bluntly, "Did you send this to me?"

Cole nodded in acknowledgment. "Do you like it?"

Alana shook her head. "I don't like it. Don't send me anything like this again."

Cole frowned. "How could that be? Lana, I remember you used to love sour cabbage fish. I ordered these dishes based on your preferences, there's no way you wouldn't like them!"

Alana looked at him. "Who said I like sour cabbage fish?"

Cole stared at her. "Before, whenever we ate together, you always had it."

Alana pressed her lips together. That was because he liked it, and he always wanted them to have the same thing so she had only eaten it out of affection for him.

But in reality, she didn't really like things that were too sour.

She preferred sweet flavors over sour ones.

She spoke up, "That was back then. I don't like it anymore."

Cole felt an inexplicable tightness in his chest.

If she no longer liked the things she used to like, did that mean she no longer liked him either?

"Lana..."

Alana interrupted softly, “I’ve finished verifying the data in the files. I’ll send them to you shortly. And this dinner, I’m giving it back to you. I hope you won’t take it upon yourself to do things like this again.”

With that, she turned and walked away.

Cold was about to get up to chase after her, but just then, his phone suddenly rang.

As he hesitated between chasing after her and answering the call, Alana had already walked out.

After a moment’s silence, he decided to answer the call.

On the other end of the line was his younger sister, Camila.

“Hello, brother, it’s so late, why aren’t you home yet?”

Cole paused for a moment before replying, “Cami, I had to work late at the office today, so I got held up a bit. Don’t worry, I’m heading home right now.”

Camila’s voice was sweet. “Okay, big brother. Come home soon. I’ll be waiting for you!”

Alana returned to her computer and sent the verified documents to Cole. Then she began packing up her things, took the dinner Stephan had sent her, and left the office.

As she walked out of the office, she suddenly remembered she needed to send Stephan message once she finished working late.

Alana: [I’m done with overtime. If you’re busy or already home, you don’t have to come pick me up, I’ll just take a cab...]

She had just finished editing the second message but hadn’t sent it yet when a black Bentley screeched to a halt in front of her.

Alana looked through the window into the car.

The man inside had chiseled features and sharp lines, he was strikingly handsome. She couldn’t help but walk over, completely surprised and delighted.

“Why did you come?”

And he’d arrived just in time.

Stephan saw her hurrying over and instinctively glanced behind her, there were no other man.

But the moment he thought of the photo she'd just sent, he was still filled with a sense of danger.

There must be a man lurking nearby, secretly lusting after her!

Stephan opened the passenger door without a trace of emotion.

"Get in."

Alana got in. She was still holding her handbag and the dinner he'd brought her.

But thinking about the photo she'd just sent him, she felt inexplicably guilty.

After all, that wasn't the dinner he'd given her, she wondered if he'd noticed.

Stephan leaned over and thoughtfully fastened her seatbelt.

He asked casually, "Did you eat the dinner I brought you?"

As he drew closer, his strong scent carried a hint of intensity.

Alana bit her lip. "Not yet. But I'm going to eat it when I get home."

Stephan's dark eyes fixed on her, a faint smile playing on his lips. "Is it the one I sent?"

Alana lowered her head slightly. "Yes, it's the one you sent."

Stephan's long, slender fingers gently cupped her chin, lifting her radiant, captivating face slightly.

"Then who sent the one you just forwarded to me, the one with pickled fish?"

Alana nervously curled her fingers.

He had found out after all.

She couldn't help but explain, "That one was from Manager Cole. He asked me to work overtime tonight, maybe he wanted to make it up to me so he ordered takeout for me. I thought you'd sent it, so I took a picture and sent it to you. When I realized it wasn't you, I returned that dinner to him. I promise, I didn't take a single bite."

"Is that so?"

Alana nodded, responding eagerly, “Yes, yes!”

Stephan chuckled and ruffled her hair. “Sweetheart, don’t be nervous. I was just checking to see if some other guy was secretly eyeing my girlfriend.”

After all, his girlfriend was so beautiful, and since she wasn’t by his side, he had no way of knowing if other men were eyeing her. So it was only natural that he felt a sense of unease.

Alana’s cheeks flushed slightly. “I... will keep myself only for you and won’t get involved with other men lightly.”

Those words struck a chord with him.

He curved his lips. “So obedient, huh?”

Alana blinked and replied earnestly, “Isn’t that only fair? I’ve asked you to keep yourself only for me and avoid contact with other women, so I can’t be hypocritical and get involved with other men behind your back.”

Stephan found this incredibly satisfying. Where else could he find such a conscientious girlfriend?

Well, the little darling right in front of him was definitely one!

“Good girl, give me a kiss.”

As if offering a reward, he leaned down and captured her soft lips.

Only after Alana was left breathless from the kiss did he finally let her go and drive away.

But before leaving, his dark eyes swept over her company.

He thought to himself, “Why not find a way to lure her to my side and have her work under me?”

But the moment the thought crossed his mind, he dismissed it.

He couldn’t make decisions about her life based solely on his own selfish desires.

Whether she stays or goes should be her own decision.

The more Stephan thought about it, the more he found it amusing.

It seemed like... he was starting to care more and more about her thoughts and opinions.

At first, he had been quite domineering toward her.

Could it be...a sign that he was growing fonder of her?

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Chapter 157 So calculating

Chapter 157 So calculating

After Alana finished taking care of Luca's cats and dogs as usual, she asked Stephan to take her back to her apartment.

Sleeping over at his place two nights in a row would be a strain on her back.

But she never expected that the man was so calculating, he actually used the excuse of getting a drink of water to brazenly stay over.

Alana gritted her teeth, glaring at the man shamelessly hogging her little sofa.

"I don't have any clothes for you here!"

Stephan replied nonchalantly, "No problem, I'll just wear your clothes."

Alana couldn't help but blush. What a pervert!

It was bad enough when he used her towel last time, but now he actually wants to wear her clothes?!

What a jerk!

She continued, "And the bed isn't as comfortable as the one at your place! Besides, the bed frame is old and might not hold both of us."

Stephan smiled, maliciously twisting her words. "Are you hinting that you want me to get you a bigger, more comfortable bed?"

“I’ll order one for you first thing tomorrow. I guarantee it won’t break even if we roll around on it.”

Enough already!

This was getting more and more embarrassing!

She couldn’t help but ask, “Stephan, are you always this inappropriate?”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “That depends on who I’m with. For example, with you, I’m being my usual frivolous self.”

Alana eyed him.

And so, not being able to send him home, Stephan successfully stayed the night and used her bathroom again.

Only this time, instead of wrapping her towel around his lower body, he found one of her looser nightgowns and wrapped it around himself.

He had originally intended to wear it, but the girl’s nightgown was simply too small for his muscular frame, he couldn’t get it on.

So he could only tie it around himself.

But tying it up wasn’t so bad either; it allowed him to show off his physique in front of Alana and tease her from time to time.

Seeing her blushing face gave him a real sense of accomplishment.

The man, fresh from his shower, walked back and forth in her room wearing her nightgown tied around him. The fabric draped over his lower body hung precariously, as if it might fall off at any moment.

Alana couldn’t bear to look and felt her nightgown was no longer fit for use. But then she remembered the three rules she’d set with him.

“Tonight, you’re not allowed to touch me!”

Stephan curved his lips and advanced toward her step by step.

“Fine, I won’t touch you. But I’d allow you to touch me.”

The man drew closer to her, exuding a dangerous aura.

Frightened, Alana quickly burrowed under the covers.

“I’m not going to touch you! I’m going to sleep!”

Stephan chuckled.

Fine, he wouldn’t touch her.

One day, he would train her to be utterly addicted to him.

Stephan lay down on the bed as well, pulling Alana, curled up like a silkworm pupa, into his arms.

Alana thought the man was about to touch her again, and her body instinctively shuddered.

The man chuckled, “Don’t worry, I promised I wouldn’t touch you, so I won’t. Go to sleep.” He gently patted her back, lulling her to sleep.

After all, she had worked overtime tonight and was physically and mentally exhausted; no matter how beastly he might be, he wouldn’t disregard her well-being.

Under the man’s gentle pats on her back, Alana unconsciously closed her eyes.

His embrace felt so warm.

His gentle caresses felt so soothing.

Alana couldn’t help but let herself drift off, lulled by the comforting sensation, into a deep sleep...

But the next day.

When she woke up and saw the man already dressed in a suit and tie, she was completely baffled.

Where on earth did he find those clothes?

Clearly, last night he had been completely naked, wearing only her nightgown. “How did you suddenly get clothes?”

Stephan glanced at the innocent young woman, her face full of confusion, and his thin lips curved into a smile as he explained with a straight face.

“I had them delivered.”

When did that happen?

How come she didn’t know?

The innocent Alana didn’t ask any further questions and was simply fobbed off by the man.

For the next few days, Alana had to work overtime.

Sometimes she worked so late that she couldn’t make it home to take care of Luca’s two cats and dog, so she asked Stephan, who happened to be free, to look after them.

Stephan snorted with a laugh.

He was supposed to take care of his love rival’s pets?!

Was she kidding him?!

But since his girlfriend had asked him to, he wouldn’t dare refuse.

He half-heartedly refilled the food and water bowls for the two cat and dog, then left. As for taking them out for a walk or anything like that, he wasn’t going to do that.

The cat and the dog were seething with resentment at Mr. Hudson’s half-hearted attitude. The golden retriever barked,

“Woof, woof, woof.”

The big orange cat meowed.

They were trying to stir some sense of compassion and love for pets in Mr. Hudson. However, Mr. Hudson had no love for them, and it was thanks to their owner!

He left them behind and walked away.

Stephan walked out, not forgetting to send a message to Alana to report on his work.

Stephan: [I've completed the task my girlfriend assigned me. I'll see you tonight, and you have to reward me! I'm coming to pick you up]

Hmph, since Alana had been working overtime these past few days, he'd been considerate of her and hadn't touched her for days.

Now, he couldn't hold back any longer!

Every fiber of his being was screaming for her! Tonight, he absolutely had to get his fix!

He was going to go pick her up and have her all night.

Alana was standing in front of the company waiting for Stephan.

"You might have a hard time getting a cab this late."

Hearing that voice, she turned and saw Cole walking up to her.

He had really been so pesky these past few days. Why does he keep working overtime as well?

"Come...let me give me a ride home."

"No thanks." She bluntly refused.

He suddenly grabbed her hand. "Stop being so stubborn and..."

"What the hell is going on here?"

Alana turned and saw Camila, whom she hadn't seen in years, and her dark pupils contracted slightly.

She instinctively lowered her gaze, her eyelashes trembling slightly. The memories of being bullied by Camila during her middle and high school years were still vivid in her mind.

Camila stared at Alana, finding her face increasingly familiar.

Even though so many years had passed, she would never easily forget that face, even if it had changed.

"Alana, is that you?!"

Camila's eyes widened in fury. She never expected that after five years, she would see this bitch again!

It was because of this slut that Cole had distanced himself from her and treated her coldly for such a long time.

It wasn't until Alana finally left that her relationship with her brother had finally started to mend.

But now, Alana had reappeared again!

What does Alana think she's doing?

Was she trying to steal her brother, Cole, from her?!

Alana frowned. Since Camila had recognized her, there was no point in hiding anymore.

Just like the shadows from her past, you can't pretend they don't exist just by running away from them.

"Camila, it's been a long time."

Her tone seemed calm, but her slightly trembling fingers betrayed the fear in her heart. She would never forget that afternoon after school when Camila, accompanied by a group of thugs, cornered her in a secluded, deserted spot outside the school.

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Chapter 158 Drama queen

Chapter 158 Drama queen

Camila and that gang of thugs verbally humiliated her and mocked her.

Camila even ordered the thugs to molest her. She fought back desperately, but Camila called her a drama queen and slapped her hard across the face.

She then ordered those thugs to kick and beat her. At that moment, facing a whole group of them, she seemed small, pitiful, and helpless. She was only just starting eighth grade; she had never faced such a dangerous situation before.

At that moment, her fear reached its peak.

“I didn’t mean to get your skirt dirty!” Camila sneered at her, “Alana, I just can’t stand you! Who told you to have that innocent-looking face? Who told you to steal all the spotlight from me in class? This is what you get!”

“Today, don’t even think about getting away. I’m going to make you pay!”

Just as Camila was ordering those thugs to humiliate her, Cole appeared just in time.

Cole attended the same school as her.

Cole was in 10th grade, and she was in eighth.

He was the school’s undisputed top student, consistently ranking first in every exam.

He was as bright as the sun and as gentle as the moon, the dream boyfriend of every girl in school.

Given how outstanding and famous he was at school, Alana naturally knew him.

As soon as Cole appeared, he immediately intimidated that group of thugs.

He stepped in front of her, towering like a mountain, blocking the leering stares directed at her.

“Cami, that’s enough! Who gave you the right to bully people like this? Take your people and get out of here!”

“If I catch you hanging out with this crowd again, don’t blame me for telling Mom and Dad, I’ll make sure they teach you a lesson!”

Camila burst into tears, frightened by Cole’s threatening tone. After a few tearful protests, she was forced to take the thugs and leave.

At that moment, Alana was crouched on the ground, trembling uncontrollably. Cole bent down, looked at her, and spoke gently.

“It’s okay now. As long as I’m here, I won’t let them bully you.”

Alana lifted her reddened eyes. A beam of light fell precisely on Cole; at that

moment, his smile was gentle, and his entire body was bathed in a sacred glow.

It was as if she were seeing a light meant just for her, a light that would redeem her. Later, Cole took her to a nearby pharmacy, bought some ointment, and applied it to her wounds himself.

He said to her, “Camila is my younger sister. What she did to you just now was

completely out of line. I’m apologizing to you on her behalf. When we get back, I’ll have a serious talk with her and make sure she never bullies you again.”

“If she bullies you again in the future, just come find me, I’ll take care of it for you! But... could you please not tell anyone about what happened today?”

The young girl was filled with fear over what had just happened. With someone willing to protect her, she instinctively clung to him, not stopping to think about whether this would be to her advantage or not.

“Okay.”

So later, to protect herself, she stayed by Cole’s side for a very, very long time. And Cole, just as he had promised, continued to look out for her.

She was truly grateful to him. Whether his feelings for her were genuine or not, the fact remained that he had helped her.

But she knew all too well that there was too much standing between them; they weren’t meant to be. She had harbored a long time crush on him so when he confessed he liked her in college, she swiftly agreed to date him.

Now, thinking about it, she wished she had stayed away from him.

Cole sighed bitterly; she couldn’t stand seeing Alana so calm.

Especially now that so many time had passed, Alana’s features had matured, making her even more beautiful.

Back in school, Alana had always outshone her in beauty.

Whenever Alana was around, Camila’s moment in the spotlight would vanish. Even her most ardent admirers would abandon her the moment they saw Alana, turning their attention to her instead.

There was a boy she had liked back then, but in the end, he turned around and went after Alana instead.

What's even worse is that Alana wasn't just beautiful, she also got better grades than Camila.

Apart from her higher social status, Camila was outshone by Alana in every other way.

Having always been held on a pedestal and fawned over, she naturally couldn't accept this, so she opposed Alana at every turn, especially her relationship with Cole.

After all, Alana was just a lowly girl with no parents to love her, even if she bullied her mercilessly, who would ever stand up for her?

But her brother actually stood up for her, he even slapped her for Alana's sake. This only made her hate Alana even more.

After all, her brother, Cole, had always doted on her. He'd never even raised his voice at her, let alone hit her.

Ever since Alana showed up, everything changed.

So it was all Alana's fault!

If Alana hadn't shown up, her relationship with her brother wouldn't have gone sour!

Camila sneered, her tone becoming uncontrollably sharp and cutting.

"Lana, you're such a disgusting leech. Even after my brother dumped you, you still have the nerve to show up in front of him and cling to him. How pathetic are you?"

Alana said nothing, but took the opportunity to wriggle free from Cole's grip.

Seeing Alana coldly shake him off, Cole frowned, then turned to Camila and snapped.

"Cami, shut your mouth!"

Camila's face turned pale with fright as she looked at Cole in disbelief. "Brother, you're yelling at me again! You're yelling at me over this woman again, I'm your little sister, you know!"

During the past few months, she felt that her relationship with her brother had returned to normal, and he doted on her just as he used to.

But now that Alana had reappeared, was her place in her brother's heart about to be taken away?

The more Camila thought about it, the angrier she became, and she took out all her frustration on Alana.

“Lana, why don’t you just get lost? Why do you keep showing up in front of my brother?! Get out! Get out of here right now! I don’t want to see you anymore!”

She suddenly lunged at Alana, trying to push her away.

Alana instinctively stepped back.

Cole quickly stepped in to stop Camila, grabbing her hand. “Enough! Stop this! I’ll take you home!”

Camila exclaimed, excitedly, “Brother, don’t stop me! Let me teach her a lesson! She’s nothing but a scheming hypocrite! Not only does she deliberately oppose me, but she also wants to steal you away from me. I won’t let her get away with it!”

Cole clenched his teeth and pulled her back forcefully.

He turned to look at Alana and spoke softly to calm her down, “Lana, I’ll take Cami home first. Don’t go yet. I’ll come back for you in a bit.”

With that, he grabbed Camila and walked away.

Camila was still hurling insults at Alana.

The vicious curses rang in Alana’s ears like a curse, leaving her unsettled.

Those long-buried memories seemed to come back to life, relentlessly attacking her.

Stephan got stuck in traffic for a while on the way.

So he arrived about ten minutes late.

He parked his car in front of Alana’s office. He had assumed Alana was still waiting for him at the office, and he was just about to call her to let her know he had arrived.

But before he could even take out his phone, his sharp eyes spotted a familiar, graceful figure standing not far from the company entrance.

Stephan paused for a moment, then broke into a smile.

It turned out she had already come downstairs to wait for him.

Without hesitation, he unbuckled his seatbelt, opened the car door, and walked

toward her.

He walked quickly toward the girl he liked, taking two steps at a time.

“My darling, I’m sorry I kept you waiting.”

No sooner had Stephan finished speaking than the girl, who had been standing not far away, suddenly rushed over, threw herself at him, and embraced him tightly.

She buried her face in his chest.

He looked down and saw her dark, tousled head.

It felt soft and cute.

His heart melted, and a faint smile touched his thin lips.

“Why are you being so affectionate all of a sudden?”

He was a bit flattered.

The girl in his arms clung to him tightly, as if she wanted to sink into his body. Her delicate, supple body trembled slightly.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 159 Her dignity

Chapter 159 Her dignity

“Why... did you take so long to come...”

Stephan keenly sensed that something was wrong with her and instantly wiped the casual smile from his face.

Furrowing his brow, he explained in a low voice.

“Sorry, there was traffic on the way. What’s wrong?”

He reached out and pulled the girl in his arms close.

A large hand, calloused from hard work, gently cupped her soft head and stroked it tenderly.

Alana felt the man's large hand on her head; it carried a silent comfort and was quite warm.

She took a deep breath.

"It's nothing. I just wanted to...hold you close..."

She had just been overcome by emotion and lost control for a moment. She wanted to hold him, to find a little comfort. She'd be able to pull herself together very soon.

Her ability to bounce back has always been strong.

Stephan didn't read too much into it; he just assumed she was physically and mentally exhausted from working overtime for days on end.

He ruffled her hair again and said, indulgently, "It's okay. Hold on as long as you want. Your boyfriend's embrace will always be yours alone."

Alana's eyelashes fluttered slightly.

The warmth radiating from him, along with his soft reassurances, silently soothed the restlessness hidden deep within her heart.

She felt comforted, yet for some reason, her eyes stung slightly. Because whenever she felt down, she almost always bore it alone, silently processing all her negative emotions.

She believed that pain was only temporary, and that time would heal everything.

But now, there was someone by her side, letting her hold him, gently comforting her, and offering her a warm embrace.

It was as if a powerful force had been infused into her body, filling her with a warm, comforting sensation.

The pain and panic in her heart gradually faded, replaced by a hint of sweetness that arose from his comfort and affection.

Alana couldn't help but feel a hint of dependence; she gently nuzzled her cheek against the man's chest, soft and clingy like a little kitten.

“Okay, then I’ll hold you a little longer.”

Cole drove Camila home, then, ignoring her protests, hurried back to the company entrance.

But to his surprise, when he returned, Alana was already gone.

Cole frowned. Had she left?

He had clearly told her to stay put and wait for him. Besides, she was clearly in a bad mood, Camila’s appearance had obviously upset her.

Back in school, she and his sister hadn’t gotten along very well.

Even though he had tried to mediate between them several times, it hadn’t made much of a difference. And this sudden encounter tonight was even more...

Cole was quite concerned about Alana’s situation and couldn’t help but pull out his phone to send her a message.

Cole: [Where are you?]

[I told you to wait for me to get back. Why didn’t you wait?]

He waited a long time for her reply but nothing came. Cole grew worried and couldn’t help but call her.

At that moment, Alana was having dinner with Stephan at a high-end restaurant. They had ordered over a dozen dishes, most of which were Alana’s favorites.

Among them was a plate of crayfish, the restaurant’s signature dish.

However, they hadn’t been peeled.

Alana wanted to pick one up and try it.

Stephan sensed her intention, so he promptly put on a pair of disposable gloves and took a crayfish himself. He began peeling it slowly and carefully. “It’s time for your boyfriend to step up, I’ll help my girlfriend peel it.”

Alana smiled, her lips pressed together. He sure knows how to seize an opportunity. Hmm, bonus points!

Major bonus points!

After peeling the crayfish, the man fed it directly into her mouth.

He asked with a smile, “Your boyfriend peeled these. Do you like them?”

Alana chewed thoughtfully, a glistening streak of oil spilling from the corner of her mouth.

Then she nodded. “It’s delicious.”

Stephan stared at the glossy sheen at the corner of her mouth. “I want to try it too. Is it good?”

Alana, eager to show off her skills as a girlfriend, offered proactively, “I’ll peel one for you.”

However, before she could make a move, the man suddenly lowered his head and captured her soft, delicate lips.

Alana’s eyes dilated.

What was he doing?

They were still eating!

The man fumbled around in Alana’s mouth for a while, kissing her until her face turned bright red before finally letting her go.

He deliberately made a few smacking sounds, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Compared to the ones my girlfriend peels herself, I still think the ones in my mouth taste better.”

Alana’s cheeks flushed bright red again.

He actually likes it when it’s fed to him through her mouth?

What a perverted man.

She didn’t dare look up at anyone, afraid someone might notice the heated exchange she’d just shared with him.

“Behave yourself while we’re eating! We’re still out in public!”

The man chuckled softly. “Yeah, I’ll be inappropriate with you once we get back.”

Alana bit her lip and couldn’t help but shoot him a reproachful glance.

He was so naughty!

How could there be such a naughty man?

But the more mischievous he was, the more she seemed to like him. What should she do?
Wah!

She’d caught the bug and was getting a little naughty herself.

Suddenly, her phone in her pocket vibrated. Alana quietly pulled out her phone and saw it was a message from Cole. She bit her lip, not wanting to respond.

But to her surprise, Cole actually called her.

The all-too-familiar, cheesy ringtone rang out, shattering the tender moment.

“I’m late! I’m late!”

“You’re going to be late for work!”

“The early bird catches the worm!”

“Are you getting up? Are you getting up? If you don’t, I’ll starve you to death!”

Alana blinked.

Feeling awkward, she frantically declined the call.

Stephan glanced at her. “It’s so late. Who was calling you?”

She bit her lip; subconsciously, she didn’t want Stephan to know about her past relationship with Cole.

“My boss, Manager Cole. He was probably calling about work.”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “Is that so?”

Alana felt inexplicably guilty and nodded vigorously, “Mm-hmm.”

It wasn’t so much that she didn’t want Stephan to know about her relationship with Cole, but rather that she didn’t want him to discover she had a rather unpleasant past and had gone through some difficult experiences.

Few people have the courage to expose their shameful past to someone they care about.

She simply felt deeply insecure and wanted nothing more than to hide those memories, presenting herself as the “normal” girlfriend she believed she should be.

She dared not imagine what would happen if Stephan found out she was a child abandoned by her parents, would he continue to treat her as kindly as he always had?

Would he, like those people in the past, look at her with disapproving eyes, or even shamelessly mock and humiliate her?

Those vicious words had left a deep mark on her, haunting her like a nightmare and keeping her awake at night.

Stephan stared intently at her, his eyes deep and intense.

Alana bit her lip, hesitant to meet his gaze.

His gaze was piercing, as if he could see right through her.

Stephan could tell the young woman was hiding something from him. Though he didn't know what it was, she seemed unwilling to tell him.

Perhaps their bond wasn't quite solid yet; it was only natural that she wouldn't want to be completely open with him.

All right, no rush. He would take it step by step, slowly winning her over until she was willing to trust him and accept him with her whole heart.

He suppressed the intense possessiveness in his eyes and gradually averted his gaze from her. “All right, let's eat first.”

Seeing that the man wasn't pressing her further, Alana couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

How wonderful, without even realizing it, he had preserved her dignity.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 160 Aching all over

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After Alana ignored his call, Cole continued to call her several more times. But Alana had wised up; she'd put her phone on silent, so she didn't hear them.

The meal came to an end.

Stephan drove her home.

But the direction seemed off, it looked like they were heading toward his place. Stephan glanced at her and bluntly stated his intention.

“Come over to my place tonight. I want a third time.”

Alana blushed; that was way too blunt.

But he’d sent her a message hinting at it earlier, so she was somewhat prepared.

Stephan watched the girl’s bashful expression and smiled calmly. “Tonight, how about something a little more exciting?”

Alana found herself drawn in by his words. She looked at him and asked, “What kind of excitement?”

She had no ulterior motives; it was simply curiosity. Stephan stared at her, his gaze burning with obvious desire.

“How about I get you some lingerie, a sexy nightgown?”

He pictured the girl slipping into the lingerie, lying on the bed, striking all sorts of

seductive poses to tempt him.

The man’s throat involuntarily tightened.

That image was simply too beautiful.

Alana's breath caught.

Her already rosy cheeks flushed even deeper, like ripe berries about to burst with juice. She bit her lips tightly, their color turning vivid under her pressure.

"You... don't go too far."

Her soft, low voice was laced with unspeakable shyness, utterly irresistible.

Listening to her tantalizingly soft voice, Stephan felt an irresistible tickle in his throat.

"Fine, I'm not going too far. I'm just wearing a battle robe, how could that be going too far?"

She reacted sharply, her almond-shaped eyes widening. Her moist eyes radiated intense accusation and resistance.

"I don't want to!"

Stephan's eyes darkened with a hint of resentment at being rejected. "You've been

working overtime every night these past few days. I've been covering your night shifts for you. It's been mentally and physically draining. If you don't give your boyfriend a little reward and compensation, that just wouldn't be right."

Alana gasped.

How could she possibly refuse?

After all, it's true that he helped her with her part-time job, so giving him a little reward and compensation is only fair.

But asking her to wear sexy lingerie to seduce him. What should she do?

Just thinking about it made her want to die of embarrassment! “Let’s try something else.”

Stephan chuckled softly. “Then I’ll have to give that some serious thought.”

The way he looked at her was like he was eyeing a delicious piece of prey, calculating how to take a bite.

Alana was so embarrassed her fingers curled up involuntarily. “Stop being so inappropriate. Just drive properly.”

The man’s voice was low and husky. “As you wish, my dear girlfriend.”

The seductive whisper slipped quietly into her ear, burrowing deeper, causing her heart to skip a beat and her body to grow inexplicably hot.

She pretended to look away, gazing out the car window.

Hoping the wind outside would blow away the heat inside her body.

Alana returned to the house with Stephan.

He held her delicate hand tightly, their fingers intertwined as if afraid she might run away.

Stephan held her hand, squeezing and pinching it.

As if he’d found a fun toy he couldn’t put down. He led her to the sofa and had her sit on his lap.

He continued to play with her fingers.

“Your hands are so soft.”

Soft, white, and delicate.

Like a piece of delicious silken tofu.

He really wanted to take a bite.

But right now, besides just tasting them, he had even more wicked thoughts in his mind. For instance, he recalled how she had once used her hands to help him.

So, where should he start tonight?

The man who appeared calm and composed was already stirring with desire inside. Alana had no idea of the wicked thoughts swirling in the man’s mind.

She thought he was simply complimenting her gentle touch. Her gaze couldn’t help but fall on the man’s large hands.

His hands were beautiful, long and slender with well-defined knuckles, exuding a sense of strength.

Every time his hand held hers or cradled her, she felt a sense of security from that strength.

And...Alana couldn’t help but place her own hand on his palm to compare, “Your hands are so big.”

They were almost twice as big as hers.

Stephan stared intently at her, his gaze darkening.

“My hands aren’t the only thing that’s big.”

Alana met the man’s ambiguous gaze, and her cheeks flushed involuntarily.

What should she do? She got it instantly.

He certainly wasn’t just big-handed. Stephan had let go of her soft hand at some point, his hand now resting on her slender, fair waist.

Her waist was light and slender; he could easily encircle it with one hand. As he stripped her of her clothes, her fair, delicate back was laid bare.

On her fragile waist, two small, indented dimples, sexy and alluring dazzled his eyes.

He couldn’t help but lean down, kissing them again and again, unable to get enough.

Further down, the girl’s buttocks, perched on his thighs, were full and firm, soft yet supple.

And those legs, white as jade.

When those jade-like legs wrapped around his waist and abdomen, the sheer ecstasy was utterly irresistible.

Alana sensed the man’s gaze upon her, lingering, unbearably hot, so aggressive, so

possessive.

And she felt like a fish pinned to a cutting board by him, at any moment in danger of being filleted and devoured.

A blush spread across her cheeks as she nudged him. "I...I'm going to take a shower..."

Stephan gently pushed her knees apart, positioning her to straddle him.

She was delicate and soft, her sweet scent clinging to him like a shadow, like a sweet, soft, sticky little cake.

He held her tightly, savoring the warmth and softness in his arms, unable to suppress a satisfied sigh.

"Don't rush. My girlfriend is so soft and sweet, let me savor the moment. In a little while, we'll shower together."

Once we've stripped down, I'll get to admire her all over again.

What kind of wicked thoughts could a man like him possibly have? He just wanted to admire his girlfriend inside and out.

Alana gasped, "What? Take a shower together?"

Stephan looked at the girl's shocked and bashful reaction, curled his lips into a smile,

and said, "It's not like we've never showered together before. In that bathtub, have you forgotten?"

Alana's face turned bright red.

How could she possibly forget?

She just couldn't forget, that was exactly why...

Alana insisted, "I want to wash myself."

The man asked shamelessly, "Will washing yourself be as comfortable as having me help you?"

Alana gasped.

How could that be the same?

She was simply ashamed to be standing naked in front of him, who was equally naked. After all, she wasn't as shameless as he was.

The man slowly moved closer to her, his breath brushing against her delicate cheek.

"We made a deal, you promised to reward me and we need to a good time tonight. You can't go back on your word."

Alana bit her lip, unsure of what to say.

Stephan curved his lips, cupped her rounded hips with his hands, stood up, and

walked step by step toward the stairs...

Another night of wild passion flew by.

When she woke up the next day, Alana was aching all over.

Chapter 161 Still burned

Chapter 161 Still burned

Lying in bed, Alana recalled what had happened the night before, and her cheeks still burned.

She couldn't forget that wicked man, carrying her into the bathroom, coaxing her into letting him undress her, and scrubbing her body all over.

But as he washed her, things took a turn. The first time was right there in the bathtub, reliving the madness of that night.

Then, he held her as she sat on the sink, his bathrobe folded beneath her bottom.

She faced him, their skin pressed against each other, with a mirror behind them.

At the height of his desire, he couldn't resist gripping her chin, turning her face toward him so she could see her own expression, confused, intoxicated, and utterly unable to contain her passion.

He buried his face in the crook of her neck, kissing her repeatedly, teasing her.

Alana took a few deep breaths to catch her breath, then slowly climbed out of bed.

This morning.

Stephan was up early again, having personally prepared breakfast for her.

After all, having been worn out all night, she didn't have the energy to handle any of this. But he seemed to have boundless energy, like a male demon who'd just absorbed a full dose of essence.

As for her, she felt like a limp, listless little kitten. Still, waking up every morning to a ready-made breakfast felt pretty nice.

Even though their relationship had only just begun, Alana couldn't help but look

forward to every day to come, wondering if they would be just as warm and cozy as this. She took a sip of the meat congee he'd cooked; the sweet, savory flavor made a happy smile spill across her face.

"It's so good!"

Stephan looked at her. “What’s so good?”

Alana looked at him, her eyes sparkling.

“It’s so nice to have breakfast cooked by my boyfriend every day.”

This was something she had never even dared to imagine before.

Stephan curved his lips and reached out to pinch her delicate little cheek. “If you like it, eat a little more.”

But deep down, he had already made a silent promise to himself, from now on, whenever he had the time, he would make breakfast for his girlfriend, because she loved it.

Alana blinked. “I’ve had enough.”

Stephan studied her. “Not enough. You’re too skinny.”

Alana asked with a smile, “Isn’t being a little thinner better? Lots of girls think they’re fat and are always complaining about losing weight.”

Stephan said earnestly, “I can’t control other girls, but my girlfriend doesn’t need to lose weight, as long as she’s healthy.”

Alana smiled, her lips pressed together.

She absolutely loved hearing that.

Besides, he was really different from those men who look down on their girlfriends for being overweight and demand they lose weight.

So, being with him, she didn’t feel much pressure. The man paused for a moment, then suddenly changed the subject.

“Although you don’t need to lose weight, you still need to exercise regularly. After all, you’re so delicate and can’t handle rough treatment.”

She was so delicate and soft that sometimes he was genuinely afraid he might snap her in two if he used too much force.

Alana froze for a moment, inwardly wailing in despair. Wasn’t doing those “bedtime exercises” with him every night enough?

But mostly he did all the work while she just enjoyed it.

But as her physics teacher had said, the action of a force is always mutual.

While he was exerting himself, she was the one enduring it.

No wonder she was so exhausted.

Alana evaded the question, "Let's talk about it later."

The truth was, she was just lazy and didn't feel like exercising.

Her work was already so exhausting every day; all she wanted to do when she got home was lie in bed, watch some videos, and catch up on TV shows. She had no energy left for exercise.

Stephan chuckled, seeing right through her evasion. "For the sake of your health, I'll be keeping an eye on you from now on."

Alana pouted, asking defiantly, "Is it really for my health, or just for your own pleasure?"

Stephan asked, "If I said it's purely for you, would you believe me?"

Without a moment's hesitation, Alana replied, "No way!"

The man raised an eyebrow. "Exactly."

Alana arrived at the office. Just as she stepped out of the elevator, a hand suddenly reached out and grabbed her.

She glanced sideways and saw Cole's refined, handsome face, which betrayed a tension that didn't quite match his usual demeanor.

His dark eyes, slightly obscured by his glasses, were a sea of turmoil, his emotions impossible to read.

Cole stared at her and said, "About what Camila said to you last night, I'm apologizing on her behalf. She... can be a bit sensitive. Please don't take it personally."

Alana replied indifferently, "It's fine. I'm used to it."

Cole felt a lump in his throat.

He thought back to how Alana and Cole had once been at constant odds. He never expected that five years later, it would still be...

He couldn't help but say, "When I got back last night, I gave her a good talking-to. From now on, she won't..."

Alana suddenly interrupted him, her tone distant. "Manager Cole, I have no interest in matters between you and your sister. Is there anything else? If not, let go of me. I need to get back to work."

Cole's throat tightened even more.

"Lana, last night I told you to wait for me at the company entrance. Why didn't you just wait there obediently? I told you, I'd just take Cami home and then came back to pick you up..."

Alana's eyes were clear as she looked at him and said, "No one is going to wait for you in the same spot forever."

That double-entendre stung Cole, making his eyelid twitch slightly.

He grabbed her wrist; the veins in his arm throbbed as he couldn't help but squeeze a little too hard.

"Even if you weren't waiting for me, I sent you messages and called you countless times. You could have at least answered the phone."

"Do you have any idea how worried I was? I almost didn't sleep a wink all night."

Alana lowered her gaze. "I'm sorry. My phone was on silent; I didn't notice."

Cole called her out without hesitation. "You're lying. You clearly declined the call!"

Alana took a deep breath. "Since you knew I was deliberately ignoring your calls, why did you keep calling?"

Cole frowned. "I told you, I was worried about you!"

Alana lifted her eyelashes, her clear eyes fixed intently on him, pure and free of any trace of deception.

"Are you really worried about me? Or are you just enjoying the process of toying with me?"

Cole's pupils contracted sharply.

Stared at by those pure, lively eyes, for some reason, he felt as though the dark thoughts he had once buried deep within his heart were now beginning to surface, laid bare before her.

“Lana, I’m not...”

Alana interrupted him softly, “I heard everything. The things you said at your birthday party just before you broke up with me to be with Sophia.”

At the time, she had been standing outside the door, holding the gift she had carefully prepared for him.

Beside him were a few close friends and relatives, including his younger sister, Camila.

One of his friends spoke up.

“Cole, it’s your birthday today. Are you inviting that girl who was abandoned by her parents?”

“You’ve been looking out for her all these years, making her believe you two were in a relationship. Isn’t it time to wake her up from her delusion? Or have you fallen for her?”

Camila immediately retorted, “How could that be? My brother would never fall for that lowly woman whom even her own parents rejected. He only looks after her because she’s quite smart, helping with his business and all.”

“Cole, is what your sister said true? Are you only giving her special treatment because you’re using her, with no other intentions whatsoever?”

Alana remembered exactly how Cole had responded at the time.

He held a half-full glass of red wine, swirling it slowly, his tone casual and nonchalant. “She’s so beautiful, what’s wrong with having a little interest in her? But with a family like hers, dating is fine, but marrying her? Forget it.”

Camila chimed in from the side, “Exactly! A man of my brother’s caliber is way out of her league, she could try her hardest her whole life and still wouldn’t measure up. She’s only fit to be my brother’s lapdog!”

It was only then that Alana realized his kindness toward her had been motivated by ulterior motives.

And in his eyes, she was the kind of girl he could date, but never bring home to marry. Because he looked down on her and despised her background.

She couldn't remember exactly how she felt at the time, but it seemed like she cried for a very, very long time when she ran home.

It took her several days to finally bring herself to cut off every last connection to him.

Cole couldn't help but breathe heavily.

She had heard it after all.

No wonder she didn't show up that day.

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Chapter 161 Still burned

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Camila immediately retorted, “How could that be? My brother would never fall for that lowly woman whom even her own parents rejected. He only looks after her because she’s quite smart, helping with his business and all.”

“Cole, is what your sister said true? Are you only giving her special treatment because you’re using her, with no other intentions whatsoever?”

Alana remembered exactly how Cole had responded at the time.

He held a half-full glass of red wine, swirling it slowly, his tone casual and nonchalant. “She’s so beautiful, what’s wrong with having a little interest in her? But with a family like hers, dating is fine, but marrying her? Forget it.”

Camila chimed in from the side, “Exactly! A man of my brother’s caliber is way out of her league, she could try her hardest her whole life and still wouldn’t measure up. She’s only fit to be my brother’s lapdog!”

It was only then that Alana realized his kindness toward her had been motivated by ulterior motives.

And in his eyes, she was the kind of girl he could date, but never bring home to marry. Because he looked down on her and despised her background.

She couldn’t remember exactly how she felt at the time, but it seemed like she cried for a very, very long time when she ran home.

It took her several days to finally bring herself to cut off every last connection to him.

Cole couldn’t help but breathe heavily.

She had heard it after all.

No wonder she didn’t show up that day.

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Chapter 162 Easily accepted

Chapter 162 Easily accepted

No wonder she easily accepted when he suggested a break up.

He had thought she might try to hold onto him and fight for him.

But she had already let go of him.

He grabbed Alana's shoulders with both hands and explained urgently, "Lana, that wasn't true, I was just joking..."

He had been so young back then, full of pride and arrogance, he hadn't realized the consequences of his words.

Back then, he'd assumed that because she was always by his side, she depended on him and couldn't possibly live without him.

But when she completely vanished from his life, without a single word, he suddenly realized how important she was to him.

It was actually him who couldn't live without her.

Alana smiled bitterly.

He didn't realize how deeply the words he spoke back then had affected her.

She thought he was special, different from all the others who had humiliated and mocked her.

But the truth dealt her a crushing blow.

Yet now, with a single offhand remark, he casually brushed the whole thing aside...

Alana feigned calmness. "Whether it was a joke or not doesn't matter anymore. What matters is that I don't care anymore. I don't care that you were about to marry someone else. I don't care if that worked out or not. I don't want to have anything to do with you."

Seeing Alana's composed demeanor, Cole felt a sudden, inexplicable sense of panic.

Even though he was so close to her, he still felt as though she were far away.

So far that he felt he couldn't reach out and hold her.

That sense of panic, the fear that he might lose her, held him in its grip.

Unable to control himself, he pulled the girl in front of him into his arms, wishing he could merge her into his very being.

“Lana, I want no one else. I’ve broke all contact with Sophia. I will never let anyone deceive me again. I will never let you question your worth in my life again. I’m sorry. Please forgive me, okay?”

Alana hadn’t expected Cole to suddenly pull her into his arms. Startled and terrified, she pushed him away with her hands.

“Cole! Let go of me! We’re at the office, someone could walk in at any moment!”

Her eyes darted around in panic, fearing someone might see them.

Cole couldn’t bear to let her go. “Will you forgive me?”

“If you forgive me, I’ll let you go.”

Alana pleaded urgently, “I forgive you, let me go!”

In truth, she had never once resented or blamed him, so how could she even speak of forgiveness?

He had simply made it clear to her that there was absolutely no point in loving him. Upon hearing this, a flicker of joy crossed Cole’s eyes.

If she was willing to forgive him, did that mean there was still a chance for them?

“Lana, I...”

Taking advantage of his distraction, the girl in his arms suddenly struggled free and backed away from him. She stared at him with a guarded expression.

“Cole, from now on at the company, please keep your distance from me. If someone had seen you hugging me just now, it would have caused a misunderstanding.”

Cole paused for a moment, realizing now that his behavior had been a bit impulsive.

“I’m sorry, I just...”

He couldn’t help himself.

Before he could finish, the girl softly interrupted him.

“I’m leaving now.” Alana lowered her eyes and turned to leave.

Cole’s heart tightened.

The words that had slipped out...’Would you like to have dinner together tonight?’

was ultimately swallowed back as she walked away.

He felt a strong sense of frustration.

But he tried his best to reassure himself: It’s okay. They’ve only met again; there will still be chances for their relationship to improve.

Alana returned to her desk, feeling somewhat unsettled as she thought about Cole’s sudden embrace.

She didn’t understand what he was really trying to say.

Clearly, in his eyes, she was nothing more than a dispensable figure.

He looked down on her background and had even mocked her in front of his friends and his sister.

Since he wasn’t sincere with her, there was no point in her clinging to any illusions about him.

When he wanted a break up, she easily agreed.

And just when she had forgotten him and let go of that relationship, he reappeared, claiming he had been looking for her all along, showing concern for her, and acting as if he cared deeply about her.

It was truly baffling.

If she couldn’t figure it out, she wasn’t going to bother trying.

After all, she wasn’t a mind reader; she couldn’t possibly know what was going on inside Cole’s head.

She wasn’t delusional enough to think he was interested in her.

After all, once bitten, twice shy.

Ever since she found out his intentions toward her weren’t pure, she’s been afraid to get any closer to him.

She was particularly afraid of getting hurt. Once she'd been hurt by someone, she wouldn't get close to them again; she'd just retreat into a hard shell to protect herself. She admitted that when it came to love, she was a complete coward, afraid to take even a single brave step.

If it weren't for Stephan, who was proactive and passionate enough to persist despite her repeated rejections, time and again choosing her with unwavering resolve, she would never have found the courage to choose to be with him.

So she hoped Stephan wouldn't be like Cole.

He was her first act of bravery, and she hoped he would be her last. Two days of peaceful life passed.

During those two days, Cole didn't assign her any overtime. She was able to catch her breath a little.

The weekend followed closely behind.

She hadn't made any plans for the weekend and intended to spend all her time with Stephan.

Stephan wanted to take her on a date just the two of them. Like going shopping or seeing a movie, or something like that.

Apparently, this was the standard routine for couples to strengthen their bond. After all, since he couldn't bring Alana home to meet his parents just yet, he had no choice but to focus on building a connection with her first.

However, a phone call from Alana's hometown instantly threw a wrench into Stephan's weekend plans.

Someone from her hometown called to say that her grandmother had fallen and broken her arm.

With something this serious happening, Alana naturally had to go back to check on her.

She received the news on Friday morning, immediately took time off work, and booked a flight for that afternoon.

When she took the time off, she informed Cole, since she was now his assistant.

Cole asked with concern, "Is your grandmother's condition serious?"

Alana looked a little pale. "We're not sure yet. I'm going back to check on her. Could

you please approve my leave?”

After all, her relatives couldn’t explain the situation clearly over the phone; she wouldn’t feel at ease until she saw for herself.

Given the gravity of the situation, Cole couldn’t stand in her way. “Alright. When are you heading back? Do you want me to drive you?”

Actually, he wanted to go back with her; after all, he had met her grandmother before.

Alana shook her head. “No need. I’ve already booked a flight for this afternoon. I’ll be leaving shortly.”

Cole stood up and said without waiting for her reply, “Then I’ll take you to the airport.”

Alana declined, “No need. My boyfriend is coming to pick me up.”

In truth, Alana didn’t know if Stephan would come to pick her up. She had just sent him a message saying her grandmother had an emergency and she’d booked a flight to go back.

He hadn’t replied yet; perhaps he was busy.

But to turn down Cole, she had no choice but to use him as an excuse.

Cole couldn’t help but clench his fists.

Here we go again. Every time he tried to get close to her, she used her boyfriend as an excuse to fend him off.

Did she really not want to be with him that much?

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Chapter 163 Safe trip

Chapter 163 Safe trip

He really wanted to use his professional position to force her into it, but knowing she hadn’t warmed up to him yet, he had no choice but to let it go.

“All right, have a safe trip.”

She paused for a moment, then couldn’t help adding, “Let me know you’ve landed safely.”

Alana replied, “Okay,” then turned and hurried away.

Back at her desk, Alana quickly gathered her things, said goodbye to her colleagues, and left in a hurry.

As she walked out of the office, she was just about to hail a cab when she saw that familiar black Bentley driving toward her.

The car pulled up in front of her.

The man inside deftly opened the passenger door for her.

“Get in!”

Seeing Stephan’s handsome face, Alana couldn’t help but feel a lump in her throat.

She hurriedly got in, closed the door, and fastened her seatbelt.

“Why did you come? I just sent you a message, but you didn’t reply. I thought you...”

Stephan looked at her and explained, “I was in a meeting. I didn’t see your message until after it ended. I figured you might be rushing to the airport, so I came right over.”

Most importantly, he didn’t know how she was feeling and was afraid she might be overthinking things, so he had to come see her in person to check on her.

Alana’s eyes stung again, a bitter, stinging sensation making her feel as if she were about to cry.

“Thank you.”

Stephan couldn’t help but reach out and gently wipe the moisture from the corners of her eyes, his deep voice filled with tenderness.

“My darling, don’t cry. Do you have your ID with you? Do you want to go home and get it?”

Alana said, “I have it on me. Let’s just go straight to the airport.”

“Alright, tell me, which airport?”

Alana sniffled and whispered the name of the airport.

Stephan immediately drove there.

As he drove, he asked, "What time is your flight? Do you want me to go with you?"

Alana bit her lip and whispered, "One o'clock in the afternoon."

After a pause, she continued, "It's too tight a schedule. I'll just go by myself."

"One o'clock isn't that tight. I can book a ticket right now."

Besides, he wasn't comfortable with her rushing back alone.

Alana said, "Really, it's okay. I can manage on my own. Besides, it wouldn't be appropriate for you to come along on such short notice. I haven't told my grandmother that I have a boyfriend yet. I'll wait until I've told her, then I'll formally introduce you to her."

Stephan gave a soft chuckle, neither confirming nor denying her point.

Although she was right, he felt a little upset that he couldn't go with her.

After all, this weekend were supposed to belong entirely to him, they could have spent a wonderful, romantic time together, just the two of them.

He had everything planned out.

Either they'd go shopping and see a movie like any ordinary young couple, or they'd stay in bed for two days and two nights without leaving the house.

Now that she'd left him behind to return to her hometown alone, leaving him all by himself, he couldn't help but feel a pang of disappointment.

Alana seemed to remember something; she immediately opened her bag and pulled out a set of keys.

"Oh, right. While I'm away, please take good care of Luca's pets. Here are the keys to his place. I'd leave them in your care."

Stephan shot her a sidelong glance, a smirk playing on his lips. "Way to go, Lana. You're getting better and better at bossing your boyfriend around as if it's the most natural thing in the world."

He couldn't help but complain inwardly. It was bad enough that she'd left him behind, but now she was asking him to take care of his rival's two pets?

This girlfriend of his, didn't she know he'd be jealous?

Alana blushed, unable to argue.

She thought to herself, if you have a boyfriend and don't make full use of him, aren't you just wasting the fact that he's your boyfriend?

Stephan snorted lightly and seized the opportunity to demand, "Remember to give me a reward when you get back, or I'll let your Luca's pets starve to death!"

As soon as Alana heard this, she realized the man was setting a trap for her. She instinctively asked, "What kind of reward?"

The man said shamelessly, "Put on some sexy lingerie, lie on the bed, and use every trick in the book to seduce me."

Her face flushed bright red in an instant.

"You, you, you..."

She stammered for a while but couldn't make head or tail of it. She just thought he was so perverted!

"I...I refuse!"

Stephan's lips curled into a smirk. "Your refusal is invalid. I'll wait for you to come back so I can claim my reward."

It would take about half an hour to reach the airport.

There was still about half an hour before boarding.

Worried that Alana might get hungry on the way, Stephan bought her a few pastries and cakes to tide her over.

He ruffled her hair and said with concern, "Remember to text me when you land to let me know you're safe."

"Okay."

"Once you get there, make sure to eat on time. Don't let yourself get too hungry."

"Okay."

“Make sure to tell your grandmother about your boyfriend. I’m waiting for you to bring me over and formally introduce me to her.”

“Okay.”

“And one more thing you absolutely mustn’t forget: remember to miss me.”

“Okay.”

He chuckled, unable to resist pinching her soft, fair cheeks. “Lana, are you a robot? I said all that, and all you said was ‘okay’?”

Her eyes were red and teary. “I was afraid that if I said one more word, I wouldn’t be able to hold back the tears...”

Although he was a bit fussy, her heart felt warm hearing his words.

Every time she traveled, she was all alone, with no one to see her off.

She saw so many people around her being picked up or dropped off by their loved ones, with one warm piece of advice after another. It moved her deeply, and she envied them so much.

Only when you truly experience it yourself do you realize just how heartwarming that scene is, and how reluctant you are to part.

She cherished this feeling of being with him.

She really loved it.

Stephan stared into her reddened eyes, his throat catching slightly.

“In that case, kiss me.”

Alana’s eyes had just turned red, and now her face flushed as well.

“No, there are too many people here...”

Stephan couldn’t care less about that right now. He didn’t know how many days she would be away in her hometown, and the thought of not being able to hold her or kiss her for all that time was pure torture.

“Then let’s find a private spot to kiss.”

Alana bit her lip. “You didn’t kiss me in the car just now...”

“It’s my fault. I was worried you’d just caught a flight, so I overthought it. Now, let’s find a good spot to kiss.”

“Don’t kiss me now. Just wait until I get back.”

Stephan ignored her little protest, leading her to a spot with fewer people. He cupped her face and leaned down to kiss her.

Oh this shy girlfriend of his. He didn’t mind doing it in front of even thousands of people but he had to respect her wishes.

Her tear-filled eyes made her look as fragile as a delicate doll, filling him with tenderness.

He just wanted to hold her close, kiss her passionately, and comfort her...

By the time Alana boarded the plane, her lips were so swollen and red she couldn’t bear to be seen.

Her heart was filled with both sweetness and embarrassment.

That rascal, he’d almost devoured her all over in the middle of the bustling airport.

But as she walked away, she couldn’t help but look back every few steps.

Every time she turned, she saw him still standing there, staring intently at her, his eyes deep and dark.

Her heart felt warm, and she waved at him. “Stephan, see you soon.”

She would miss him so much.

Stephan watched Alana board the plane, watching her slender figure disappear from view. In that moment, he felt an indescribable sense of loss.

An emptiness.

He furrowed his brow slightly, standing outside the airport, motionless for a long time. Until the plane took off and was completely out of sight...

His phone suddenly rang.

Stephan slowly looked away and took out his phone to answer the call. “Hello.”

Cynthia said irritably, “You little brat, it’s the weekend tomorrow. When are you bringing your girlfriend home so I can get ready?”

This ungrateful son was completely unreliable; she, his mother, had to call and ask herself.

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Chapter 164 A pulp

Chapter 164 A pulp

Stephan paused for a moment. “She’s busy this weekend. I won’t be able to bring her home to meet you guys.”

“She’s not available??”

Cynthia was shocked. “That’s not what you told me a few days ago!”

Stephan replied flatly, “A few days ago, I didn’t think it through, I didn’t consider her schedule. Besides, we’ve only just started dating. We’re still in the honeymoon phase, so it’s not quite the right time to meet the parents.”

Cynthia laughed in exasperation. “Is it that the honeymoon phase isn’t over yet, or that you don’t even have a girlfriend? You little rascal, just to fool your old lady, you’ve gone so far as to lie about having a girlfriend. Are you trying to drive me to my grave with anger?”

“I don’t have the power to drive you to your grave. If I actually did, at least I’d have some peace and quiet.”

Cynthia clutched her chest, which ached from the shock, “You, you, you! You better be back tonight, or I’ll beat you to a pulp!

“I’m busy tonight. I have to work overtime at the office.”

Going back just to get beaten up? Only a fool would do that.

Cynthia's voice rose, "Stephan!"

Stephan had a premonition and moved his phone out of the way in advance.

"I have a meeting to attend in a bit. I'll have to go."

Regardless of how much Cynthia was ranting on the other end, he hung up decisively.

Unable to take her anger out on her son, Cynthia turned her fury on his father instead.

Seeing her husband sitting on the couch reading the newspaper as if nothing were wrong, she charged over without a second thought and snatched the paper from his hands.

"Just look at the ungrateful son you've raised!"

"All you ever do is make me angry!"

Bernard was engrossed in his business newspaper when he was suddenly hit with a barrage of abuse from his wife.

Helplessly, he asked, "What did he do to upset you this time?"

Cynthia was fuming. "He promised to bring his girlfriend home for us to meet this weekend, but then he went and backed out, saying she was busy. What kind of excuse is that? It's obvious he's lying to us, he doesn't even have a girlfriend!"

Bernard winced at the thought. "Honey, you really need to work on your temper. You're getting a bit too hot-headed. Maybe his girlfriend really is busy?"

Cynthia was so furious she felt like she was going through early menopause.

"Do you think I want to be this short-tempered? It's all because of that good-for-nothing son of yours! My close friends, their sons are about the same age as yours, and their grandchildren are already old enough to run errands!"

"Now look at your son, forget about holding a grandchild, we can't even catch a glimpse of a girlfriend. It's not just me who's worried, aren't you, as his father, worried too?"

"Our sensible son should have already given us two grandchildren in three years, but he's the one causing us trouble day in and day out. We've set him up with one blind date after another, and he's picky about every single one. What on earth is he looking for? If he just says the word, I'll go out and drag her here myself!"

Bernard felt so sorry for his wife that he couldn't help but get involved.

“Oh, come on, don’t get so worked up. Have a sip of water to calm down!”

He kindly poured a glass of water and handed it to Cynthia.

Cynthia lowered her head, gulped down more than half the cup, and launched into another round of grumbling and ranting.

“Don’t you think Darla is a great girl? Not only is she beautiful, but she’s also

exceptionally talented. She’s already become a department head at such a young age, and her family background isn’t much different from ours. She’s such a perfect match for our son. With such a perfect wife candidate, how could he possibly not want her?”

“Just thinking about such a wonderful daughter-in-law not coming into the Hudson family breaks my heart!”

“If your son doesn’t like her, there’s nothing you can do about it, even if it breaks your heart. Why don’t we just drop this and move on to the next one?”

Cynthia snorted. “He wouldn’t like the next one either. I’ve set him up with so many potential partners, which one has he ever been satisfied with?”

“Maybe your idea of a good match isn’t the same as his. Why not stop worrying about him so much and focus your energy elsewhere, like on your husband here. It’s been days since you’ve been in bed with me to show me some affection.”

As he spoke, Bernard took the opportunity to pull Cynthia into his arms, seating her on his lap. Then, pouting his lips, he leaned in to kiss her.

Cynthia quickly covered his approaching face with her hand and gave him a playful glare. “Go away! You’re such a pervert!”

Alana had been on a flight for nearly two hours before landing in a provincial capital in the south.

Her grandmother had broken her arm and been sent to a hospital in the provincial capital for treatment.

The weather in the south in September was hot, and the sun was blazing.

As soon as she stepped off the plane, a wave of heat hit her.

On her way to find a ride after disembarking, she was already sweating profusely, and her cheeks were flushed from the heat.

She hailed an Express ride on her phone.

As soon as she got in and felt the cool air

from the car's AC, she finally felt a bit more comfortable.

"Driver, City People's Hospital, please hurry."

"Okay."

Alana hadn't eaten the bread and cake she'd brought on the plane because she didn't have much of an appetite.

Now she was absolutely starving, so she made do and ate a little right there in the car. Traffic was heavy, and it took nearly an hour to reach the hospital.

After hearing the news about her grandmother from a relative, she rushed to her grandmother's hospital room.

When she arrived at the ward, she found it crowded with relatives, all her aunts and uncles had come.

Grandma had just undergone surgery and was extremely weak; her left arm was encased in a thick cast.

Apparently, Grandma had accidentally fallen while getting out of bed, and when she hit her arm, it just snapped.

Elderly people do have fragile bones; even a minor bump or knock can cause serious problems.

Seeing her grandmother's haggard, pale face, Alana's heart ached deeply. "Grandma, I'm here."

Grandma was quite shocked to see Alana.

"Oh, why have you come back? Who called you? Why did they make you worry? Your job in the capital is so far away, is it easy for you to come back just for a visit. Go back now! As long as your aunts and uncles are here to look after me, that's enough!"

The aunts and uncles standing nearby remained silent.

But they were quite unhappy that Grandma, at her advanced age, was still working in the fields and had broken her arm.

An old lady her age should stop causing trouble, if something happens, it'll only be a burden on them.

Alana walked over to her grandmother and took her calloused hand in hers.

These old hands, having toiled in the fields all her life, felt rough and dry, like tree bark.

Every fingernail was black, looking as if covered in a thick layer of grime.

They stood in stark contrast to Alana's fair, jade-like fingers.

She clutched them tightly, her heart aching. "Grandma, it's okay. I flew back, it only took two hours. It won't be long."

"Besides, now that I'm back, if you just send me away like this, wouldn't that be a waste of the fare?"

Grandma sighed but didn't say anything else. Though they hadn't seen each other in just a few months, she couldn't help but ask how Alana was getting along in the city.

After all, that place was so far from home, and she was in a strange land; she was afraid Alana might be taken advantage of.

Alana, of course, only shared the good news, saying her life was great and her job was going well.

She also said that once she'd saved up enough money from her job, she'd take Grandma to visit the city.

Grandma was naturally delighted to hear this.

Upon further inquiry, it turned out Grandma's arm injury was quite serious and required a two-week hospital stay.

Of course, she wouldn't recovered after those two weeks; injuries involving bones and tendons take a hundred days to heal, let alone a broken arm.

The folks relatives have weak immune systems, so it will be even harder for them to recover; the doctor estimated it would take about six months.

For the next six months, someone will need to be there to take care of her personally.

Several of her aunts and uncles mentioned that they were all busy with their own lives and couldn't take care of Grandma, so they hinted that Alana should quit her job, come back to care for Grandma for a year or so, and then consider looking for work again.

Or she could just find a job anywhere in their small county town down south.

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Chapter 165 Need to work

Chapter 165 Need to work

The relatives felt that for a young woman, work was work no matter where she was so why bother trying to make it in a big city?

Besides, once she was of age, she'd find a husband, have children, and be a full-time housewife, why would she need to work outside the home?

Several relatives said exactly this to Alana's face right there in the hospital room.

And that was precisely why they'd urged her to come back. Alana remained silent, saying nothing.

If she opened her mouth, she wouldn't stand a chance against these seven or eight highly vocal critics.

The most sensible thing to do was to say nothing.

Her grandmother, however, disagreed.

"I only broke my arm, I'm not completely disabled, who says I'm unable to take care of myself!? Besides, even if I did need care, is it really up to a granddaughter to take care of me? What good was it raising all of you, my sons and daughters, if this is how you treat me?"

"I've got a few scrapes, and every one of you is making excuses and refusing to take care of me. You actually called my granddaughter to rush home, quit her job, and take care of me for a year or two? Do you have any shame? I've raised a bunch of ungrateful brats,

every one of you has no conscience left. Oh my, this is making my chest hurt from the anger...”

One of her uncle’s wife didn’t take this very well. “Mom, didn’t you raise Lana yourself? You’re injured, isn’t it only natural for her to come back and take care of you?”

Her aunt chimed in, “Exactly. We’d love to take care of you too, but with several kids to look after at home, we just don’t have the time!”

Her uncle said, “I have to go to work to earn a living and support the family. This household can’t function without my income.”

Anyway, they were all so busy they had no time to look after Grandma, an elderly woman.

Grandma laughed bitterly. “So you all have things to do, but Lana doesn’t? Your job is a job, but does Lana not have a job? If she doesn’t work, she won’t have any money. Are you going to give her money to spend?” When she said that, everyone else fell silent.

Although they weren’t a wealthy family, they lacked for nothing, they had everything they needed.

But the idea of setting aside money to support a Alana felt like a knife to the heart.

In their eyes, Alana was nothing more than a burden abandoned by her parents, a girl they’d rejected, openly. Her mother wasn’t even directly their sibling. She was a cousin who lived close to Grandma.

Their grandmother couldn’t bear to see her alone and helpless, so she insisted on taking her home to raise her.

And she’d raised her all the way to this age.

Though the old woman treated Alana as her own and warned them to treat her as family, she was practically like a stranger to them.

Now that her grandmother had broken her arm, it’s only natural for her to stay and take care of her.

After all, caring for a person in their seventies or eighties was a huge hassle, and no one wanted to be stuck with that burden.

Seeing the tension in the air, Alana quickly stepped in to smooth things over.

“Grandma, please don’t say anything for now. You just had surgery; you need to rest properly.”

Seeing her grandmother so frail yet still getting so upset, she felt a pang of sympathy.

Grandma's tone softened slightly.

"You're the only one who cares about me, Lana. You may not be my granddaughter directly, but you're dearer to me than my own!"

Everyone present knew exactly what she was referring to.

The old woman was indeed partial to Alana, she favored her far more than her own grandchildren.

Given the extent of this favoritism, she might even be included in the will.

Her uncle's wife suddenly spoke up, "Alana, you're getting older. Shouldn't you start looking for a boyfriend and get married soon? I have plenty of eligible bachelors around here. Why don't you just stay here instead of going back? Find someone you like and get married right away. Otherwise, once you get old, you won't have any luck finding a partner."

Her aunt chimed in, mentioning that so-and-so, her neighbor, was currently on a blind date.

"He's not that old, around thirty. He's a programmer with a car and a house, and he makes over ten thousand a month. He's in high demand. Why don't we set up a time for you two to meet?"

Alana declined, "No, thanks. I don't do blind dates."

Her uncle's wife couldn't help but urge her, "You're already twenty-two. Almost twenty-three. The girl next door, who's the same age as you, already has a son who's two years old. She lives the good life, staying home every day to take care of the baby and look after her in-laws. She doesn't have to work so hard. How easy is that?"

"Unlike you, you're still drifting around, working so hard. Why not just find someone to marry, let your husband support you, and settle down already!"

Alana blinked.

Get married, have kids, and become a full-time housewife?!

To her, that didn't sound like a life of luxury, it sounded like a life of suffering.

Grandma frowned. "What do you mean, 'get married'? And why are you age-shaming someone this young? She's only twenty-two and had just graduated from college, why should she get married so soon?! She has her own dreams to chase."

“There’s no rush to get married. Good men are hard to come by these days. She needs to look carefully and choose wisely, we can’t end up with another scumbag like her father, who not only cheated on his wife but also abandoned his family.”

Her uncle’s wife said, “I’m just helping her pick one out. Mom, don’t worry, the guys I know are all people I’ve thoroughly vetted. They’re top-notch; I guarantee there won’t be any mistakes!”

Grandma frowned and said, “You should ask Lana’s opinion on this. Don’t make decisions for her. You’re just taking advantage of the fact that she has no one around to protect her.”

To be honest, she was getting older and hoped to see someone by Alana’s side who could keep her company and take care of her.

Her uncle’s wife immediately said, “I’m asking her right now, Lana, why don’t you stay and get to know a few of the men I know? What do you think?”

Alana paused for a moment, then replied politely, “Auntie, thank you for your concern, but I really don’t need that.”

Her uncle’s was a bit annoyed, upset that Alana didn’t appreciate her kindness.

“Oh, come on! I’m concerned about your future marriage, I’m worried you won’t be able to get married later on, so I’m introducing you to some great men. Why aren’t you being more cooperative?”

Alana replied calmly, “Right now, I feel my career is more important. I’d like to put matters of marriage on hold for the time being.”

After a brief pause, she added, “Besides, I’m already seeing someone, so there’s no need for you to worry so much.”

Everyone was taken aback. They never expected that Alana’s return would bring such shocking news.

Her grandmother immediately asked, “You really have a boyfriend?”

Alana nodded. “Yes, we’ve only been dating for a few days.”

Her grandmother asked, “Where is he from?”

“He’s from the city.”

“What does he look like? How old is he?”

“He’s pretty handsome, and he’s twenty-eight.”

“What does he do for a living? How many people are in his family?”

Alana was at a loss for words.

She didn’t exactly know what Stephab did for a living; she only knew he wasn’t short on money.

As for his family background, she hadn’t even asked about that.

Alana bit her lip and said, “Grandma, we just started dating. I don’t know that much about him yet.”

Grandma frowned, thinking her granddaughter was too naive.

“Silly girl, you’re already dating him and you haven’t even figured out who he really is? Aren’t you afraid of being deceived?”

Alana bit her lip. “He’s a really nice person. He wouldn’t deceive me.”

It was she, however, who had yet to be honest with him about her family situation. Because she didn’t dare to be honest herself, she didn’t dare to ask him about his either. Her grandmother couldn’t help but ask,

“Do you have a photo of him? Let me see it, I know a thing or two about reading faces.”

Alana swallowed.

She didn’t have a photo of him, she hadn’t even taken one on purpose.

No, wait, she remembered. There were indeed photos of him on her phone.

But those were the abs photos he’d sent her, the kind that made her nose bleed just looking at them. There was no way she could show those to Grandma.

So, blushing, Alana said, “Not yet. I’ll take one for you when I get back.”

Not seeing the photos, Grandma felt a little disappointed, but after thinking about it, she realized her granddaughter was all grown up, and it was only natural for her to be dating.

She was getting on in years, so it was not really her place to interfere, but she could only advise, “Get to know him well. If you feel he’s lacking in any department or makes you uncomfortable, break it off right away.”

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Chapter 166 Might consider

Chapter 166 Might consider

“If you think he’s a good person and his family is decent, you might consider marrying him.”

Alana nodded.

But deep down, she felt she couldn’t spend the rest of her life married to him. She didn’t want to get greedy and wish for that.

Right now, she just wanted to date him and see how things went for a while.

As for marriage, there were just too many things to consider; she didn’t dare to think about it.

Her aunt-in-law wasn’t keen on Alana marrying someone from too far away.

“Lana, your boyfriend lives too far away. Why not break up with him and find someone here in our little county town?”

“If you’re close by, your families can help each other out. If you marry so far away, if anything happens, help from afar won’t be enough to put out a fire nearby!”

Alana replied, “Auntie, I’ve only just started dating. I haven’t thought about marriage yet.”

They didn’t even know she had dated Cole in college. Well, she wanted them to think this was her first relationship. After all, things with Cole had ended badly.

To think she even dreamt of marrying Cole. That was why she couldn’t bring herself to want more with Stephan.

She didn’t want her expectations to get crushed again.

Her uncle’s wife said, “Oh, I’m just worried you’ll waste your prime years. Why not come back home and find a man to marry? Do you really have to look so far away? Besides, is

that guy you're seeing reliable? What if he doesn't have a job or any income source? Being with him would just be a waste of your youth. You might as well listen to me, break up with him, and find someone reliable, wealthy, and with a stable income, it's better than just picking someone random out there!"

Alana said, "I think he's pretty great."

Her aunt-in-law snapped, "What good does it do that you think he's nice? No matter how nice he is, how could he compare to someone your family picks out for you? It's your family who has your best interests at heart. They're sincere with you and wouldn't joke around with your lifelong marriage!"

Alana frowned, not knowing what to say.

She was sick and tired of this excuse that they were doing it for her own good.

But every time she tried to argue back, her uncle's wife always had a reason to shoot her down.

Their views were too different; no matter how much she argued, no one would see her side.

She decided not to say anything.

Grandma interrupted, "All right, let's not talk about this anymore. I'm tired; let me get some rest."

As soon as Grandma mentioned resting, the others promptly found excuses to leave.

In the end, only Alana remained to keep her company.

Grandma couldn't help but mutter;

"What a bunch of ungrateful brats. I raised them for nothing."

Alana sighed. "Grandma, please be careful from now on. You're getting older; you shouldn't be working in the fields like that anymore."

Grandma snapped, "It's not like I want to! If I don't work, do you think those ungrateful brats will take care of me in my old age? Just look at them, the moment something happened to me, they just called you back and that was it. Every single one of them made up their own excuses and ignored me!"

"And your mother's no better. She abandoned you over a decade ago and hasn't come back to see me or you even once. Not a single word from her all these years, someone who didn't know might think she'd died out there!"

As she spoke, Grandma's eyes welled up with tears.

Back when Alana's mother abandoned her and left, Grandma had a huge fight with her.

She told her, "If you abandon Alana, you'll never be allowed to set foot in this house again."

Little did she know that once she left, she wouldn't return for nearly fifteen years.

A full fifteen years, not a single word.

They didn't even know if she was still alive.

Alana said nothing, but simply handed her grandmother a tissue and gently wiped away her tears.

"Grandma, wipe your tears."

Seeing how obedient and thoughtful Alana was, Grandma's heart ached even more, and her tears flowed even more freely.

"Oh, Lana, you've really had it rough."

How could they have had the heart to abandon such a good child?

Alana gave a faint smile. "It's not hard. Having Grandma to love me is enough though."

Grandma sighed. But she was getting old; she couldn't keep doting on her granddaughter forever.

Who knows, one day, she might just kick the bucket and leave this world...

Alana stayed with her grandmother for a long time. Only after her grandmother grew tired and fell asleep did she have a chance to go out to a restaurant and order a bowl of spicy noodles for herself.

While eating her noodles, she noticed some unanswered messages on her phone and replied to them one by one.

Stephan asked her how her grandmother was doing.

Alana replied.

[She's doing okay, but she just had a minor surgery and is feeling a bit weak.]

Stephan asked again.

[Do you need my help? Should I arrange for an orthopedic doctor to take a look?]

After a brief pause, fearing Alana might think it was an inconvenience, he added,

[My mom is a doctor; she knows some well-known orthopedic specialists who might be able to help your grandmother.]

Alana smiled. [No need. The doctors here are sufficient.]

Stephan chuckled, [Alright, but if you ever need help, just let me know. Your boyfriend is always on standby.]

Alana felt a warm glow in her heart and couldn't help but compliment him. [What a great boyfriend I have]

Attached was a cute little bunny emoji.

To Stephan, it looked absolutely adorable. The corners of his mouth curled upward involuntarily; that single compliment, "Great boyfriend," made him feel absolutely elated inside.

[If you think your boyfriend is so great, then hurry up and marry him, get added to his household registry, and enjoy his greatness for life]

Alana's eyelashes fluttered.

Marry him?

How can something like that come true?

After just a little over ten days of knowing him, she already felt he was out of her league. Besides, she didn't plan on getting married anymore, so she couldn't make any promises to him.

[I need to go back to the hospital to see my grandmother. That's all for now. Let's talk again when I have time.]

Stephan pouted.

She didn't answer his question directly.

Something was up!

But no rush. No matter how big the problem, he's always managed to overcome it.

This minor issue will be resolved in due time.

[Don't overwork yourself. Make sure to get some rest.]

Alana's eyes stung slightly.

Thinking about how she'd rushed back after a long, tiring journey, not a single person had truly asked if she was tired from the trip or if she needed to rest.

Except for Grandma.

But now, it seemed there was one more person who truly cared about her.

After finishing her noodles, Alana packed up a bowl of light meat congee to take home.

Suddenly, her phone rang.

She picked up her phone and saw it was Cole calling.

She frowned slightly, thought for a moment, and decided to answer.

As soon as she answered, Cole asked with concern, "Lana, how is your grandmother doing?"

She paused for a moment before speaking, "It's not looking good. She might have to stay in the hospital for about two weeks."

Cole frowned. "In that case, then you..."

Alana couldn't help but ask, "Manager Cole, could I take a couple more days off? I'd like to stay a few more days to take care of my grandmother."

Cole paused for a moment. "Sure."

Alana replied politely, "Thank you."

Hearing her polite response, Cole couldn't help but sigh. "There's no need to be so formal between us. Lana, I genuinely want to help you. If there's anything you need, just let me know. I'll do whatever I can."

Alana pressed her lips together, unsure what to say, and simply nodded.

A brief silence fell.

Neither of them knew how to end or continue the conversation.

Alana was the first to break the silence. “Manager Cole I have to go. I’ll hang up now.”

Cole furrowed his brow. “Lana, we’re not at the office right now. Don’t keep calling me ‘Manager Cole. Can you just call me Cole or Coco?”

Alana lowered her eyes. Remembering that he had just agreed to approve her leave, she gave a faint “Mm-hmm” and said, “Goodbye.”

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Chapter 167 I miss you

Chapter 167 I miss you

After hanging up, she picked up the takeout container of congee and headed back to the hospital.

When she arrived at the hospital, her grandmother had just woken up from a nap.

Alana took the opportunity to feed her the porridge.

After feeding her, she boiled some water and wiped her grandmother’s body down.

The elderly woman was frail, and with her arm injured, Alana had to tend to her with the utmost care, afraid of accidentally bumping into her.

Alana tended to her with the utmost care throughout the entire process; no one helped her.

By the time she was done, she was covered in a sticky layer of sweat.

Her grandmother felt sorry for her. “Silly girl, it’s getting late. Go home, take a shower, and get some rest! You’ve been busy all day.”

Alana asked, “If I go home, who will take care of you tonight?”

Grandma replied earnestly, “I’ll just call your uncle or aunt to come over and keep me company. You shouldn’t be doing everything yourself, this is their job. If you ask me, you shouldn’t have come back at all. The moment you arrived, they felt

perfectly justified in asking you to take care of me. Look at it, it’s been so long, and not a single one of them has shown their face.”

“But they said Grandma was seriously injured and nearly died. I was so afraid something bad happened to you, how could I not come back to see you? Until I see with my own eyes that you’re okay, I just can’t rest easy. I can’t focus on my work either.”

“You...” Grandma was deeply moved by what she heard, and her heart felt warm.

That silly child, all the love I’ve poured into her hasn’t been in vain.

“Sweetie, go home first, take a shower, change your clothes, and get some rest. I’ll call your uncle and aunt right now.”

But when Grandma called them, they came up with all sorts of excuses about not having time.

Things like having to help the kids with homework or working late that night. It made Grandma so angry she almost let slip a curse word.

Alana had even taken a few days off work and traveled all this way to visit her.

Yet her own sons and daughters wouldn’t even take a day off; one after another, they just made excuses to deliberately avoid looking after her.

She’d raised a bunch of ungrateful brats, forget about having them look after her in her old age; they were more like parasites living off her.

Finally, Grandma took a hard line: “Fine, if you won’t come take care of me, then when I die, the house back home and all the savings I’ve kept for years, I’ll leave it all to Alana!”

As soon as those words were out, her aunts and uncles all rushed to volunteer to come and keep her company.

Once money was involved, they were all over her.

After all, if Grandma’s house back home were sold, it would fetch well over a hundred thousand dollars. And her years of savings, her savings could be much as well.

They couldn’t possibly let all that go to Alana, an outsider.

Once her aunts and uncles agreed to come take care of Grandma, Alana finally felt at ease enough to find a place to shower and rest.

She didn't return to the house in her hometown but instead checked into a nearby hotel. She took a shower and changed into a clean set of clothes.

Overcome by exhaustion and drowsiness, she let her body sink deeply into the bedding.

While Alana was so exhausted, she fell asleep the moment her head hit the pillow, Stephan was having a rough time.

Without his sweet, soft girlfriend to warm the bed and let him hold and kiss her, he tossed and turned, unable to sleep.

His mind was filled with images of holding Alana in his arms, coaxing her, and tempting her to let him kiss her over and over again.

First her lips, then her face, followed by her neck, her chest...

He didn't want to miss a single spot.

She was so fragrant and soft, her whole body smelling so sweet it nearly intoxicated him; he couldn't get enough of her.

And the scent on her wasn't that of artificial perfume; it was a natural body fragrance, subtle, unique, and incredibly pleasant.

As he kissed her, she was shy and coy, pushing him away with her weak, limp hands. But soon, unable to resist, she wrapped her arms around his neck, soft and delicate.

Stephan's breathing grew ragged; his eyes burned with a fiery red as he struggled to restrain himself.

Finally, unable to bear it any longer, he got up and went to the closed balcony to take down the girl's panties hanging there.

Finally, he lay back down on the bed, his long, slender fingers clenching her panties tightly as his chest rose and fell...

Alana slept soundly at the hotel until dawn, feeling completely refreshed.

After a quick wash and a bit of freshening up, she picked up her phone and saw that Stephan had sent her a message first thing in the morning.

[Daily workout.]

He had dutifully sent a photo of his abs.

It made Alana blush bright red first thing in the morning.

With a photo like that, she couldn't possibly show it to her grandmother. She'd wait until she got back and find a time to take a nice photo for him.

Alana replied.

[I just woke up.]

The man replied quickly, [Hmm, you didn't sleep in my arms last night. Did you sleep well?]

Alana didn't catch the hidden meaning in his words and answered honestly.

[It was okay. I stayed at a hotel and slept soundly until morning.]

There were too many people back home, and it was all too lively; it wasn't convenient for her to go back.

It was much quieter staying alone in a hotel. Stephan felt a pang of jealousy. So last night, he was the only one tossing and turning, unable to sleep.

Even jerking off to her panties didn't help.

In the end, he had to go to the gym and worked out for over two hours.

He snorted lightly.

[I couldn't sleep last night.]

Alana blinked innocently and asked, [Why?]

Stephan: [I couldn't sleep without you holding me.]

Alana's heart skipped a beat, and her cheeks flushed again.

Oh my, what kind of boyfriend starts being so cheeky first thing in the morning?

She teased him on purpose, [Is that for real?]

Stephan: [It's true. If you don't believe me, come back and keep an eye on me.]

Alana thought for a moment before replying, [I won't be back for a few days. Grandma isn't doing well; she needs to stay in the hospital for observation for about two weeks, so I'll probably stay here to take care of her for a week more.]

Whether it was a week or not depended on whether the company approved her leave. Initially, she'd requested three days off, not including the weekend.

But given the current situation, she might need to extend it.

Stephan's eyes darkened.

The sky was falling, and he'd have to spend a week alone in an empty room.

How was he supposed to handle this?

His fingers twitched as he reminded her, [We agreed on three times a week.]

Alana blushed again.

Ah!

How could he still be thinking about that?!

What kind of dirty thoughts were filling his head!

She gritted her teeth, [I'll make it up to you when I get back!!!]

Stephan curved his lips, looking at the three exclamation marks the girl had sent.

He could imagine just how tensed and adorable her expression must be.

[Alright, I'll keep that in mind.]

Alana puffed out her cheeks. [I'm going to grab breakfast. Talk to you later.]

Stephan: [Mm, remember to miss me.]

Alana: [What about you?]

Stephan: [I miss you already, every single moment.]

Alana's ears were burning.

That old man sure knew how to flirt.

He was making her heart flutter with sweetness. Perhaps his passion had rubbed off on her, because she replied,

Alana: [I miss you, so, so much.]

Stephan looked at the girl's reply, his heart burning.

What was that feeling?

It was as if, even though they were a million miles apart, they were still pressed tightly together, feeling each other's warmth, that searing, burning sensation.

He wanted to hold her in his arms, to kiss her.

Alana arrived at the hospital and found her grandmother alone in the ward. Her aunt and uncle's wife were nowhere to be found.

Alana held the freshly packed porridge and asked with a frown, "Grandma, where are Auntie and uncle's wife?"

Her grandmother looked troubled. "They went back early this morning."

"I told them to stay and take care of me so you could go back to work with peace of mind, but they ran off faster than rabbits."

Alana pressed her lips together and said nothing.

"Grandma, you haven't had breakfast yet, have you? I bought you some congee."

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Chapter 168 For a long moment

Chapter 168 For a long moment

Grandma sighed. “Ah, my granddaughter is the only one who cares about me enough to buy me breakfast. Those two? They’d love to see me die in my bed.”

Alana’s face paled, and she said anxiously, “Grandma, don’t say that, you’re going to live to be a hundred!”

Grandma was comforted. “All right, all right. I’ll live to be a hundred. You’re the only one who wants me to live a long life.”

For the next few days and nights, Alana cared for her grandmother nonstop.

She handled everything on her own, feeding her, washing her, and taking care of her bodily needs.

She even stayed up at night to keep vigil and care for her grandmother.

The other relatives either didn’t come at all, or they’d drop by for just a quick look before leaving.

Anyway, since Alana was taking care of her, they felt completely at ease.

Alana had been pulling all-nighters to care for her grandmother; she wasn’t getting enough rest or eating properly, and she’d lost a lot of weight.

Grandma watched her with a heavy heart. “Oh, Lana, you must go home. Don’t worry about this old woman! If you keep looking after this old woman, they’ll feel even more justified in letting you take care of me!”

“Go book a flight home right now. I don’t believe they’ll just abandon me!”

Alana’s eyes were red, with visible bloodshot veins.

“Grandma, I’ve already taken more than a week off work. Since I’ve already requested the time off, I can’t just cancel it. Let me take care of you for this week, and we’ll see what happens after that.”

Grandma sighed deeply. “Oh, you stubborn girl, you’re even more stubborn than a mule!”

Alana gently smoothed out Grandma’s blanket. “Grandma, don’t worry so much. Just rest up. Only when you’re feeling better will everyone feel at ease.”

Grandma couldn't help but sigh, "Lana, you're so sweet and sensible, you deserve a wonderful man! Remember, when you're looking for a man, you have to keep your eyes wide open. Don't be like your mom, the one she ended up with was a good-for-nothing."

"When you look at a man, it's not just about his looks. What's more important is his character, his inner qualities, and his values, see if he treats you well and if he's truly devoted..."

Alana listened patiently to her grandmother's endless chatter and smiled. "Okay, I'll remember that."

That evening.

Once Alana saw that her grandmother had fallen asleep, she quietly slipped into the bathroom and called Stephan for a long chat.

The young couple hadn't seen each other in nearly a week, and they were both thinking of each other constantly.

So the man's first words were:

"Lana, I miss you."

Hearing the man's deep, husky voice on the other end of the line, Alana couldn't help but feel a lump in her throat; her longing for him had reached its peak. "Me too."

Stephan lowered his voice. "Want to video chat? I want to see you."

Alana bit her lip. "I'm in the bathroom..."

Stephan coaxed her softly, "It doesn't matter where you are. I just want to see you."

Alana's heart softened, and she nodded.

He quickly sent a video call invitation.

Alana tapped "Accept."

The phone screen flickered, revealing the man's chiseled, handsome face.

His sharp, chiseled features, deep-set eyes, and high, straight nose immediately caught her attention.

Alana stared at him, momentarily at a loss for words.

It felt as though she hadn't seen him in ages, evoking a familiar yet unfamiliar sense of nervousness.

Even though they texted and talked on the phone almost every day, this was their first time video chatting.

So it was inevitable that they'd feel a little awkward.

Stephan, however, didn't feel that way. As Alana looked at him, he was looking at her too, his eyes deep and intense.

He stared at her fair, beautiful face, his thin lips parting slightly. "Lana, you look thinner."

Alana bit her lip. "Really?"

Stephan replied, "Yes, your jawline has become sharper. Have you been so busy taking care of Grandma that you haven't been eating properly?" Hearing the concern in his voice, Alana's nose stung again. "No, I've been eating on time."

Stephan furrowed his brow, his eyes betraying his concern. "If you're eating on time and still losing weight, then you must not be getting enough rest. Look at your eyes, they're very red, with obvious bloodshot veins."

Alana took a closer look at her reflection on the screen; her eyes did seem a little red. She couldn't help but reach up and rub them, they turned even redder and felt damp. Still, she reassured the man on the screen, "It's just a little redness. It's nothing. I'm not tired."

Stephan had eyes of his own; he didn't believe a word of her nonsense.

"Have you been taking care of your grandmother all this time? What about your grandmother's children? Don't they take care of her?"

Alana said, "They're all busy; they haven't had much time to come over and take care of her."

Stephan laughed bitterly. "So, they just let you handle it all on your own?"

Alana spoke softly, "It's fine. Don't worry."

"I'm only taking a week off. I'll be back in a couple of days, so it's no big deal if I look after Grandma for a couple more days."

Besides, her grandmother had raised her all her life. She wouldn't mind taking care of her for a week, or even for the rest of her life.

Stephan frowned deeply. “But I’m worried about you. I can’t stand seeing you so exhausted.”

As soon as Alana heard this, her heart felt as if it had been struck hard, and a stinging mist gradually welled up in her eyes.

For so many days, she had cared for her grandmother day and night, not daring to let her guard down for a moment, her body tense to the point of exhaustion.

She had built herself up into an impenetrable fortress, impervious to any hardship.

Even when she was exhausted, she never admitted it; she only pushed herself to be stronger, just a little stronger.

She’d just tough it out.

But the man’s single expression of concern instantly brought down all her defenses. No matter how strong she pretended to be, deep down, she was still fragile.

She bit her lip hard, trying to stop the tears from falling.

But now, her tears spill out like pearls on a broken string.

One after another, they slid down the corners of her eyes.

Afraid that Stephan would see, she quickly turned the camera away, not wanting him to witness her in such a vulnerable state.

Seeing the camera suddenly shift direction, Stephan frowned deeply, his heart filled with silent anxiety.

“Alana!”

Alana took a deep breath and slowly exhaled.

She fought desperately against the overwhelming wave of pain and heartache.

In the mirror above the sink, the girl’s eyes were already red from crying. Her fingers trembled slightly as she clutched her phone, holding back her emotions and

trying to steady her breathing.

“I’m fine. I’m okay.”

“It’s getting a bit noisy here. I don’t want to wake Grandma. Let’s leave it at that for now. We’ll talk properly when I get back.”

Without giving the man a chance to reply, the girl hurriedly ended the video call.

Stephan saw the call suddenly cut off, and his expression darkened slightly.

After hanging up, Alana couldn't help but cover her lips, which were trembling slightly. Her shoulders trembled violently as she struggled to contain the surging emotions within her.

What was going on?

How pathetic of me?

How could she suddenly lose control of her emotions in front of Stephan?

She had been pretending so well up until now. But his single expression of concern had caught her off guard, and in an instant.

How could someone suddenly lose control like this?

How embarrassing.

He wasn't going to laugh at her, was he?

Alana stayed in the bathroom for a long time.

She washed her face over and over again, only stepping out once the redness in her eyes had somewhat faded.

As she emerged, she saw a dark figure darting out of the ward.

"Who was that?" Alana rushed out in a panic, but by the time she stepped out of the ward, the figure was already gone.

She stood there, stunned, for a long moment.

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Chapter 169 Blink of an eye

Chapter 169 Blink of an eye

Alana wondered if she'd been seeing things, if her mind had played tricks on her. How else could the person have vanished in the blink of an eye?

Could it be that she had just been crying, causing her to hallucinate?

Alana turned back and saw her grandmother still sleeping soundly in bed, completely undisturbed.

If someone had come in, who could it have been?

Who would come in on the sly?

Alana couldn't figure it out, but she guessed she might have seen things, so she went back into the ward and closed the door again.

Little did she know that as she entered the room, a woman's figure was gradually emerging from the corner.

The woman's eyes stung with emotion. "It's Lana...it really is her..."

But she no longer had the courage to face this child.

The next day arrived.

No one knew what Grandma had told her uncle's wife and aunt, but they showed up early in the morning, each carrying bowls of cooked porridge and fruit.

The two of them scrambled to feed Grandma the porridge, their attitudes overly eager and fawning.

"Mom, drink mine!"

"I made this bone broth congee for you myself, it's made with marrow bones and smells amazing!"

"Mom, mine is chicken congee. I went to the market this morning, picked out an old hen, slaughtered it, and cooked this congee just for you. It's guaranteed to nourish your body!" Just a few days ago, they were pushing each other aside, unwilling to take care of Grandma, but today they've suddenly changed their tune?

Grandma's expression wasn't exactly pleased. "The moment the word 'inheritance' comes up, you two get all excited. You're just putting on a show for me. Why weren't you this attentive to me before?"

Last night, she had secretly called them and told them that whoever took care of her while she was injured, and did so well and often, would get a larger share of the inheritance.

As a result, the very next day, these people were already scrambling to curry favor with her.

A look of guilt flashed across the faces of the women.

"Mom, how could you think that? We're all family, isn't it only natural for us to be good to you?"

"Exactly! We'll take care of you from now on. We promise to get you back to full health!"

Grandma snorted coldly, not bothering to respond to the two of them.

She turned to Alana. "Lana, you've stayed here long enough. Go back to work. Your aunt-in-law and your aunt will take care of you for the time being."

The women both chimed in.

"That's right, that's right. We'll take care of your Grandma!"

"Go back now, you'd better pack your things and head home today!"

But deep down what they were considering was that Alana had already been staying here to take care of the old lady for a week. If she stays any longer, won't she end up snatching an extra share of the inheritance that belongs to them.

They certainly wouldn't allow that!

Alana hesitated. "Grandma..."

Grandma waved her hand impatiently.

"Go home now. Seeing you neglecting yourself to take care of me makes me sad."

Alana bit her lip, a faint sting welling up in her eyes.

She knew Grandma was all bark and no bite; she must have been worried Alana was tired, which was why she was sending her away.

"Grandma, I'll go home then. I'll come back to see you again in a while."

Grandma nodded, holding back the pain of parting, and said, “All right, go home!”

“I’ll miss you, Grandma.”

Alana’s eyes were red. She turned her head away, looking a bit flustered, wiped away a tear, and then solemnly bid farewell to her grandmother, her aunt, and uncle’s wife before leaving.

As she left the hospital room, she inadvertently brushed past a figure.

Alana didn’t pause.

It was that figure, however, who suddenly stopped in her tracks and watched Alana for a long time.

Even after Alana had stepped into the elevator, the figure remained frozen in place for a long time.

The woman wore a white hat and sunglasses, and a mask covered half her face, her face was almost completely concealed.

Only after Alana had disappeared did she look away.

Suddenly, her uncle’s wife, Miranda, stepped out of the hospital room and spotted the elegantly poised woman standing outside.

She immediately grew wary and rushed over to the woman. “What are you doing here?”

The woman replied, “Mom’s in the hospital; of course I had to come see her.”

Miranda scoffed “Oh, come on! You’ve already paid off all the medical bills, why are you even here? I told you, we’ll take good care of her!”

The woman pursed her lips and asked, “Was that Alana just now?”

Miranda gave a low cough. “What’s the matter? Can’t you even recognize your own daughter anymore?”

A faint pang of bitterness washed over the woman.

How could she not recognize her...

It’s just that she didn’t dare to acknowledge her, she was afraid to.

After all, she had been so heartless when she abandoned the child back then.

She would never, ever forget the look in Alana's eyes when she abandoned her as a little child, she was so bewildered, so shocked, so sad, so desperate.

Every time she thought back on it, her heart ached so much it felt like she couldn't breathe.

She bit her lip, holding back her tears, unzipped her Louis Vuitton bag, and took out a bank card.

"Miranda, there's 100,000 dollars on this card, you can keep 80k in any case the hospital or Grandma needs anymore. Ten thousand is for your trouble in helping to take care of her, and the other ten thousand, please pass that on to Alana for me."

As soon as Miranda saw it, her eyes lit up. She quickly took the card and clutched it tightly in her hand.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure to give it to Lana! We're all family. Every time you give us money, we always made sure to pass it on to her!"

"Just look at her, we've raised her to be so pretty and flawless! I haven't even raised my own daughter as good as I've raised her!"

The woman took Miranda's hand, overflowing with gratitude. "Thank you, thank you, Miranda, for taking care of her."

Miranda smiled nervously.

She dared not admit that not a single penny of the money this woman had given her over the years had ever gone to Alana, instead, it had all ended up in her own pocket.

The clothes, shoes, and handbags Alana wore were all hand-me-downs from her own daughter.

But this woman didn't dare to come forward and acknowledge Alana, so she'd never discover how poorly their family treated her.

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Chapter 170 Making her laugh

Chapter 170 Making her laugh

Alana had texted Stephan to let him know that she was flying back. She also texted him the time of her flight and assured him that as soon as she landed, she would come over to his place.

He had been ecstatic, filled with lots of dancing emojis making her laugh.

But what she didn't expect was to find him waiting for her at the airport, holding a bouquet of flowers.

Alana blushed. It was a particularly cold day and seeing him standing there, clad on a knee-length jacket with a scarf wrapped around his neck but still smiling and waving at her made her feel so blessed to have him.

Smiling, she hurried up to him, he ran to. Both running to each other and hugging each other tightly as if they had been separated for years.

"Why aren't you wearing a sweater?" He asked, holding her in his arms.

"I didn't know the weather was this cold here." She replied.

Quickly, he took off his jacket and made her wear her.

"Stephan..."

Before she could even say anything, he took off his scarf as well and wrapped it around her neck.

Now he was only dressed in white long sleeves and black pants.

"You might catch a cold." She let out, concerned.

"Well, that would be more bearable than you catching a cold."

His words brought tears to her eyes.

Why did he care about her so much?

She wasn't used to this kind of treatment.

Stephan quickly cupped her cheeks.

"What is it? Is your Grandma's condition still bad? Do you want to go back? I'd go with you this time?"

She shook her head. “No...I just...I miss you so much and I don’t want you to catch a cold.”

He chuckled. “I missed you too. Let’s hurry to the car then.” He suggested, grabbing her luggage with one hand and holding her hand with the other.

When they got his house, she discovered that he had spent all morning cooking for her.

She was all smiles as he served her and urged her to eat a lot.

Oh, she loved how he treated her.

After eating, she stood up to do the dishes, but he wouldn’t let her.

“You should get some rest.” He suggested.

“But I’m not tired.” She whined.

He grimaced as he stared at her. “So you’re not tired, huh.”

She knew what he meant by that. Oh this rascal.

But right now, she wanted to feel his skin against hers.

Her eyes twinkled as red splotches bloomed in her cheeks.

“Yes, I’m not,” she purred softly as he backed her toward the desk and she coiled one leg around his calf.

“I guess we get started to feeding our bodies as well,” he whispered before he dipped his head to capture her lips in a long sensual kiss. The urgency in his body belied the slow languorous kiss as he leisurely explored her mouth. Sliding his tongue between her lips, he sipped from the sweet nectar of her mouth as his tongue stroked against hers and he gave himself over to the pleasure of melding his mouth to hers.

He tried to take things slow, but apparently being away for a week had increased the hunger they both felt for each other. He was just as impatient as she tore at his clothes. She managed to rip his shirt apart, before he once again seized control.

Flipping her onto her stomach, he bent her over her table. Leaning his body over her, he whispered against her ear.

“If you wanted me that badly all you had to do was say so. There are far quicker ways to get what you want.”

He pressed the bulge of his erection against her ass and he delighted in the shudder that coursed through her body.

Rendering her naked happened in a matter of seconds.

With deft fingers, he unzipped his pants and eased his aching cock into his hand. Holding the turgid length in his palm, he pumped lightly as he slid the fingers of his other hand through the moist folds of her glistening sex. Without warning he shoved his middle finger inside her and stroked it back and forth, eliciting a sharp gasp from her lips.

He slowly eased his digit from her creamy center, his finger coming away stained with her juices. He wasted no time in replacing the length of his finger, with something far larger and more solid.

Gripping her full hips in his hand, he nudged at the dripping wet slit of her sex, stretching her slowly as he plowed inside her.

She moaned beneath him as she tried to rock her hips backwards, to take her deeper.

“You want this?” He whispered hotly as he held himself still.

“Yes, please, please.” she begged as she twisted around to meet his lust filled gaze.

Neither of them broke eye contact, when he surged forward, feeding her all of his length on one single hard thrust.

Simultaneous groans rumbled from inside both of them, as their bodies fit together perfectly. Already he could feel his balls tightening as the muscles in her cunt squeezed around him. He knew neither one of them was going to last long as he stroked inside her on deep, hard thrusts.

He kept that pace for just a few seconds, before she reached out across the table to grasp the other end. When she lifted onto her toes, sending him tunneling just that extra inch deeper, he lost it.

Palming her ass, he slammed his hard length into her at the same time he jerked her body back against him. His rhythm was frenzied as he fucked her with wild, primal thrusts.

“Ahh...ahhh,” Alana shouted as her knuckles turned red from her death grip on the table. There was nothing gentle about the pulsing rhythm of their bodies as they gave in to the demands of their desire.

He knew the moment her orgasm hit her, because he thought he would die when her cunt clamped around him so tightly that it was a struggle just to move an inch within her wet center. Then hot, searing cream gushed out to coat his dick, and trickle down to his balls.

Somewhere in the distance he heard her scream a number of expletives mixed in with his name, but as the blood pounded violently in his ear, he was basically deaf as his own climax ripped through him.

He slammed into her over and over again, his pace frantic as the slapping of his balls against her skin echoed in the dining room. It felt as if he thrust inside her a hundred times, but he knew it was just four strokes, before pleasure roared through him and he exploded deep into her waiting cunt, his warm, milky seed spurting forth to drench her inner walls with his semen.

He came for a long time as he dug his nails into the soft flesh of her hips, while their combined juices slowly trickled down her inner thighs.

With achingly slow movements, he pulled his softening length from inside her as he rested against her, struggling to drag in an even breath.

But this was just the beginning.

Getting his strength back, he gathered her into his arms and headed for his bedroom. He had to take his time tonight, worshiping this woman he had missed so much.

He wasn't sure he could bear being separated from her for a week again.

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Chapter 171 At peace

Chapter 171 At peace

As Stephan lowered her onto the bed, he growled, in a hot husky voice.

“I missed you so much. I missed the taste of you on my lips, your unique scent. And the tight feel of your pussy wrapped around my fingers.”

A dark flush spread across her face as she puckered her lips into a tiny “oh” but then he pushed the tip of his dick inside her and her expression took on an entirely different meaning altogether.

He was done with talking. They would talk later. Right now he was more interested in claiming her again making up for the one week they had been apart.

A week that had felt like a month.

He held her legs wide as he pressed forward slowly. She was still wet from before, in his cum and hers. He pressed forward until he was completely buried inside her, and the heavy weight of his balls rested against her soft flesh.

He pumped his hips slowly, as he gently worked his dick inside her until she began to stretch to accommodate him again. Yet even after she began to relax around him, he still had to squeeze his eyes shut tight and concentrate hard on not embarrassing himself because she still gripped him like a tight fist.

Although, he knew instinctively that no matter how many times he stroked his length inside her, she would always fit snugly around him because she had been made for him...and only him.

He picked up his pace and drove into her harder and faster, tunneling his engorged flesh deeper inside her. His balls slapped furiously against her skin as the sound of sweat slick skin smacking together echoed off the walls.

“Ahh...hmm.” She cried out beneath him as her hips matched the rhythm of his strokes, sending his cock thrusting deeper inside her until he swore he brushed against the back of her sheath.

More juice poured from her, drenching his dick in its wet warmth. He groaned as it seemed to seep through his skin causing his entire body to shiver with pleasure. He shifted higher up her body, pressing her knees closer to the mattress as he slammed into her tight, wet sheath with wild, frenzied strokes.

His powerful thrusts drove the headboard of the bed against the wall with each thrust, her inner walls closed in on him and he lost all thought as he fought back the urge to spurt inside her. She was so tight, so unbelievably wet and tight and he was close to losing it.

“Oh, shit, Lana. You have to stop before I come...”

“I can’t. Oh, God. Oh, Stephan. I’m coming. I’m comiiiiinnnggg!” She dug her nails into his shoulders and threw her hips at him as she slowly came undone around him.

Violent shudders racked her body as her orgasm hit her and she bucked wildly beneath him. He pounded his steel length inside her pussy, riding her hard through the endless throes of her climax. He was relentless in his driving need to brand her as his forever.

He draped her legs over his shoulders and cupped her ass with his hands, pummeling her cunt with his cock until the last tremors of her orgasm caused her cunt to clench around

him like a steel vise. It happened so suddenly that he was unprepared for it and before he realized what was happening he felt hot tingles of pleasure shoot from the tip of his dick straight to his balls and then he was coming.

He drove into her on one last powerful thrust, burying his cock inside her, balls deep. Seconds later, he roared out her name as jet after jet of milky white semen erupted from his dick to drench her tight walls with his seed.

“Lana! Fuck! Fuck!” He grunted loudly as he coated her sheath with his sperm until he felt as if he’d emptied his balls inside her.

He trembled above her as wave after wave of his climax crested and then broke inside him until finally he could not hold himself up and was forced to collapse on the bed beside her. Sweat beaded on his chest as he struggled to drag in normal breaths of air. When he finally was able to draw in an even breath he turned his head to face her.

She met his gaze with a tentative smile.

He turned over to tangle his hand in her hair and placed a single kiss against her sweat slick forehead.

“I thank the heavens everyday that you’re my woman.” He let out.

Alana smiled and tugged him toward her to press her lips firmly against his.

He groaned against her mouth as he pulled her up against him. Lying back down, he dragged her above him so that she could straddle his hips. Another ragged groan escaped his lips when the sheet fell away from her body, revealing the lush beauty of her figure.

She was being as active as he was tonight and he was glad. She must have really missed him enough.

If not, she should have been tired by now.

Stephan ran his hands along her hips, across her waist, to settle at her breasts where he cupped their heavy weight in his hand.

He stared, mesmerized by the beautiful jewels of her hardened nipples before he sat up to draw the stiff flesh between his lips.

“Stephan,” she rasped out as she gripped his head tightly. He feasted on her rosy tips as he moved between her ample breasts, lavishing them each with his undivided attention.

He could hear her breath coming in choppy pants and he finally lifted his head from her breasts to stare up at her. Their eyes met and his heart nearly stopped at the combination of fondness and lust that blazed in the depths of her eyes.

His hands shook as he once again settled them against her hips to shift her up his body.

“Get on him,” he growled out in a hoarse whisper.

She took his hardened flesh in her small hand and pumped gently. He sucked in a breath and closed his eyes as she worked her hand up and down his cock, stroking her thumb in the slit at the tip, to spread the droplets of precum that gathered there across the head.

He groaned low in his throat as she stroked his dick, harder and faster, tugging at the sensitive flesh. When she squeezed him tightly he nearly shot off the bed.

“Lana, ride me, now. I don’t think I’m going to last much longer this time,” he croaked out.

She didn’t hesitate. Moments later, he thought he was going to die a slow death when she slid down on him, taking him inside her firm walls so slowly that he thought he would come before he could get all the way inside her.

“Oh, God, Stephan,” she moaned out when she took the last inch of him inside her.

His chest heaved and his breathing became labored as he struggled to hold back his climax, when she began to bounce up and down on his cock, taking him inside her with rough strokes.

He held her hips as she slammed her cunt down on his hard length, the hot wet heat of her surrounding him like a warm, welcoming, tight cave, made just for him.

He groaned out her name when she quickened her pace. And he could tell she was close to coming as her thrusts down on his dick became wild and frantic.

He glanced up at her to see her head thrown back and her mouth open as she rode him at a frenzied pace.

He slid one hand behind her to cup her lush ass, while the other shot out between her legs to stroke her hardened clit.

“Stephan!” She screamed as she took him inside her with violent strokes. Her pussy began to pulse and vibrate around him and he fingered the tiny nub, harder and faster until hot, sticky wetness gushed out around his cock.

She cried out his name again as her orgasm roared through her. And when her pussy clamped around him like a balled fist, he was powerless to stop his own climax. On a loud grunt, he drove up into her with hard pounding thrusts, before he exploded deep inside her wet, tight warmth.

Pushing past her clenching muscles, he shuddered uncontrollably as he emptied his seed inside her spasming cunt.

Tremors continued to rack them both as she milked his cock with her warm pussy and jets of cum spurted deep inside her until they both had nothing left to give and she collapsed against his chest while he struggled to drag in a full breath of air.

He stroked her sweat soaked back for a long time until the sound of her even breathing reached his ears.

He glanced down into her face to see that she was now fast asleep. Then with them still locked tightly together, he too succumbed to a blissful sleep, feeling truly content and at peace in the arms of his woman.

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Chapter 172 Really weak

Chapter 172 Really weak

Stephan and Alana had agreed to stay home the following day together. After having a shower together and breakfast. He noticed she barely touched her food and seemed really weak.

He wondered if he had been too much last night. Did he hurt her?

“I feel so tired. I need to get more sleep.” She let out.

“I’ll come join you in bed after putting away the dishes.” He said staring at her with concern as she walked away.

As Stephan walked into the room, she was curled up like a ball. He quickly hurried up to her.

“Lana, what is it?”

She looked up and his heart sunk at how pale she was.

“My period...I’m on my period.”

Alarmed, he stood up.

“What should I do? Are you in so much pain? Should I take you to the hospital? I...”

She laughed. “Calm down, Stephan. It’s just...I’m not with any sanitary pads and if you could get them as well as the tea I always take, I’d be fine.”

Seeing the girl blink her clear, beautiful eyes and nervously tug at his hand, the soft, ticklish sensation, paired with her soft, sweet, and adorable voice, calmed his nerves.

When it came to his girlfriend, he needed to handle her with absolute care, make sure she was always okay.

He smiled and replied affectionately,

“Alright, stay right here. What’s the name of the tea? I’ll go buy it for you right away.”

As she told him the name, he leaned down to kiss the girl on the forehead, then turned and walked away.

Alana shifted uncomfortably, rubbing her legs together, and whispered, “Hurry up...”

Stephan curved his lips. “Got it, my little darling.”

That slightly magnetic “little darling” made her ears tingle and her whole body feel flushed with desire.

Oh God!

Stephan arrived at a nearby supermarket, headed straight for the checkout counter, and asked the cashier.

With his hands in his pockets, he exuded a cool, aloof air.

“Where is the feminine hygiene section?”

The cashier was instantly captivated by the handsome, well-built man standing before her.

He was so handsome!

She really wanted his number!

But the moment she heard him ask about feminine hygiene products, she guessed he might already have a girlfriend.

The cashier felt a twinge of regret, but she dutifully pointed out the sanitary pad section to him.

“Go straight from here, and it’s at the end.”

Stephan politely said thank you and headed toward the end of the aisle as the cashier had indicated.

Watching the man’s tall, slender figure, the cashier couldn’t help but gaze at him with starry eyes. “He’s so handsome! And he’s even buying sanitary pads for his girlfriend in person, so handsome and

thoughtful, truly one of a kind! Oh God, please send me a whole bunch of boyfriends like that!”

Stephan strolled leisurely over to the feminine hygiene section and gave it a quick scan.

The selection was vast, with dozens of brands to choose from.

He’d forgotten to ask her earlier; he didn’t know which brand of sanitary pads she usually preferred.

If he just picked one at random, he was afraid she might not be used to it.

After a moment’s thought, he pulled out his phone and sent her a message.

Stephan: [What brand of sanitary pads do you usually use?]

As he was looking down at his phone, a graceful figure had quietly approached him.

Stephan was waiting for Alana’s reply when, suddenly, someone tapped him on the shoulder out of the blue.

It wasn’t too hard or too soft, but it felt incredibly intrusive.

He looked up and saw Darla, who had appeared at his side without him noticing. Darla was wearing a lotus-pink dress and a pair of silver-rimmed glasses, exuding the air of a refined lady.

When she recognized Stephan, a flicker of delight crossed her eyes. “What a coincidence! I can’t believe I ran into you at the supermarket!”

Did this mean that fate had brought them together after all?

Stephan cast a faint glance at Darla, his tone even colder. “Miss Gordon, have you forgotten what I once told you?”

Darla feigned ignorance and asked with a smile, “What?”

Stephan raised his hand and gently tapped the spot where Darla had just touched, his brow furrowing slightly as if in disgust.

“From now on, if you run into me, just pretend you didn’t see me.”

Darla scoffed.

What a heartless, unromantic man.

But the more unromantic he was the more she wanted to conquer him!

She’d love to see just how wild and sensual this man, who appeared so aloof and restrained on the surface, was once they were in bed.

She kept picturing both of them naked together and cuddling.

She would sure he’d make a wonderful lover.

Darla was burning with desire inside, but she kept smiling, feigning ignorance of his meaning as she changed the subject.

“What are you buying?”

Stephan glanced down at the message Alana had replied to, then scanned the various arrangements of sanitary pads in front of him. With a sweeping gesture of his

large hand, he precisely picked out the exact brand she needed. “Sanitary pads.”

Darla was taken aback. “Sanitary pads?”

Who were they for?

Surely... he wasn’t buying them for himself, was he?

Could it be that he recently had hemorrhoid surgery and needs sanitary pads now?

No, that wasn't it... though it was not entirely impossible.

After all, as a doctor, she's seen it all.

Thinking this, she smiled and said, "The sanitary pads you're holding are too cheap; they won't work well. I recommend the brand I usually use, it's 100% cotton, antibacterial, and highly absorbent."

Darla took it upon herself to grab a pack of the sanitary pads she usually used and shoved them into his hand.

Stephan didn't even look at them; he just shoved the pads back into the shelf.

"What works for you isn't necessarily right for everyone else."

She blinked.

He picked up several packs of sanitary pads, some for daytime use, some for nighttime, and clutched them tightly in his hand.

Ignoring Darla, he continued browsing the supermarket with the pads in hand.

Seeing that she was being ignored, Darla gritted her teeth and followed him again.

She tried to strike up a conversation half-heartedly, "Now that we've bought the pads, what else do you want to get?"

Stephan ignored her. He wandered over to the food aisle and spotted a bag of brown sugar, traditionally boiled and all-natural.

He picked up a bag without a second thought.

During her period, a woman's energy and blood are deficient.

They need to drink some brown sugar and ginger soup to replenish their energy. He would also buy the tea she asked for too.

Whenever his mother felt unwell during her period, his father would personally make this soup for her.

After she drank it, her complexion improved significantly. It was especially soothing when she had menstrual cramps.

Next, he picked out some red dates, goji berries, and ginger.

Darla looked puzzled. “Brown sugar, red dates, goji berries, and ginger? Why are you buying all this?”

Stephan glanced at her and said indifferently, “Miss, you’re a doctor, aren’t you? What effect would these ingredients have when combined and simmered into a soup?”

Darla replied instinctively, “They replenish energy and blood, dispel cold and warm the body, and boost the immune system.”

A faint smile played at the corners of his mouth. “Exactly. My girlfriend is on her period, so I need to have this prepared specially for her.”

She gritted her teeth. “Stephan, don’t give me that. Your mother told me you don’t even have a girlfriend!”

Stephan gave her a half-smile. “What nonsense has my mom been feeding you now?”

Darla stared at him, enunciating each word clearly, “Your mother told you to arrange for your girlfriend to meet her last weekend, but you didn’t. So, you don’t have any so-called girlfriend at all!”

Stephan stared at her, incredulously.

He was at a loss for words.

Darla knew full well that Stephan didn’t see her as a romantic prospect yet, but that didn’t mean she had no chance.

She said in a conciliatory tone, “Stephan, honestly, you don’t need to make up a nonexistent girlfriend to deceive your mother. Since your mother wants you to have a girlfriend, get married, and start a family so badly, why not find someone who’ll make you and her happy? I happen to meet your mother’s requirements. If you marry me, we can take our time building our relationship after the wedding.”

“If after a year or two, you still don’t have feelings for me, we can talk about parting ways. Isn’t that better than being constantly pressured to get married?”

Besides, she was confident that once she successfully married him, she would win him over sooner or later!

Stephan’s dark eyes held a cool detachment. He didn’t answer her question but asked instead, “Miss Gordon, do you know why I haven’t gotten married yet?”

Darla was curious. “Why?”

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Chapter 173 No love no marriage

Stephan's thin lips parted, his voice low and firm.

"For years, I was single because I was yet to meet the woman made for me. I don't do flings, I could never bring myself to even hold hands with someone I wasn't in love with and you think I can marry someone I don't love?"

Darla froze. So love was very important to him?

No love, no marriage...

Stephan continued, "So now that I'm in love, I'll ensure I marry the person I love. Miss Gordon, I have no feelings for you, so I have no intention of marrying you. So, just mind your own business. Don't meddle in other people's affairs, your behavior only makes me resent you." With that, he grabbed his things and walked straight to the front desk to pay, completely ignoring Darla, who was still standing behind him.

Darla watched the man's cold, indifferent back as he walked away, biting her lip tightly.

She felt a deep sense of resentment.

Why couldn't she be the one he falls in love with?

"A woman chasing a man is like a thin veil between them." She didn't believe that, with her relentless pursuit, she wouldn't be able to win him over.

It was only a matter of time.

She clenched her fists and said, "Stephan, one day, I will make you kneel at my feet and become my devoted husband!"

While waiting for Stephan to return, Alana received a call from Eve.

She told Eve that she had returned from her hometown, and that Stephan had personally picked her up at the airport.

Eve was surprised. "He's so good to you, in this cold?"

“Yeah, he seemed to been waiting for a long time too. Bringing my flowers and wrapping me up in his jacket.”

“Holy crap, I never would’ve guessed, he’s actually pretty smooth.”

Who could resist a man like that?!

Alana must have been completely overwhelmed with emotion at that moment, right?!

Alana unconsciously recalled that moment, she had felt so special to him.

Now she found herself falling over all for him, falling head over heels.

“Eve, tell me, do you now think he’s sincere about me?”

“Ugh, don’t make me say it. I’m jealous because I don’t get to experience that.”

Alana pouted.

The corners of her mouth turned up slightly. “Doesn’t your boyfriend treat you like that?”

Eve replied indignantly, “No! Not at all! The only thing he does is fuck me all day and night.”

Alana’s ears flamed at how vulgar Eve’s words were.

After a moment’s hesitation, she asked,

“But you always praise him before, that he gets you nice things and a nice car...”

She knew how much material things makes Eve happy.

Eve was visibly upset. “He’s been working me over like this in bed, I can’t start explaining how he is in bed and his awful kinks that I have to endure, giving me some money is just compensation for my hard work! You have no idea what kind of living hell I go through every single night! So, I deserve every penny he has!”

Alana friends.

She wondered, what exactly did it mean to be tormented in bed to the point where life was worse than death?

She knew Stephan was mostly insatiable but she also enjoyed sleeping with him.

Eve sounded as if she was genuinely fed up with her boyfriend’s bedroom activities.

Could it be... that Eve was suffering some kind of horrific abuse from her boyfriend in bed?!

She tried to reason with her earnestly, “Eve, if you don’t feel comfortable being with him, then just break up.”

Eve grumbled, “Do I need you to tell me that?! As soon as I’ve made enough money, I’ll kick him to the curb and walk away!”

Alright, her friend was level-headed after all; she’d overreacted.

As if something had just occurred to her, she spoke up, “Eve, I forgot to tell you something, Cole... he’s shown up.”

Eve gasped, “What?! You mean the same Cole who abandoned you?! The Cole whom you had loved so much.”

Alana sighed. “Yeah. But I do not love him anymore.”

Her heart no longer fluttered for him. It only did for Stephan now.

Cole nodded. “It’s good that you don’t. You have new feelings and a new person now, you should cut all ties with the past completely!”

She paused for a moment. “But you said he showed up. He hasn’t been bothering you, has he?”

Hearing this, Alana didn’t hide anything from her and recounted everything that had happened with Cole recently.

Including the fact that he was now her boss and that she had been handpicked by him to be his assistant.

“Holy shit! He’s clearly got his eyes on you! Could it be that he’s genuinely interested in you, so he showed up again to try and win you back? But even so, the nerves of that guy! Does he seriously think you can forgive him for everything?!”

“I have no ill feelings towards him. In fact, when I look at him now, there’s just indifference. I just want him to leave me alone. Plus, I already have a boyfriend. And even if I didn’t, I still wouldn’t have taken him back.”

Eve said, “I think that since he went to such lengths to find you and show up in front of you, he doesn’t seem like the type to give up easily. He might keep pestering you. You can guess his intentions just from the fact that he asked you to be his assistant!”

Eve couldn't help but get curious, her gossipy side taking over. "Does your boyfriend know about Cole yet? How did he react to Cole? Did he feel threatened and want to keep you glued to his side, preventing you from having any contact with Cole?"

She was really looking forward to the scene of two men fighting over one woman, fiercely competing for her!

It would definitely be thrilling and intense!

Who would come out on top?

She couldn't wait!

"Um, he doesn't know yet."

Eve's anticipation, which had been brimming to the brim, suddenly crashed down with a thud!

"What?"

"Aren't you going to tell him?"

Alana was puzzled. "What's there to tell him? If I tell him about Cole, it'll make it seem like I care about him. If I don't tell him, nothing will happen. If I do, it might even put our relationship at risk. Let's be honest, who would just casually tell their boyfriend about an ex who was their new boss now?"

Wasn't that just asking for trouble?

Eve exclaimed excitedly, "Lana! Don't you want to see two men fighting over you?!"

Chapter 174 Something else

Chapter 174 Something else

"Wouldn't they go crazy fighting over you, even to the point of forcing you to choose...My dear friend, you could choose the two of them, you know...I'm actually reading a novel

where the female lead ended up with two men and it's kinda awakening something in me..."

"Oh please, Eve! Stop reading those novels, you're really becoming something else."

Gosh!

Alana's face flushed crimson. Was this something a normal person would say?!

If she weren't so reserved and shy, she would've let a few choice swear words slip out.

"Look, it's a pretty good read, I should tell you the name..."

"No...no and no!"

Eve had a second thought. "Wait, Cole isn't a good choice. He hurt you badly, and his sister bullied you before. Even though he's handsome, he's still a no-go."

Alana sighed.

Finally, her friend was making sense again.

Eve added, "But now that Cole is back, his sister Camila hasn't shown up, has she?"

"If she starts picking on you like she used to, you can't just put up with it and let her bully you anymore! If she dares to say another word to you, just walk right up to her and slap her left and right across the face until it's swollen. Then kick her to the ground, make her crawl at your feet, and with a cool flick of your hair, tell her: 'I'm not the weak, helpless Lana, who let you push her around, don't try me!'"

Alana laughed.

This girl was getting more and more out of control.

Not only was she obsessed with those novels, but she's gotten hooked on palace intrigue dramas too.

"Oh, I have to go now, my boyfriend's back. Let's talk next time!" Alana heard footsteps approaching from outside the door and hurriedly hung up the phone.

Sure enough, the door swung open the very next second.

A tall, imposing figure walked in with deliberate, measured steps. A gray shirt outlined his broad shoulders and narrow waist, while black dress pants hugged his straight, long legs.

A metal belt buckle fastened securely at the waistband, cinching his tight, muscular waist. Alana's gaze fell on the man's belt buckle, and she couldn't help but recall how, just yesterday he had deftly unfastened that belt, tossed it aside, and..

She bit her lip, her cheeks burning visibly.

For some reason, a gush of menstrual blood flowed out from between her legs.

Oh no, she'd made his bathrobe even dirtier...

Stephan walked in unhurriedly, carrying a shopping bag.

He spotted the girl sitting demurely on the edge of the bed, wrapped tightly in his bathrobe, her cheeks flushed, more radiant and alluring than a blooming rose.

He walked to the bed, paused, and, with a smirk, looked at her with unhurried composure.

"What are you thinking about in bed? Why are you so flushed?"

Alana couldn't possibly admit it. Lifting her flushed, soft, and alluring eyes, she whispered, "Nothing. Did you buy the sanitary pads? Give them to me. I'll go wear them."

Stephan deliberately withheld them, raising an eyebrow to tease her. "Why won't you tell me? Is it because you were thinking about those steamy things we did together?"

And sure enough, he saw the blush spread all the way to the nape of her neck, making her look radiantly flushed.

Ashamed, Alana glared at him with her beautiful eyes, "Stop it! Give me the pad, or it'll leak even more!"

"Is it leaking?"

"Let me check how much has leaked..."

The man's deep, magnetic voice carried a hint of mischief as he slowly moved closer to her.

Alana was so embarrassed she couldn't help but burrow under the covers, looking like a startled little deer with a pitiful expression. "No, don't come over..."

Stephan smiled. A man with a mischievous streak, he felt a deep sense of satisfaction seeing the little white rabbit so shy and flustered.

He set the bag he was holding down beside her. “Silly girl, I was just kidding. Go wear it.”

Alana stared at the shopping bag placed right in front of her, blinking once, then again. He was tricking her?!

What a mean man!

He picked on her at the drop of a hat!

Alana picked up the shopping bag and looked inside. There were several packs, enough to last her for months.

“You even bought me both day and night pads?” She thought she’d just told him the brand of pads, and he’d just grabbed a random pack on his way home. She never expected him to get her so many, he’d even prepared both day and night varieties.

He really thought of everything.

Stephan’s dark eyes met hers as he curled the corner of his lips. “Hmm, isn’t your boyfriend so thoughtful?”

Alana smiled slightly. He certainly knew how to praise himself. “Yeah. Very thoughtful.”

“How about a kiss as a reward?”

“I...”

“A French kiss.”

Alana shot him a playful glare and said softly, “I’ll go wear my pad first.”

Stephan asked kindly, “Do you want me to help you wear it?”

Alana shrieked. “No, no!”

Stephan teased, “Why not? Can’t I learn how to wear a pad on my girlfriend?”

Her cheeks flushed. “Stephan, you’re so naughty!”

How could anyone be like him!

Even asking how his girlfriend wears her pad...

“If a man isn’t a little bad, a woman won’t love him.”

A classic line.

Alana didn't want to deal with him, so she dragged her feet as she got out of bed. She took the torn-off sanitary pad, found a clean set of clothes, and only then went into the bathroom to change.

After changing, she checked the man's gray bathrobe.

Sure enough, it was stained all over. She walked out holding the soiled gray bathrobe, biting her lip as if she'd done something wrong.

"Do you have a basin for washing clothes here? I got your bathrobe dirty, so I need to wash it."

Stephan was sitting on the bed. Upon hearing this, he stood up and strode toward her. "Is that so? Let me see, where exactly is it dirty?"

Alana blushed, hiding the bathrobe behind her back, too embarrassed to show it to him. "No, don't look..."

Stephan stepped in front of her. Seeing her hurriedly tuck the bathrobe behind her back, hiding it tightly, he raised an eyebrow slightly.

"It's my bathrobe. Why can't I look? Give it to me. I'll wash it for you."

Alana's ears were burning. "No, it's okay. I got it dirty, so I'll wash it myself."

Stephan moved closer to her again and coaxed her in a low voice, "Be a good girl. Just think of it as a reward for me. Let me wash it."

Her head spun, and she felt as if her face would burst with embarrassment.

He... what did he just say?!

Treat it as a reward for him?

Was washing the bathrobe she'd soiled a reward for him?

Aaaah!

This man was shameless and completely out of line!

She couldn't take it anymore!

Stephan's large hand gently brushed against the girl's burning cheeks; the slightly calloused texture teased her delicate skin.

Her naturally delicate cheeks turned even more rosy and alluring. And he adored this shy, endearing look of hers.

“Be a good girl, give it to me. You’re on your period; it’s not good for you to touch cold water. Give your boyfriend a chance to show off, hmm?”

“Stephan, I...” Alana was so embarrassed her toes curled tight; she wanted to refuse again, but the man leaned down and kissed her lips.

He kissed her repeatedly, entwining himself with her.

Taking advantage of her dazed and intoxicated state, he snatched the bathrobe from her hands.

Then, he picked her up in his arms, laid her on her bed, and had her lie down.

He tucked the blanket around her, his large hand resting gently on her head. “Be good. Get some rest.”

Alana’s lips, kissed by him, glowed with a delicate flush.

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Chapter 175 Caught on

Chapter 175 Caught on

Her eyes were glistening, their lustre almost overwhelming.

“I... I’m resting. What about you?”

Stephan curved his lips; the upturned corners of his mouth hinted at a touch of mischief.

“Once I’ve washed the bathrobe, I’ll come back and rest with you.”

Alana blushed.

Just go already!

Don't say another word!

Embarrassed, she immediately pulled the blanket over her face!

Stephan chuckled softly, feeling quite pleased.

He tugged at the blanket. "Sweetheart, don't suffocate yourself."

The girl under the covers grumbled and whined, ignoring him.

Stephan smiled again, picked up his bathrobe, and prepared to step out.

But then he seemed to remember that her dirty clothes, the ones he'd just helped her take off were still in the bathroom. Hmm, he'd just wash those too.

Stephan picked up the girl's clothes and the bathrobe and went to the bathroom in the next room to wash them.

He didn't want to disturb Alana's rest.

Before washing them, he couldn't resist rubbing the bathrobe she had worn; it still carried the soft, sweet scent of her body.

Thinking of how this bathrobe had once wrapped closely around her, her delicate skin in intimate contact with the soft fabric...

His Adam's apple bobbed, and something inside him stirred once more.

He lowered his head and couldn't help but take a deep breath.

As if he were trying to draw every last bit of her sweet scent into his lungs.

He wore a perverse look of satisfaction. His girlfriend really did smell so good~

Finally, he could breathe in her scent.

God only knows how he'd managed to endure the week she was away.

He'd sniffed every piece of clothing she'd left at his place, and they were all scentless now.

Of course, just sniffing the clothes wasn't enough. In a little while, he'd go back, hold her close, bury his face in the crook of her neck, and inhale deeply once more.

The man's lips curled slightly.

Suddenly, his fingertips paused, as if they'd brushed against something damp.

He took a closer look at the damp spot on the bathrobe, furrowing his brow. "Why was there so much of it?"

While the man went to wash the clothes, Alana lay on the bed, hoping to rest.

But her stomach suddenly began to ache faintly, as if something were tugging at her insides. The sensation of heaviness was intense, making it impossible for her to rest properly.

She tossed and turned in bed for a while, then picked up her phone to watch videos, trying to distract herself.

But after watching a few funny videos and laughing out loud a couple of times, the pain got even worse.

In the end, it turned into a case of pure pain. Alana clutched her lower abdomen, sighing in pain.

The monthly ordeal.

Giving birth was painful enough for women, why does getting your period every month have to be so agonizing too?

Were women born to suffer?

She didn't get it.

Alana simply couldn't take it anymore. She tossed her phone aside and began rolling around on the bed.

Consequently, when Stephan walked into the bedroom, he saw Alana writhing on the bed like a worm, clutching her stomach.

His eyes darkened as he carried a cup of freshly brewed brown sugar ginger tea and hurried over.

The figure on the bed no longer had a rosy complexion; instead, she looked pale and weak.

She clutched her lower abdomen tightly with both hands, biting her red lips, it hurt so much.

Yet she was holding back from making a sound. Her eyes were rimmed with a hot, red flush from her struggle to hold back. She looked as fragile as a delicate porcelain doll.

It was heartbreaking.

Stephan quickly set down his bowl, sat on the bed, lifted the girl, whose face had turned pale with pain, and pulled her into his arms.

His warm, large hand quickly pressed against her lower abdomen.

“Does it hurt a lot?”

Alana didn’t want him to worry too much.

Clenching her teeth and catching her breath, she said, “I don’t know what’s wrong, but it hurts more than usual this time...”

“Maybe it’s because you’ve been so exhausted these past few days.”

“Don’t worry about me. Just let me lie down for a bit.”

She felt so miserable right now; she didn’t want him to see her looking so disheveled and pitiful.

Stephan frowned deeply; seeing her in such distress, his heart ached unbearably. “How could I possibly not take care of you when you’re like this? Here, I just made you some brown sugar ginger tea. Try a few sips and see if it helps. If that doesn’t help, I’ll take you to the hospital.”

Alana was taken aback. “You... you made me some brown sugar ginger tea?”

How did he know how to?

“Yeah, I just made it. It’s still a bit hot, let me blow on it for you.”

Stephan wrapped one arm around her slender waist, pressing his palm against her lower abdomen and gently massaging it to ease her pain.

Then he turned around and picked up the bowl sitting on the nightstand.

The bowl contained the freshly brewed brown sugar ginger tea, a reddish syrup with a few slices of ginger, red dates, and goji berries floating on top, steaming hot.

The man carefully blew on it, cooling it down considerably.

“It’s perfect now. You can drink it.”

Alana, cradled in the man’s arms, watched as he bent down to blow on the hot tea in the bowl for her. The earnest look in his eyes made her eyes sting, and a mist formed in her gaze.

She had never drunk brown sugar ginger tea before; whenever she got her period and the pain struck, she would simply grit her teeth and endure it. She had asked him for tea today to try it because Eve had recommended it last time.

But when he got back, she had forgotten she asked for that.

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to soothe her pain, but because she always didn’t have the energy to do anything.

When the pain became truly unbearable, she would just curl up in bed and toss and turn over and over again, she had no strength left to get out of bed and make herself a bowl of brown sugar ginger soup to warm her stomach.

Besides, since she’d never made it for herself, she didn’t keep those ingredients in her rented room.

Of course, no one ever prepared it for her either.

She just never expected that the first sip of brown sugar ginger tea she’d ever drink would be from Stephan.

Alana took the bowl the man handed her and drank several small sips.

True to its reputation as a tonic for energy and blood, after a few sips, her lower abdomen felt warm, and the pain had eased considerably.

Stephan kept watching her expression. “Are you feeling a little better?”

Alana nodded, biting her lip as she asked, “Did you make this for me?” Seeing that her complexion had improved considerably, he felt his anxiety ease considerably.

He nodded. “Yeah. It’s my first time making it, I hope it’s not too bad to drink?”

Hearing this, Alana’s eyes welled up with tears.

It was actually his first time making it.

She felt so lucky to be the first to taste something he'd made.

"It's delicious. It's the best brown sugar ginger tea I've ever had."

Though he'd put in a bit too much ginger, it stung her throat a little.

But it wasn't a big deal.

She sniffed, "It's so good. Let me have a few more sips."

Stephan's lips curled into a smile. "Is it really that good? I'll have a sip too."

Alana's breath caught, "Don't drink it..."

But it was too late. Stephan took a small sip from the spot where she had just drunk. It was only a tiny sip, but a wave of throat-burning heat surged through him, shooting straight to the top of his head.

Unaccustomed to this, the man immediately began coughing uncontrollably.

His handsome face turned crimson from the coughing.

He frowned, staring at the brown sugar ginger tea in his hand with obvious distaste.

"Why is it so spicy?"

Rarely seeing the man so flustered, Alana gave a soft cough and couldn't help but chuckle.

"Spicy? A little spice is good. It warms you up. I actually prefer spicy food."

Stephan shot her a glance and called her out coolly, "You're lying! You clearly prefer milder flavors. You're not used to anything too spicy."

Alana pursed her lips.

Oh no, he's caught on.

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Chapter 176 My darling

Chapter 176 My darling

She hadn't actually told him she wasn't used to spicy food.

But he had noticed.

Just like she'd noticed that he didn't like cilantro. It turns out that, without even realizing it, people pay attention to every move of the one they care about, their joys and sorrows, their likes and dislikes.

Stephan set the remaining ginger tea with brown sugar aside.

"You won't drink this bowl for now. I'll pour it out later. Next time I make it, I'll use fewer ginger slices."

Alana frowned, looking a little reluctant.

"Don't. That's such a waste."

Stephan turned back, lowering his gaze to the girl in his arms. With a smile in his eyes,

he asked, "Is it a waste of this bowl of ginger tea, or are you just reluctant to waste my thoughtfulness?"

Alana's long eyelashes fluttered, and a beautiful, alluring blush spread involuntarily across her delicate cheeks.

His question was so direct that she, with her innate reserve, found herself too embarrassed to speak.

Ashamed to speak, she murmured, "You know perfectly well... what I mean."

Stephan teased, "If you don't say it, I won't know."

He gazed at the delicate, camel-colored flush on her cheeks. His long, jade-like fingers gently pinched her soft cheek, the flesh between his fingers yielding a soft, springy texture, smooth and tender as silken tofu, making him reluctant to let go.

He curved his lips into a smile, luring her step by step. "Sweetheart, tell me the answer. I want to hear it."

Alana couldn't take it anymore; his gentle advances were not something an ordinary woman could resist.

Her lips trembled slightly, quivering as she said softly, "I can't bear to waste... your feelings."

She took a deep breath and continued, "I want to cherish this feeling of yours." Stephan's eyes instantly grew incredibly deep.

She said she couldn't bear to waste his kindness and wanted to cherish him.

What does this mean?

It shows... that she's gradually starting to care about him.

The place he held in her heart was growing deeper and more significant.

Although he appeared calm on the surface, inside he was overwhelmed by uncontrollable surges of emotion, his blood boiling.

The feeling of being cared for by her gave him an extraordinary sense of fulfillment.

If he weren't trying so hard to suppress it, the curve of his smile would rival the sun itself. But that was far from enough.

His standards were a bit high; he intended to gradually take over her entire heart, so that she would think of nothing but him.

Stephan curved his lips, unhesitatingly cupping her face, and leaned down to kiss her. He kissed her delicate lips tenderly, murmuring in a hoarse voice.

"Sweetheart, what am I to do? You're driving me wild. I want to kiss you to death right here in my arms..."

Alana's face flushed a vibrant crimson.

His kisses left her gasping, almost suffocating.

She just wanted to melt into a puddle, go limp in his arms, and even merge into his body. When Stephan finished kissing her, the girl in his arms lay limp and nestled against him, like a docile little kitten, utterly adorable.

It was just that one tender little hand was being a bit naughty, it had actually slipped under the hem of his shirt and was caressing his abs.

Yet the girl seemed oblivious, her delicate, flushed cheeks buried against his firm chest, breathing softly.

The man gave a mischievous smile and couldn't help but tease her, "Darling, what's gotten into you? Why did you suddenly start touching my abs, hmm?"

Alana had been kissed into a daze by the man, her eyes hazy and unfocused.

Hearing this, she froze for a moment before finally realizing that her small hand had already touched the man's abs.

The texture under her fingers was firm and taut, and the heat radiating from it was almost scorching.

And her hand was just... right there, completely exposed, caressing that incredibly powerful part of his body... Ah?!

Ah!

How could this happen?

When did she touch it?

She didn't even know, it was as if he'd corrupted her, and she'd grown accustomed to the feel of his abs...

Alana instinctively pulled her hand back, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

Seeing her obvious attempt to hide her intentions, the man chuckled softly. "Why pull your hand back so quickly?"

"If you want to touch, just keep touching."

Not bad, he'd trained his girlfriend to become increasingly unable to resist him.

This time she reached out to touch his abs on her own; next time, wouldn't she reach out to touch him...everywhere?

The man thought about it and felt inexplicably excited.

He loved seeing his girlfriend act so naughty around him.

Alana blushed even more. "I...I didn't mean to touch you...It's... my hand just wouldn't listen."

She couldn't help but bury her hand under the covers.

She thought shyly to herself, Damn hand, what's going on?!

Why did they suddenly get so restless?!

Before, she'd complained that Stephan's hands were always wandering, that when he held her, he was always groping her.

Now, how had it come to this with her too... Waaah, it seems like she's turning into a bit of a pervert too?

What happened to her image as a demure, conservative, well-behaved woman?!

Stephan chuckled. This little smart aleck, was she actually returning the very tactic he'd used on her?

"Is it that your hands won't listen to you, or is it your heart... that just can't resist doing naughty things to me?"

Alana retorted excitedly, "I'm not! I didn't! Don't make things up!"

However, the more agitated she became, the more unusual she appeared.

The man stared at her, a smile playing in his eyes, its meaning ambiguous.

Alana was so ashamed she wanted to sink into the ground. She quickly wriggled out of his embrace, flopped onto the bed, and pulled the blanket over her face.

"I... I'm going to rest."

"Don't bother me!"

Stephan thought his girlfriend looked absolutely adorable when she was shy, so he couldn't resist tugging at the blanket to tease her some more.

"Darling, are you really going to rest? Actually, if you want to touch me, you can keep touching me, not just my abs..."

Alana let out a voice from under the covers that was so embarrassed and indignant she felt like she might die.

"No touching, no touching! I'm going to sleep!"

She knew what he's up to!

She wasn't about to fall for that so easily.

Stephan curled his lips. "Fine, get some rest. Once you've recovered, I'll touch you properly. By then, no matter what you do to me, I won't stop."

Alana swallowed.

Why is he getting more and more perverted??

Was it really okay to date such a twisted boyfriend?!

Stephan poured out the ginger tea from the bowl and returned to the bedside.

This time, Alana had already closed her eyes and was sleeping peacefully.

Just moments ago, her complexion had been alarmingly pale, but now that she was asleep, a faint blush of pink had returned to her fair cheeks.

She looked much healthier.

A faint smile touched his lips. He then quietly lifted the blanket and slipped in beside her. With one arm, he gently pulled the girl into his embrace; with the other, he placed his hand on her lower abdomen and massaged it with just the right amount of pressure.

Her slightly furrowed brows and eyes gradually smoothed out under his gentle caress, settling into a look of deep contentment.

Seeing her features relax, Stephan's heart, which had been on edge, settled considerably.

He leaned down to kiss her beautiful eyes and brows, then buried his face in the crook of her neck with a sense of relief, breathing deeply.

The faint, sweet scent emanating from her drifted into his nostrils.

He lost himself in it, closing his eyes as if reluctant to let go.

"My darling."

Use arrow keys (or A / D) to PREV/NEXT chapter

Alana slept so soundly that night.

As she slept, she always felt a hand gently massaging her little belly. That hand was thick and warm; resting on her little belly.

Her stomach was naturally prone to feeling cold, but as that scorching hand caressed her, a warm glow spread through her, reaching all the way to her heart. The morning light caused Alana's eyelids to flutter.

She let out a contented little moan and slowly opened her eyes. What met her gaze was the man's handsome, flawless face.

Deep-set brow bones, a high, straight nose, and full, crimson lips. Every feature was exquisitely refined.

It was as if he were a masterpiece crafted by God. At that moment, Alana found herself cradled in his arms, his burning hand still pressed against her lower abdomen.

So it wasn't a dream after all. She could feel someone massaging her stomach, it was real.

Alana gazed at the sleeping man before her. His peaceful, sleeping features radiated a gentle softness, less of the usual coldness and harshness, and more of a warmth that made one want to draw closer.

She watched him quietly like this, feeling the flutter of her heart toward him. That feeling of affection for him seemed to grow stronger and stronger. Just looking at him like this filled her with a sense of peaceful contentment. If only, they could stay like this forever.

Alana gently caressed the man's handsome, chiseled face, and this time, without hesitation, she leaned in to kiss his lips.

Feeling the soft touch on his lips, the man slowly opened his deep, piercing eyes.

Before him lay the girl's eyes and brows, arched like crescent moons, her pupils clear and bright, radiating a captivating glow.

Caught in the act, the girl felt a touch of shyness; an alluring blush quickly spread across her cheeks, and a mist of bashfulness gathered in her beautiful eyes.

She bit her soft lips and whispered.

"Good morning, boyfriend."

That soft, sweet voice was like a piece of sugar so sweet it was almost cloying, melting right in the man's heart.

Stephan curved his lips, watching her with a leisurely air. "So proactive first thing in the morning?!"

Alana blushed, her almond-shaped eyes glistening with moisture, and asked in a soft voice, "Don't you like it?"

Stephan raised an eyebrow, his lewd words flowing effortlessly, "I do. I like it very much. I can't wait for you to kiss every inch of my body."

Kiss every inch of his body?

Just like he did to her, leaving no part of her untouched?

Thinking of the naughty things he did to her almost every night, Alana blushed so hard her toes curled up.

Help me!

He was so vulgar.

The girl pouted slightly, looking displeased, yet exuding a tantalizing air of coy shyness. Stephan felt a tingling sensation in his chest and couldn't resist leaning in to kiss her.

approaching lips. Her fingers brushed against his thin lips, which carried a hint of coolness, and she couldn't help but tremble slightly.

unbearable. Just being stared at by him gave her the sensation that he had already stripped her naked and ravished her thoroughly.

Oh my!

The more she thought about it, the more her mind wandered.

She was still on her period, why was her mind wandering to such depraved thoughts?! Stay proper!

Stephan watched the girl's blushing face, his lips curving into a silent smile as he gently kissed the palm of her delicate hand.

"Are you feeling better now? Does your stomach still hurt?"

The tingling sensation from his kiss on her palm made Alana instinctively pull her hand back. A flutter of excitement coursed through her, and her face flushed even deeper. She said softly, "Much better."

"Last night, were you the one who kept massaging my stomach?"

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "You could tell?"

Alana nodded, looking very docile. "Mm-hmm, I did. It felt really good."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "Isn't your boyfriend thoughtful?"

"Mm-hmm, he is."

"Should we give him a high score?"

She smiled; "Um, sure."

She sensed something was off.

Sure enough, the man revealed his true colors with his next sentence.

His voice was low and hoarse, laced with a hint of coaxing. "Sweetheart, how about some sexy lingerie? Can we arrange that after your period ends?"

Help!

Why was his mind filled with nothing but lewd, perverted nonsense day after day?!

Is this... normal?

Stephan extended a finger and traced it across her delicate cheek, his deep, magnetic voice utterly seductive.

"You promised me. You can't go back on your word!"

The man's intense gaze made her whole body burn.

She averted her eyes and stammered, "Um, let's wait until my period is over..."

He chuckled. Her period was indeed a tough time. But no matter how difficult it was, he had a way to handle it.

The two days Alana was back happened to fall on the weekend.

She didn't have to go to work and had plenty of time to rest.

Stephan wasn't going anywhere either; he stayed in the house to keep her company.

They spent their time eating, drinking, and lounging around.

While she binge-watched shows, he read up on financial news.

Sometimes, as he watched, he could hear her uncontrollable giggles. He couldn't help but look up at her.

Lying on her side on the bed, she held her phone, covering her mouth with her hand, her eyes crinkling with laughter, her eyes sparkling as if they held stars.

He wondered what funny video she was watching to make her laugh so happily.

Stephan's lips curved into a smile. She really was adorable. Alana was scrolling through funny videos when she received a message from her grandmother.

[Lana, this is Grandma. Did you get home safely?]

This was sent from her aunt's phone; her grandmother didn't know how to use a phone, so whenever she had something to ask, she'd ask her aunt to send the message for her.

Alana replied, [Yep, Grandma, don't worry. I'm back safely.]

Her grandmother asked again, [Since you're back, have you met up with your boyfriend yet? I asked you to take a picture of him. If you did, send it to Grandma so I can see. If he's too ugly, he wouldn't be a good match for my pretty, cute, and sensible Lana.]

Alana bit her lip; if Grandma hadn't brought it up, she almost would have forgotten. She couldn't help but glance up at the man sitting on the sofa, hugging a laptop and working intently.

He was wearing a black shirt and black dress pants. The top two buttons of his shirt were undone, revealing a sliver of his delicate, healthy, tanned collarbone.

With broad shoulders, a narrow waist, and long legs crossed slightly, he exuded an indescribable air of noble handsomeness.

Paired with his strikingly chiseled, handsome features, he was undeniably handsome from every angle, 360 degrees of flawless good looks!

Alana immediately felt the urge to take a photo of him.

Since her grandmother wanted a photo of him, she figured she might as well improvise and snap one right there on the spot.

However, she didn't plan to do it openly; she intended to snap the shot on the sly.

So, the moment to put her photography skills to the test had arrived.

While the man's attention was fixed on his laptop, Alana quietly opened the camera app on her phone and stealthily aimed the lens at him... Click.

A flash of light lit up the screen.

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Chapter 178 Turned him on

Chapter 178 Turned him on

Alana's cheeks flushed with embarrassment. Oh no, she'd forgotten to turn off the flash!

He didn't notice, did he?!

It was just a sneaky snapshot, she didn't know why she was feeling so guilty.

She instinctively glanced at the man on the sofa. He was still staring at his computer screen, his expression deep and focused, seemingly unaware that she had just snapped a photo of him.

Alana let out a slight sigh of relief and finally looked down at her photographic masterpiece.

Little did she know that just as she looked down, the man on the sofa lifted his head slightly. His dark eyes swept over the girl on the bed, and the corners of his mouth curled up casually.

What was this little white rabbit up to, sneaking around like that?

She must be asking for a kiss.

He set down his laptop and slowly stood up. While the girl had her head down, intently looking at the photos, he walked over at a leisurely pace and drew close to her...

Alana looked down at the photo of Stephan. Sure enough, with his handsome, striking features, he looked good no matter how he was photographed.

He didn't even need any retouching or photo editing. A man this handsome, with such a great physique and eight-pack abs, and he's actually her boyfriend? Why does that make her feel so giddy inside?

Besides, Stephan was so handsome, her grandmother would surely be delighted to see him, right?

Hehe, she'd send it to her grandma right away to make her happy.

Alana smiled slightly and sent the photo to her grandmother without hesitation.

But before she could wait for her grandma's reply, a shadow suddenly fell over her.

"Sneaking around like that, what are you up to?" A deep, magnetic voice came from above her, tinged with a hint of intriguing danger.

Alana's eyelids twitched, and she quickly looked up.

The man, who should have been sitting on the sofa, had somehow ended up standing right in front of her, looking down at her.

Alana's cheeks flushed. "You... how did you get over here?"

The man leaned in, closing the distance between them, his gaze fixed on her eyes, deep and unfathomable.

"If I hadn't come over, how would I know what kind of mischief you've been up to behind my back, hmm?"

Alana's heart tightened, and she

instinctively hid her phone behind her back.

She had been sitting on the bed, but as the man leaned in, she instinctively sank lower.

"I... I didn't do anything wrong."

Stephan's lips curled into a smirk. "Taking secret photos of me and sending them to

others, isn't that doing something bad?"

Alana gasped.

Stephan raised his hand and pinched her soft cheek. "Tell me, who did you send them to?"

She bit her lip, too embarrassed to speak. "I... just sent them to my grandmother. She said she wanted to see what my boyfriend looks like, so..."

The man raised an eyebrow. "You sent it to your grandmother. And then? Did she tell you your boyfriend is the most handsome guy in the universe, and praise you for having such good taste in men?"

Alana scoffed.

What a narcissist!

Then again, with a face like his, he certainly has every right to brag.

"I just sent it to Grandma. She hasn't replied yet."

Stephan reached up and ruffled her hair. "Let me see, how did I look in the photo? If you make me look ugly and Grandma doesn't like it, I won't let you off easy."

Alana glanced at him and said softly, "You're so handsome; you look good no matter how you're photographed."

His lips curved into a smile; being told he was handsome by his girlfriend made him feel incredibly happy.

In a cheerful mood, he said, "Let me see it."

Alana thought for a moment, then pulled out her phone.

The man sat down on the bed, took the phone from her, and glanced down at the photo on the screen.

He didn't really care how the photos turned out; what he cared about was...

"You sent this candid shot of me to your grandmother?"

Alana was puzzled. "Is there a problem with that?"

She thought the candid shot turned out pretty well.

“I just think that since we’re boyfriend and girlfriend, it’s not right to only send photos of me.”

“So what do you mean...”

“Send a photo of the two of us together.”

Alana couldn’t help but blush.

To be honest, she and he... hadn’t actually taken a photo together yet.

Seeing her flushed cheeks, Stephan knew she was shy again.

This little bunny gets shy at the drop of a hat.

It’s just a photo together, he was not going to do anything bad to her...yet.

He curved his lips into a smile and continued, “If we don’t post a photo of us together, your grandmother might get the wrong idea and think this is some stock image you dug up from who-knows-where.”

Alana interrupted softly, “Okay, I get it. I’ll take a photo with you.”

Actually... she wanted to take a few with him, too.

It was perfectly normal for a couple to take photos together, wasn’t it?

Stephan raised an eyebrow triumphantly, then opened the camera app on her phone.

“Come on, move a little closer to me.”

Alana couldn’t help but shift closer to him.

Stephan took the opportunity to wrap his arms around her slender waist, pulling her into his embrace.

Alana’s entire body was pressed against him, her rounded shoulders resting against his chest.

She couldn’t help but glance at the two of them on the phone screen: her petite frame was deeply nestled in his embrace, almost completely enveloped by him.

Her breath caught. “Isn’t... this a little too much?”

Stephan aimed the camera at the two of them, his tone calm. “It’s not too much. It’s just a normal pose for a couple taking a photo.”

“But, um...” Alana instinctively turned her head to look at him.

But the next second, the man suddenly leaned down and kissed her soft lips. Click!

The flash went off again.

The camera froze on that moment.

Akans snapped out of it and couldn't help but push him away.

“Ah, Stephan, you big rascal, you...you actually...”

Her lovely face flushed crimson in an instant. Stephan quickly stood up and looked down at the photo he had just taken.

A handsome man held a lovely, delicate woman in his arms, leaning down to kiss her.

A handsome man and a beautiful woman, the scene was truly picturesque.

The girl's face was still flushed, as alluring as a rose.

The man curved his lips. “That turned out well. Let's use this photo to send to your grandmother.”

Alana hadn't even seen the photo yet, but hearing him say that, she immediately

panicked, “Ah! No way! You can't send a photo like this to Grandma! Give me the phone! I'm deleting it!” She was so frantic she couldn't help but jump out of bed, trying to snatch the phone from the man's hand.

But she was no match for him.

The man stretched out his long arm, wrapped it around her slender waist, and stopped her from flailing about.

And right in front of her, he tapped to send the photo he'd just taken of the two of them kissing.

Alana stared in disbelief.

“Stephan!”

Filled with both anger and humiliation, Alana couldn't help but wrap her arms around his waist and bite down on his shoulder. He actually sent the photos?

How dare he?

If Grandma sees this photo, will she... Aaaargh!

Regardless of how Grandma would react, she already felt like she'd died of embarrassment!

The man let out a low groan; the girl's bite was actually starting to feel good.

He lowered his gaze to the girl who was biting him with gusto, his voice low and hoarse. "Sweetheart, keep biting. Bite down harder. Ahh...feels good."

Alana paused. "Huh??"

Wait, she was biting him to vent her frustration, and instead of getting angry, he actually told her to bite harder?!

Could it be... she actually bit him in a way that turned him on?!

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Chapter 179 Flush involuntarily

Lifting her head slightly, Alana saw the man's lowered eyelids, and the deep satisfaction and pleasure in his eyes were almost overflowing.

She blinked.

Was she punishing him, or rewarding him?

She released her grip and saw a wet patch on the fabric of his shirt at his shoulder, causing her face to flush involuntarily.

Stephan was just getting comfortable when the thrilling, pleasurable sensation on his shoulder vanished in an instant.

A sense of emptiness washed over him, accompanied by a helplessness he couldn't shake off.

He lowered his gaze to her, his eyes burning with a dark, surging desire.

"Why did you stop biting, hmm?"

Alana was both angry and embarrassed; she glared at him fiercely, like an adorable little kitten with its fur all ruffled.

She had no intention of rewarding him any further.

“Give me my phone! I’m going to delete the photos!”

Stephan’s lips curved into an amused smile. “Too late. It’s been over two minutes.”

Alana went berserk, raining a flurry of punches down on the man’s hard chest.

“Aaaah! It’s all your fault! Why did you send such embarrassing photos to my grandmother? And my grandma isn’t alone, what if someone else sees it?! I’m too embarrassed to even go back home!”

Stephan watched her frantic reaction with amusement; he really thought she was absolutely adorable.

He let her punch him, since to him, her fists felt soft and harmless.

“I didn’t send it to your grandma.”

Alana’s cheeks puffed out with anger, making her look chubby and adorable.

“I don’t believe you, I just saw you click ‘send’!”

Seeing the girl’s puffed-out cheeks, Stephan thought she looked like a little hamster guarding its food, so soft and adorable.

It was enough to melt his heart.

He handed her the phone back, giving her cheek a gentle pinch as he did so. “If you don’t believe me, check for yourself.”

Alana snatched the phone back and checked her chat history with her grandmother, sure enough, the photo Stephan had sent was nowhere to be found. She was surprised, she was absolutely certain she’d seen Stephan tapped “Send” on the photo!

Stephan chuckled, “Silly girl, I sent it to myself.” You look so alluring when I kiss you, I couldn’t bear to let anyone else see that. I have to keep it all to myself.”

Alana blushed and finally opened her chat with the man.

Only then was she certain: he had sent the photo to himself. Relieved that he hadn’t sent it to her grandmother, she couldn’t help but breathe a sigh of relief.

But thinking about how he’d just teased her, she gritted her teeth, her almond-shaped eyes widening in mock anger as she glared at him.

“Stephan, you’re so mean!”

The man chuckled softly, wrapping his arm around her slender waist and leaning down to kiss her rosy cheek. “It’s not like I’ve just started being mean to you,”

“Watch out, I’m going to be even meaner to you from now on.”

Alana was fuming, but there was nothing she could do about him. “Are we still taking pictures?”

“No more!”

“But we’ve only taken one so far.”

“No way. It’s all your fault anyway!”

“Fine, fine, it’s all my fault.”

The man cupped the girl’s face, kissing her repeatedly to soothe her.

It felt like he’d turned her into a spoiled little girl.

After soothing Alana, Stephan silently picked up his phone, tapped to save the photo of him kissing her, and set it as his phone’s wallpaper.

Looking at the intimate couple in the photo, the tenderness and doting affection in the man’s eyes nearly overflowed like water.

Hmm, not bad. Now he could look at it whenever he wanted. He glanced at the girl’s white phone.

Maybe... he should set that as her wallpaper too?

Meanwhile, at the hospital.

Grandma received the photo Alana had sent.

When she saw the photo, Grandma gasped and hurriedly urged her daughter-in-law and children in the ward to take a look.

“Come over here and take a look! This is Alana’s boyfriend!”

Curious about Grandma’s reaction, the aunts and other women all crowded around.

Upon seeing the man in the photo, the two older women both, without a word, looked at him with eyes full of admiration.

Oh my goodness, he's so handsome, is he even real?

Even the heartthrobs in the entertainment industry weren't as refined as he is, were they? Just look at the sculpted, flowing contours of that handsome face, the deep-set brow bones, the high, straight nose bridge.

It was practically the golden ratio of facial proportions, with not a single flaw to be found.

His physique looks impressive too, broad shoulders, a narrow waist, and long legs. He was even better-built than a model.

A deep gray, high-quality shirt hung on him, and black dress pants hugged his long legs.

He sat with one leg crossed over the other, a laptop resting on his thigh. His gaze is lowered, his expression serious and focused, exuding a strong sense of power.

The photo captured the man with such depth and dimension that he looked as beautiful as an oil painting.

Grandma said, excitedly, "Wow. He's so handsome, he's stolen my heart! Take a look, isn't he handsome?"

My two women who were close exchanged a glance, then spoke in unison.

"He's just okay."

"He's so handsome, it's obviously photoshopped!" Miranda let out.

"I think he's photoshopped too. With today's photo editing skills, they can turn an ugly guy into a total hunk!" Grandma's daughter let out.

Grandma frowned. "Why are you so against Lana being happy? She's so pretty, what's wrong with her dating a total hunk?"

"Well, even if Lana really is dating such a handsome guy, just because he's good-looking doesn't mean he's reliable!"

"Just look at him, dressed so provocatively, not even bothering to button his shirt properly. The way he's showing off... I'm too embarrassed to even look..."

Before she could finish, her sister-in-law, Miranda, couldn't help but let out a slurp.

Oh no, he was just too good-looking, she couldn't help but gawk.

Grandma shot Miranda a look and couldn't help but roll her eyes dramatically. How old was she, drooling over a handsome young man?

"Why are you staring at him like that? I thought he wasn't good enough." Grandma snatched the phone right back, refusing to let those two keep looking.

Miranda wiped away the drool that had spilled out, feeling guilty. "This guy looks like a male model, he's obviously not trustworthy!"

Alana's Aunt cleared her throat and nodded. "You're right. These days, good looks don't put food on the table, you still need a reliable job."

Grandma said, "You saw it too, Alana's boyfriend was just holding a laptop. He's clearly the type who works in an office."

Miranda scoffed. "He's just putting on a show!"

"Exactly! It's a staged photo, meant to trick your eyes!"

Grandma laughed in exasperation, "You two, can't you stand to see Alana doing well? I'll bet you anything that Lana's boyfriend is totally reliable, and so is his job. If you don't believe me, just wait and see!"

The other two women exchanged a glance. No way!

Was Alana really going to have a good life now?!

No way!

Absolutely impossible!

If Alana's boyfriend were really that great, she'd be dying to bring him home to show off, she wouldn't be hiding him away like this.

They were jealous, after all. Alana was abandoned by her parents when she was young, and although her family took her in, they looked down on her deep down.

Why should they take in this "junk" just because her parents didn't want her?

They might as well have just dumped her at an orphanage!

But that old woman at home wouldn't have it; she insisted on bringing her home to raise her.

In all the years, she's been with her maternal family, only her grandmother had been genuinely kind to her; the rest of the relatives just turn a blind eye whenever they saw her.

And they never expected her to amount to anything.

Chapter 180 Still has me

Chapter 180 Still has me

If Alana isn't doing well, she has only herself to blame, after all, her own parents abandoned her.

That was just how it was for children without parents to love them, the relatives had the belief that those kind of children were doomed to a life of misery.

So they were convinced that Alana was destined to struggle for the rest of her life.

If she were to start living a good life, that would be the real surprise.

Miranda couldn't help but ask, "Mom, why don't you ask Alana what her boyfriend does for a living, if his family is wealthy, and if they own a house or anything like that!"

Grandma thought about it and realized he was right, she had the chance to ask, so why hadn't she?

All this guessing back and forth was pretty silly.

She really was getting old, her brain just wasn't working right anymore.

So, she picked up her phone and sent Alana a voice message.

She didn't know how to type, but she knew how to send voice messages.

"Lana, tell me, what does your boyfriend do for a living? How much does he make a month? Does he own a house?"

Alana received the voice message from her grandmother and tapped to play it. When she heard the content, she blinked.

“Um, Stephan, my grandma wants to ask you a few questions. Would you mind answering them?”

Stephan had just set his wallpaper when he heard this. He glanced at her. “What kind of questions?”

Alana handed him her phone. “Here.”

Stephan took her phone, skimmed through it, and chuckled softly.

“About my salary? About my house?”

Alana bit her lip, speaking nervously, “Um, these are pretty sensitive topics. If you can’t answer them, it’s fine.”

If he didn’t want to talk about it, she would respect his decision and wouldn’t push him.

Stephan looked at her with an amused expression. “Do you want to know?”

Alana blinked and replied honestly, “I... of course I do. As your girlfriend, shouldn’t I be allowed to know how much you make each month?”

“That’s true.”

Alana’s curiosity was instantly piqued. “So how much do you actually make each month?”

“I don’t get a salary.”

“Huh?” Alana was stunned. “You go to work every day, right? And you don’t even get paid? Doesn’t that mean you’re working for nothing?”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, because I’m the one paying everyone else.”

Alana blinked.

Was he joking right now.

She pouted. “Forget it, I won’t ask you anymore. You’d better focus on figuring out how to answer my grandmother’s questions properly.”

Stephan curved his lips. “Of course I can. When my girlfriend’s Grandma interrogate me, I’ll have to be fully alert and sincere in my response.”

Alana couldn't help but smile. "Well then, you handle it yourself. Just be nice to her, don't go too overboard."

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "Don't go too far, huh?"

Fine!

He promised to keep it in check, nothing outrageous!

Stephan looked down and typed out his reply.

[Grandma, my boyfriend currently runs a company. His monthly salary is just a few hundred million...not a lot, but enough to get by. He owns a few properties, all private apartments.]

He was actually a billionaire but his girlfriend said not to go too far.

[Grandma, rest assured. With him by my side, I'll live a good life every day, no worries about food or clothing, and my happiness meter is maxed out.]

The man shamelessly hit send.

Hmm, he'd have to toot his own horn and sell himself.

Who knows, maybe Grandma will see this reply and obediently hand her granddaughter over to him herself.

Alana leaned in curiously. "What did you reply?"

Stephan handed her the phone, raising an eyebrow. "See? My reply isn't too far off, is it? Are you satisfied?"

When Alana saw the content of his reply, she nearly fainted.

She glared at him. "You, you, you..."

Stephan looked at her amusedly. "What about me?"

Alana couldn't help but jab her finger hard into his chest. "A salary of hundreds of millions a month, isn't that a lot?! How many houses do you own, isn't this one of the house in an estate you're currently renting? I really didn't realize you could lie without even thinking it through, you really...!"

She knew he was rich, but no matter how rich he was, it couldn't be that outrageous, could it?!

But here he was, talking as if he owned the world.

Stephan chuckled softly, reaching up to pinch her delicate cheek affectionately. "These days, who needs a script to brag? It just comes out the moment you open your mouth."

Alana stared at him in disbelief. While shocked by the man's brazen audacity, she couldn't help but think to herself, "He really is just bragging!"

A monthly salary of hundreds of millions, several private apartments, that was just ridiculous!

Does he even know that a single apartment building costs millions? Alana desperately wanted to edit the message, but in her flustered haste, she accidentally deleted it only from her end.

She panicked. "Oh no, I accidentally deleted the messages you sent. You told such a huge lie to Grandma, how are we going to cover for this when we actually meet her?"

Stephan ruffled the girl's hair, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth. "We'll just have to figure it out as we go. It's my lie, you don't need to worry about it."

Alana was getting anxious, her cheeks puffed out in frustration, her almond-shaped eyes wide with indignation. "If we can't cover it up and Grandma ends up disliking you, don't say I didn't warn you!"

Stephan looked at her amusedly. "So? Are you that afraid your grandmother will reject me?"

Stephan cupped the girl's exquisitely pretty face, his gaze fixed on her as he asked with a smirk, "Sweetheart, just how much do you care about me that you're so worried your family will reject me?"

A blush spread across Alana's cheeks.

Seriously, this naughty man, he's asking a question he already knows the answer to!

"It's not even on the horizon yet. Don't get your hopes up."

Stephan leaned down and brushed his nose against her pert little nose, a gesture that was both intimate and tantalizing.

“I’ll let my imagination run wild. My girlfriend cares about me, she cares a lot, a whole lot.”

Alana blushed and was about to say something, but the man had already leaned down to silence her with a kiss...

Meanwhile, Grandma, along with her aunt and Miranda, the three of them stared at the message Stephan had sent, their mouths agape in shock. That much money? That many houses?!

They’d never seen that much in their entire lives!

Miranda said on impulse, “It’s a scam! This guy must be a scammer!”

The aunt nodded. “Exactly. How could Lana possibly have found such a rich man? He must be a scammer, just some scumbag who took advantage of her naivety to play with her emotions!”

“What’s this about running a company, making hundreds of millions a month, and owning several private apartments? He’s just full of hot air, he doesn’t have anything.”

“Either this guy is a con artist, or your dear granddaughter is lying to you. Those are the only two possibilities!”

Grandma frowned. “What do you mean? Are you saying my granddaughter isn’t good enough for such a rich and handsome man?”

Miranda said, “Mom, it’s not that we don’t believe that, but be realistic, someone like Alana can never land a man like that, she’s just someone abandoned by her parents, with no status or standing. How could a rich man possibly take a liking to her? Even if he did take a liking to her, it’d only be for her looks, to use and dump her, he’d never actually marry her!”

Auntie nodded in agreement from the side, “Exactly! Rich people only look for matches of equal standing. What right does your granddaughter have to be considered a match for anyone?!”

Grandma was furious. “Two of you, shut up! None of you can stand to see my granddaughter do well! Let me tell you this: even if Lana’s father doesn’t love her and her mother doesn’t care about her, so what? She still has me, her grandmother!”

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Chapter 181 His sincerity

Chapter 181 His sincerity

“I believe in Lana. Even if things aren’t going well for her now, she’ll definitely get better and better in the future, she has what it takes.”

“Right now, you all look down on her, but just wait until she proves you wrong!”

Her other women paid no heed to Grandma’s. Someone who’s been written off since childhood, what good could she possibly amount to?

A sourpuss as a child was bound to remain a sourpuss forever!

Alana spent the entire weekend practically never setting foot outside the house, just curled up in bed.

After all, she was on her period and had no energy for anything; she just wanted to stay in bed and rest up.

Stephan was very attentive as a boyfriend; he prepared all three meals for her every day and even made her soups to warm her belly and replenish her blood.

Whatever she needed, he provided.

He practically granted her every wish.

Alana felt like she was becoming more and more dependent on him. In the past, whenever she had her period, she had to handle everything herself.

Now, having a man by her side to lean on felt truly wonderful. Come to think of it, it wasn't that she wanted to get used to being alone; it was simply that there hadn't been anyone around whom she could wholeheartedly rely on.

Often, the more you depend on someone, the more you can't help but worry about losing them.

That was exactly how Alana felt.

The only question is, how much longer can she rely on him?

Will there come a day when all this happiness bursts like a bubble at the slightest touch?

She dared not think too far ahead; she just wanted to cherish the present.

The future held too many possibilities, too much uncertainty. A beautiful time together was always fleeting.

Once the weekend was over, it was time for her to go back to work.

After two days of rest, Alana had mostly recovered.

That morning, Stephan drove her to the company building as usual. Alana unbuckled her seatbelt, gave the man a parting kiss, and was just about to get

out.

The man suddenly grabbed her wrist.

"Don't rush off, take this with you." He pressed a thermos into her hands.

Holding the thermos, Alana asked curiously, "What's this?"

Stephan replied, "Ginger and brown sugar tea. If you feel any stomach discomfort, remember to drink it."

Alana felt a warm glow in her heart. She had already told him she was feeling much better, but he was still so thoughtful and considerate, he'd even prepared ginger and brown sugar tea for her.

He really was... almost too considerate.

With his constant care, every day of her life had become more interesting.

Once upon a time, she hadn't held much hope for romance; it was neither here nor there, she could have lived her whole life alone.

Every day was as dull and monotonous as the last. But because of him, she now has a little something to look forward to in her daily life.

A smile involuntarily curled her lips, and her almond-shaped eyes sparkled with starlight.

"Okay, I understand." Stephan curved his lips and reached up to ruffle her hair. "Have a good day. But, more importantly, remember to miss me."

Alana nodded obediently. "Mm-hmm."

After a moment's pause, she realized she couldn't be the only one thinking of him. "You have to miss me too."

Stephan raised an eyebrow, finally realizing she wanted him to miss her too.

She was making more demands of him, that was good.

He really liked this sense of responsibility she was showing.

"As you wish, my girlfriend."

Alana smiled sweetly and couldn't resist giving him another kiss. "My boyfriend is so obedient. Here's your reward."

Stephan's eyes sparkled slightly.

His girlfriend was actually taking the initiative to reward him?!

How rare!

He stared intently at her, his eyes burning with desire. "Sweetheart, I want more."

He paused. "I can't get enough of your cherry lips, I want to taste something else." Can't get enough?

Want to try something else?

What else does he want to eat?

Where else on her body could he possibly want to taste?!

Alana thought of the image of the man hugging her and devouring her for many nights, and her face flushed as red as a ripe berry.

“That’s enough. Don’t push your luck.”

I’m going to push my luck!

She teased him first and now she wants to run? No way!

Without a word, Stephan hooked his arm around her waist and leaned down to kiss her fiercely.

He kissed and devoured her! He unleashed every move he knew on her before finally letting her go.

Alana walked into the office holding the thermos the man had shoved into her hands, her lips still lingering with his distinctive scent, so intense.

That naughty man is getting better and better at this. She bit her lips, which were unnaturally bright and glossy, feeling both shy and sweet inside.

But the moment she stepped into the elevator, the man who suddenly appeared before her made most of that sweetness vanish in an instant.

Cole stepped into the elevator and casually closed the doors behind him.

Today, he was wearing a blue suit and a pair of silver-rimmed glasses.

The deep blue of his attire added a faint air of melancholy to his naturally refined and easygoing demeanor.

“Lana, you’re back.” Cole’s voice was gentle yet tinged with excitement. He couldn’t help but stare intently at the girl before him.

It had only been over a week since they’d last seen each other, yet he realized how often she had been on his mind.

He had come to this company for her sake. Without her, he suddenly felt there was no reason to stay at this company.

If it weren’t for her, with his abilities, he could find a much better place to go.

Facing Cole, Alana, however, appeared increasingly relaxed and composed. Perhaps she no longer harbored any feelings for him, so his presence stirred no ripples in her heart.

She gave a casual greeting, her tone tinged with detachment.

“Good morning, Manager Cole.”

Cole pursed his lips, ignoring her aloof tone, and asked with concern, “How is your grandmother doing?”

Alana replied, “She’s doing much better, thank you for asking.” Her tone was strictly business, as if she were reporting to him.

As Cole listened, the air of melancholy around him grew even thicker.

“Lana, I’ve missed you so much during the past week or so that you’ve been gone.”

The eyes behind his glasses were unfathomably deep, revealing his unmasked longing for her.

That intense emotion, on the verge of bursting forth, was something no thin pair of glasses could possibly conceal.

The elevator was too dimly lit for Alana to notice the possessive look in Cole’s eyes as he gazed at her.

Even if she had seen it, she would never have responded in any way. After all, some people, once missed, are truly lost.

She couldn’t keep looking back.

Besides, she already had Stephan.

So when Cole told her he missed her, Alana felt uncharacteristically calm.

“I hope you do not speak to me like that again, Manager Cole. A boss shouldn’t miss an employee. Except it’s because of work.”

Cole fixed his deep gaze on her.

He thought he’d made his feelings quite clear over the past few days.

Alana looked away slightly and said calmly, “No matter what your intentions toward me are, it’s impossible for us to be together again.”

Cole couldn’t help but step closer to her. “Lana, I don’t believe it. You used to depend on me so much, and you loved me so much...”

Seeing the man approach her, Alana instinctively took a step back.

“Lana, you still love me, don’t you? Getting together with Sophia made me realize that no other woman can ever take your place in my heart. I wished I had never let you go. Since we both still have feelings for each other, please give me another chance. Let’s get back together, okay?”

Cole cornered her against the elevator wall, staring intently at her as he spoke earnestly.

He wanted her to see that he was serious about her now. He would win her over with his sincerity.

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Chapter 182 Perfectly normal

Chapter 182 Perfectly normal

Alana bit her lip. Listening to the man’s confession-like words, she felt not the slightest stir in her heart; on the contrary, she found it somewhat amusing.

“Cole, do you seriously take me for a fool? You were about to marry someone else! If she hadn’t dumped you, you wouldn’t be here right now...”

“No, I was going to end things with her. I was going to come back to you.”

Alana scoffed. “You really take me for a fool.”

“No. I don’t. I just want you back. Can’t you just let go of those unhappy memories and start over with me? I made a mistake.”

He was reckless back then, unaware of the gravity of his actions or even of his own feelings. She couldn’t dismiss all his feelings for her just because of that mistake that he had learnt from now.

Alana tugged at the corner of her mouth, her tone tinged with a hint of sarcasm.

“It wasn’t a mistake! It wasn’t a choice you made! Even if you see it as a mistake, it would never erase all the pain you’ve caused me?” Cole, I’m not a very forgiving person. I can’t just let everything slide and pretend it never mattered.”

Once hurt, it remained; it doesn't simply vanish with the passage of time. After all, she had truly and genuinely endured that pain.

He hadn't gone through her suffering, how could he possibly have the right to ask her to forget?

Seeing Alana's mocking expression, Cole couldn't help but feel a pang of anxiety. He took her hand and declared his feelings once more, "Lana, since you care so much, give me a chance to make it up to you, be with me again."

Alana immediately pulled away from his touch.

Lowering her gaze, she suddenly noticed a string of sandalwood beads on his wrist. She remembered that string of beads, it was the one she had personally gone to a

temple to pray for and obtain as a birthday gift for him the very first time.

Every single bead had been strung by her own hands. She had hoped he would wear the beads on his wrist to bring him safety and good health.

Of course, it was also a subtle way of expressing her feelings. She hoped her feelings would be with him at all times.

But after she gave them to him, she never once saw him wear them, not even once, until now..

Seeing it suddenly appear on his wrist now left her momentarily dazed.

Noticing Alana's gaze, Cole lowered his head and looked at the sandalwood beads on his left wrist.

He said somewhat urgently, "Lana, do you remember? This sandalwood bracelet was the first birthday gift you ever gave me. I've always forgotten to tell you, but I love all the birthday gifts you've given me, and I

treasure them dearly."

After speaking, his slender fingers couldn't help but tenderly stroke the sandalwood beads she had given him, as if cherishing them dearly.

Alana's eyes flickered, and a vague memory began to surface.

"Is that so? I thought you hadn't worn them for so long because you didn't like them."

Cole immediately replied, "No way. As long as it's from you, I love it and will

cherish it for the rest of my life!”

Alana looked up at him, a touch of stubborn determination in her eyes. “But why, then, did your sister Camila tell me herself that you despise the gifts I’ve given you? That the moment you received them, you wanted nothing more than to shove them into some forgotten corner because they were cheap and unpresentable? That’s why you’ve never worn them in public.”

Camila had told her to stop giving gifts, saying she was embarrassing herself.

She’d been foolish back then, thinking Camila was just trying to provoke her. So every year on Cole’s birthday, she’d bought him a gift, besides the sandalwood beads, there were thermoses, men’s watches, and the likes.

Though they weren’t expensive, just a few dollars but they were all bought with money she’d saved up for a long time.

Yet he had never once brought any of her gifts out in public.

Seeing Alana’s stubborn, earnest gaze, a flicker of panic crossed Cole’s face. “Is that what Camila told you?”

Alana retorted, “Was she wrong?”

“I...” Cole’s throat tightened; he didn’t know how to respond, as if whatever he said would be wrong in her eyes.

Just then, the elevator doors opened.

Alana pressed her lips together, decided not to dwell on the issue any further, and hurried out.

Whether she dwelled on it or not, it no longer mattered to either of them; it would only make things more awkward.

Her cold demeanor stung him, and Cole instinctively grabbed her wrist.

As the elevator doors opened, several colleagues standing outside immediately saw the two of them struggling inside...

The colleagues stood there, speechlessly.

Alana and Cole both froze for a moment.

Alana was the first to break free from Cole's grip. Cole also withdrew his hand, looking slightly awkward.

Something was clearly off about the two of them, and the colleagues exchanged glances, each with a different look on their face.

Seeing that everyone had clearly misunderstood, Alana's heart sank. "Please don't get the wrong idea. I just needed to discuss something with Manager Cole, right, Manager Cole?" She looked at Cole, hoping he would play along.

Although this excuse had been improvised on the spot, it was rather flimsy.

Cole stared at her, his eyes, hidden behind his glasses, deep and intense.

He paused for a moment before speaking slowly, "Yes, Alana is correct."

Alana breathed a sigh of relief and, regardless of whether her colleagues believed her, hurried away.

Cole watched the direction she had gone, a strange emotion welling up in his eyes.

At Noon, Alana went to the company cafeteria with Carla for lunch.

After ordering their meals, they found a table in a corner and sat down.

"Lana, quite a few people saw you with Manager Cole at the elevator today, he was even holding your hand. Is that true?" Carla couldn't help but ask while eating, her face full of curiosity.

Alana was in the middle of eating and choked on her food when she heard this. "What? They still gossiped about?"

Carla blinked. "Yep. And now, I'm curious!"

Carla continued, "What's your relationship with Manager Cole? I feel like he treats you a little differently. At first, I thought he was deliberately targeting you, but lately he's made you his assistant and been looking for every opportunity to interact with you. It's really..."

Alana couldn't take it anymore. "Stop it! There's nothing going on between us. Don't get the wrong idea."

Carla propped her chin in her hand. "Is that true? Could that boyfriend you've been hiding be Manager Cole? You two...are you secretly dating?!"

Cole had also come to the cafeteria for lunch. Spotting Alana in the corner, he couldn't help but walk over to her.

And he just happened to overhear Carla's words. His eyes darkened slightly as he looked at Alana with a hint of anticipation.

He wanted to know how she would respond.

Alana immediately retorted, "No way! He's not my boyfriend!" She paused for a moment, her gaze falling on the thermos Stephan had given her, filled with the brown sugar ginger tea he'd brewed for her.

Her expression softened slightly as she said gently, "For your information, my boyfriend is a hundred times better than Manager Cole."

Standing behind her, Cole's eyes instantly grew colder, and his fists clenched, unnaturally.

Carla was dying of curiosity. "So who exactly is your boyfriend?"

"He..." Before Alana could say anything, a dark blue figure loomed over her.

Carla's eyes widened at the sight of the man. "Man...Manager Cole"

Alana froze when she saw it was him.

Cole looked at her and asked. "Do you mind if I sit here?"

Alana furrowed her brow and paused for a moment. "I don't mind."

The employee cafeteria belonged to the company, not to her personally, so of course she had no reason to mind.

Cole's gloomy mood lightened considerably after hearing the girl say, "I don't mind."

He curved his lips into a smile and, acting as if they were old friends, sat down in the seat next to her.

Feeling the man's presence, Alana couldn't help but furrow her brows again.

For some reason, once Cole sat down next to her, she found her appetite vanish instantly.

But, determined not to waste food, she forced herself to eat what she was supposed to. However, she shifted her body slightly, deliberately moving away from Cold. Carla's eyes widened in shock when she saw Cole sitting right next to Alana, as if it were perfectly normal.

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Chapter 183 Big problem

Chapter 183 Big problem

Oh God!

What on earth was going on?

Just a moment ago she was gossiping about him and Alana, and now he was actually sitting right next to her?

Something was wrong!

There was a big, big problem!

After Alana sat down, he seemed to think of something and placed the bottle of milk he was holding in front of Alana.

“Lana, you don’t look too well. I just bought this milk, it’s for you.”

Alana refused and pushed the milk back toward him. “No, thanks.”

Cole pushed the milk back toward her and said gently, “Drink it. I heard you’ve been taking care of your grandmother for over a week, and you look quite worn out since you got back. Have some to replenish your strength.”

Alana frowned. “Really, I don’t need it. I already have something to drink.”

Cole furrowed his brow slightly. “Be a good girl and do as I say.”

Carla watched from across the table, her face full of awe.

Seeing that Alana kept refusing Cole, she couldn't help but say, "Um, Manager Cole, Lana is on her period. She can't drink anything cold, that milk of yours looks like it's been frozen."

Cole was taken aback. "You're on your period?"

Alana glared at Carla!

Seriously?!

Cole immediately said, "Then I'll get you a bottle at room temperature..."

"Manager Cole." Alana interrupted him calmly, then picked up the pink thermos next to her. "This is the brown sugar ginger tea my boyfriend made for me this morning. He put it in this thermos and brought it to the office for me to help restore my energy, so really, there's no need to trouble you."

Cole's expression froze instantly.

Carla was stunned. "Wow, Lana, I was wondering why you were carrying a thermos with you today. So it turns out there's ginger and brown sugar tea in there that your boyfriend made for you! Your boyfriend is so thoughtful! How many boyfriends would actually make brown sugar ginger tea for their girlfriend during her period? I'm so jealous you have a boyfriend like that!"

Alana smiled slightly, "Yeah, he's very thoughtful."

Cole's gaze swept over the thermos she was holding, and his fist clenched again.

A surge of anger quickly filled his chest.

Damn it!

Who the hell was her boyfriend?!

Does she really have a boyfriend, or was she just saying that in front of him on purpose, just to provoke him?

Either way, she'd succeeded in getting under his skin. Besides, whatever another man could do for her, he could do too...

He took a deep breath, keeping his tone gentle. "Lana, you're my assistant. If you're really not feeling well, just let me know, and I'll lighten your workload."

Alana replied flatly, "Okay, thanks."

Cole frowned. "I've told you before, there's no need to be so formal between us."

Alana sighed.

Carla's gaze darted back and forth between the two of them; her inner gossipy spirit couldn't be contained any longer.

"Ahem, if I may ask, what's the relationship between you and Lana?"

Cole looked at Alana, his gaze growing even softer. "Lana and I are..." His gentle tone carried a hint of ambiguity.

Alana felt irritated and couldn't help but interrupt, "We were classmates. We attended the same high school."

Carla asked curiously, "Just classmates?"

Alana nodded. "Yes."

Cole's eyes darkened.

Really, just classmates?

She used to cling to him like a weed, so dependent on him. And up until a couple of months ago, they were dating!

Though the relationship had mostly felt one-sided since he barely gave her any attention but he was going to change!

He was going to be the best boyfriend this time!

Cole paused for a moment, then picked up a piece of braised chicken thigh from his plate and placed it in her bowl.

He smiled gently. "Lana, since you're on your period, your body must be weak. Eat some meat to build your strength."

Seeing this, Carla's eyes widened in shock.

Oh my god!

He's actually serving her food, how could she not read into it?!

Would ordinary former classmates even serve food to each other like that?!

Wasn't that way too intimate?!

People around them started glancing over, their eyes brimming with curiosity and gossip. After all, Cole and Alana were both incredibly good-looking, so they naturally

attracted attention.

Plus, since they were manager and assistant, it was easy for people to read too much into it. Now they were sitting together and serving food to each other, their relationship must be pretty deep...

Alana noticed the strange looks from those around her and couldn't help but frown. She had completely lost her appetite.

Even though she didn't want to waste food, she had no choice but to put down her fork.

She hadn't even touched the chicken drumstick Cole had served her. "Manager Cole, Carla, I'm full. I'm going to head back first." Alana stood up and picked up the leftovers and the thermos.

Seeing that Alana was leaving, Carla felt even less inclined to face Cole alone.

"Lana, I'm full too. I'll go with you."

Alana nodded and left with Carla.

The entire time, she didn't glance at Cole even once. Cole's heart sank heavily in his chest.

He didn't understand, what had he done wrong? Hadn't he simply shown concern for her by passing her a chicken drumstick?

Cole's fists clenched tighter and tighter. He lost his appetite and got up to leave.

It was the afternoon work shift.

A delivery guy came looking for Alana, carrying a bag of items.

She looked puzzled. "What's this?"

The delivery guy replied, "Brown sugar ginger tea, and some blood-nourishing supplements. A Mr. Cole ordered them for you."

A Mr. Cole?

Alana immediately thought of the Cole she knew.

Seriously?!

She frowned and refused, "I'm sorry, please take it back. I won't accept it."

The delivery guy looked awkward. "Well, the order's already been placed. If you don't accept it, there's nothing I can do."

Alana said, "Then figure it out yourself. I'm definitely not taking it."

"Miss, please don't make things difficult for me...Just take it. I've got to rush off to deliver the next order." The delivery guy shoved the stuff into her hands and immediately took off.

Alana tried to call him back, but he was already out of earshot.

"Hey!"

A figure flashed past her, snatching the bag from her hands. "Lin Yuan, let me take a look. A Mr. Cole bought this for you, what did he get?"

"Wow, there's brown sugar ginger soup, honey dates with goji berries, and gelatin cakes?! All blood-nourishing foods!"

When Alana saw who had snatched the bag from her hands, her expression darkened. "Danielle, snatching people's things like that, is that polite?"

Danielle pouted. "I was just curious and wanted to take a look. Why are you getting so upset so easily?"

Alana held out her hand, her expression impassive. "Give it back!"

She needed to go return it or else Cole would think she accepted it and get the wrong idea.

Danielle deliberately refused to hand it over and asked instead, "Lana, did Manager Cole give you this? This morning, I saw you and him all over each other in the elevator with my own eyes. Then you had lunch together at noon, and he was being so attentive to you."

"Well, I was wondering how you managed to get him to take a shine to you so easily and make you his personal assistant. Turns out, behind everyone's back, you've been sleeping with him all along!"

Colleagues around them all turned to look, their expressions a mix of shock and curiosity. After all, the interaction between Alana and Cole was quite intriguing.

Alana's eyes turned cold. "What do you mean, 'sleeping together'? Say that again!"

“Lana, don’t play dumb. You’re just an intern who hasn’t even been officially hired yet. You haven’t even made it past the probationary period, yet Manager Cole took a liking to you and chose you as his assistant. It’s only because you and him have been sleeping together for a long time... Ah!” Before Danielle could finish, Alana slapped her across the face without hesitation.

The slap landed hard on Danielle’s face. She was stunned. The burning sensation on her face made her realize, she’d actually been slapped by Alana?!

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Chapter 184 Something wrong

Chapter 184 Something wrong

How... how dare this bitch?!

She couldn’t believe it. “Lana, you... you actually dared to hit me?!”

Alana replied coldly, “Yes, not only do I dare to hit you, but if you ever dare to spread rumors and slander my name again, I’ll beat you up!”

Danielle trembled with rage.

She retorted defiantly, “You know fully well that I’m not spreading baseless rumors!”

Alana curled her lips. “What do I know? You’re the one claiming I’m having an affair with Manager Cole. So it’s not baseless? Then do you have any proof? If you have no proof, just shut your mouth!”

Danielle couldn’t help but retort, “But everyone saw you and Manager Cole getting all touchy-feely in the elevator, and what happened in the staff cafeteria!”

Alana retorted, “So what? What does that prove?”

Danielle choked on her words.

What does that prove?

She had no idea what it meant; she just felt their relationship wasn't normal.

Alana looked at everyone and said calmly, "Let me state this again: I have a boyfriend. My interaction with Manager Cole is strictly. I don't care what you think or say behind my back, but don't bring it up to my face! If I hear anything..." Alana looked at Danielle. "...you'll end up just like her."

With that, she snatched the bag from Danielle's hand while Danielle wasn't looking. Danielle clutched her swollen cheek, she was so furious she nearly stomped her foot.

Seeing Danielle's anger, Carla couldn't help but interject, "Danielle, I have to speak up for Alana. At the staff cafeteria this afternoon, it was Manager Cole who was making advances toward Alana the whole time. He offered her a bottle of milk, but she refused. He even picked up a chicken drumstick for her, but she didn't even touch it, she just packed up her plate and left."

"Rather than saying Alana's the one going after him, it's more accurate to say that Manager Cole has a crush on her and wants to pursue her. But Alana draws clear boundaries and has made her refusal very clear."

Danielle clenched her teeth in frustration. "That bitch is just being dramatic!"

"Huh?!" Carla looked puzzled. "What are you talking about? She's not as cheap as you, is she?"

Danielle shot Song Dandan a glare. She'd been in the cafeteria at lunchtime, how could she not have seen that Manager Cole was the one who'd gone out of his way to get close to Alana?

She just couldn't stand it, which is why she had provoked Alana a little. Besides, she had a little crush on Manager Cole and was even thinking of pursuing him. But Alana beat her to it.

She never would have thought Manager Cole would be interested in a woman like Alana. She really didn't get it, what was so great about Alana that both of them are into her?

First it was Manager Dane, and now Manager Cole...

Alana held the bag, furrowing her brow. Mr. Cole?

After much hesitation, she picked up the bag and knocked on Cole's office door. If Cole did send it, she hoped he would stop making such misleading gestures.

Cole called out, "Come in."

Alana pushed the door open and strode directly to Cole's desk, setting the bag she was holding down on it.

Cole glanced at the bag, then looked up at Alana, his tone gentle.

"Lana, what's the matter?"

Alana looked at him with her almond-shaped eyes, asking uncertainly, "Did you send these?"

Cole looked up at Alana, his tone tinged with a hint of testing, "Does it matter to you whether I gave them to you or not?"

Her eyes were clear as she replied earnestly, "If you gave them to me, I hope you won't give me anything else next time. Because it would lead to misunderstandings, people might think we have some secret relationship. Also, I have a boyfriend. I uphold my virtue as a committed woman and don't want to have any connection with other men."

Hearing this, Cole clenched his fists involuntarily, a surge of pent-up frustration rising in his chest.

He stared at her. "What if... it wasn't from me?"

Alana gave a faint smile. "It's even better if it wasn't from you. Then I don't have to return these to you. I can just throw them in the trash."

With that, right in front of Cole, she tossed the bag of brown sugar ginger soup, along with the donkey-hide gelatin cakes and all the other tonics meant to boost qi and blood, straight into the trash can.

She let it go without a second thought.

Cole felt a tightness in his throat, a lump forming there.

She actually... really threw it away...

Alana gave a faint smile. "Since you didn't give it to me, I've kept you from your business." She nodded slightly, about to leave.

Cole couldn't help but speak up, "Wait."

Alana turned back. "Is there something else, Manager Cole?"

Cole took a deep breath. The intense gloom in his eyes dissipated, and he returned to his usual calm and composed demeanor. "I have a business dinner around seven tonight. You'll accompany me."

Alana pursed her lips. She recalled that he did indeed have a business dinner tonight, and as his assistant, accompanying him was part of her duties.

She nodded. "Okay."

Back at her desk, Alana immediately picked up her phone to let Stephan know.

Alana: [Just letting my boyfriend know: I have a business dinner at 7 p.m., so he doesn't need to pick me up after work.]

After sending it, she even found herself looking forward to his reply.

She even found herself imagining what expression he'd have when he received her message.

Would he be disappointed?

Or would he be angry?

Hey, hey, hey, Lana, you're overthinking this.

Alana shook her head and was about to put her phone down.

The screen lit up, he'd replied.

Stephan: [Okay.]

Alana raised an eyebrow. That was a bit of a short reply.

She pouted, finding it hard to understand him right now.

In the Hudson Group office.

Stephan had just turned down an evening social engagement with Vance and was getting ready to pick up Alana after work, planning to cook her a romantic candlelit dinner.

After all, ever since she cooked for him last time, he'd been thinking about making her a proper dinner.

As a qualified and excellent boyfriend, he couldn't just enjoy his girlfriend's kindness, he had to learn to repay her a thousandfold.

Where could you find a man like him, who goes out of his way to think of his girlfriend?

Alana, you're in for a real treat!

A smug smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. But then, he received a message saying she had to attend a business dinner that evening.

Stephan's mood crashed.

He furrowed his brow. "She just said she was going to a business dinner, but didn't even bother to specify who she was going with?" He paused for a moment. "Never mind. I trust her and it's already pretty good

that she told me this much."

He shouldn't be too overbearing.

After a moment's thought, he replied with a simple "Okay."

He felt a little down, after all, his little bunny had work tonight and didn't need him to be with her.

"It's fine, it's fine."

"It's just work. No matter how important work is, could it ever be more important than me?"

"Work takes weekends off, but her boyfriend is available every day, so her boyfriend is more important."

It felt as if he was trying to cheer himself up, the corners of his mouth turned up slightly.

Vance, who was in the middle of reporting to Stephan, heard the CEO muttering to himself and was puzzled. "Ahem, CEO, what are you saying?"

Stephan raised his eyes to look at Vance, his expression calm. "Did I say anything?"

Vance blinked. "You said 'Work takes weekends off, but her boyfriend is available every day, so her boyfriend is more important.' What does that mean?"

Stephan raised the corner of his mouth slightly. "Vance, it's hard to explain it to a single guy like you."

Was there something wrong with being single?!

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Chapter 185 Even more unbearable

Vance felt really pained that his boss kept showing off. It wasn't his fault that he was single!

He had been trying to date, okay?!

It just wasn't working out.

What was so great about dating anyway?! Ever since his boss started dating, he's become even more unbearable.

Such a love sick puppy.

"Look at you, you change your outfit every day, never repeating a single look, but that red tie around your neck? You wear it every single day. You won't even take it off even when it's worn out, and the tie is the cheapest of all your ties. Does love do that to people too?" Vance finished his work report with a calm demeanor, but left muttering curses under his breath.

Luckily, Stephan had no idea what Vance was thinking; otherwise, he would've sent him off to space for a round of "re-education" without a second thought.

After Vance left, Stephan was just about to get back to work when his eyes narrowed, as if something had suddenly occurred to him.

Something's off. Alana has been working overtime a bit too often lately. She was already working late frequently before she took her leave.

Now that she's just returned to the office, she has to work overtime again to attend social engagements...

She was just an intern, where were all these work coming from?

Stephan recalled that someone had once brought her dinner the other time, wasn't it Manager Cole or something like that?!

A man's intuition told him something was off about this.

Besides, business dinners might involve drinking, and her period hadn't ended yet. He furrowed his brow and couldn't help but send another message to her.

Alana had been busy for a while and, out of habit, glanced at her phone again.

She noticed that Stephan had sent her two new messages.

Stephan: [I guess you can't say no to the dinner, but your period isn't over yet, you can't drink too much.]

[Let me know when the event is over, and I'll come pick you up.]

Alana's lips curled into a smile as she replied.

Alana: [Okay.]

Stephan: [My girlfriend finally replied me.]

She couldn't help but chuckle. Sensing that the man might be getting upset, she sent him a cute and adorable emoji to appease him.

The event was held at Spring Banquet.

Alana sent Stephan a message in advance.

When Stephan saw it was at Spring Banquet, he raised an eyebrow slightly.

Gary and his friends were having a gathering at Spring Banquet tonight, and they'd invited him.

He'd go to join the fun; maybe he'd run into her.

Sounds good.

After work, Alana got into Cole's car and headed to their destination.

In the car, Cole chatted with Alana in a casual, off-the-cuff manner, trying to get closer to her.

He asked how she'd been doing these past few months.

Alana remained as aloof as ever, replying, "I've been okay."

Cole's expression didn't change; he remained gentle, showing concern for her

like an older brother.

“Where are you staying now? You moved out from your previous place. We might stay out late so I’ll drive you home when we’re done.”

Alana declined again, “No need. My boyfriend is coming to pick me up.”

Cole didn’t take it to heart.

Or perhaps, he simply didn’t think much of her boyfriend.

So what if she has a boyfriend?

It wouldn’t stop him from winning her back.

Ever since he found her, he was determined to have her.

The two arrived at the private room they’d reserved at Spring Banquet.

Alana followed Cole inside and saw several CEOs or executives from listed companies.

They were surrounded by a crowd of beautiful women, grinning from ear to ear.

Upon seeing Cole enter, they all instinctively composed themselves.

“Mr. Cole, you’re here!”

“Mr. Cole, please come sit down. We’ve reserved a spot for you here.”

Cole nodded and murmured a soft “Mm-hmm,” then led Alana to the empty seats and sat down.

Several executives also noticed Alana standing beside Cole. She was wearing an off-white silk blouse paired with a matching pencil skirt; the hem of the blouse was tucked into the skirt, accentuating her slender waist, while her long legs and graceful figure exuded an extraordinary charm.

Combined with her stunningly beautiful face, her looks, her figure, and her pure, innocent aura, she instantly outshone the vulgar beauties in the private room.

A CEO smiled and asked, “Mr. Cole, this is a rare treat. How come you’ve brought such a beautiful woman along with you?”

Cole replied casually, “My new assistant, Alana.”

“Alana, this is Mr. Evan...CEO Gabriel, CEO Sergio...”

Alana politely greeted the executives.

Although she was new to the workplace and hadn’t experienced many high-profile events, she kept in mind the principle of “say less, do more,” doing her best not to cause any trouble.

President Evan smiled broadly. “Cole, your assistant isn’t just beautiful, she’s also quite well-behaved.” His gaze lingered on Alana with obvious interest, after all, who wouldn’t be intrigued by a beauty, especially one as stunning as her?

Cole pressed his lips together and said nothing; after all, Alana had indeed always been quite well-behaved.

But then he thought of her recent rebellious streak...it had suddenly become so hard to manipulate her.

President Evan looked at Alana and raised a glass of wine. “Alana dear, do you drink? Care for a glass?”

Alana felt a bit awkward. “Sorry, Mr. Evan, could I have tea instead of alcohol?”

It wasn’t that she didn’t know how to drink; she simply couldn’t hold her liquor.

Mr. Evan smiled. “Alana, we’re out socializing. It wouldn’t make sense to have tea instead of wine. Right, Mr. Cole?”

After a brief pause, he turned to Cole, testing his reaction.

Alana pursed her lips and instinctively glanced at Cole.

Cole’s expression remained calm, and he didn’t speak for a moment.

This only emboldened President Evan to become even more arrogant toward Alana.

He smiled broadly. “Alana, have a drink. You’re not going to embarrass me by rejecting my offer, are you?”

Alana paused for a moment. “Alright, I’ll drink.”

Then, without hesitation, she picked up the bottle and glass and poured herself a drink. Cole watched her concession and couldn’t help but frown.

Why?

She clearly didn't want to drink. Why didn't she do what she was supposed to...turn to him for help when she was in trouble?

If she asked for his help, he would have done anything to stop her from drinking.

But now, she'd rather drink something she didn't like than ask him for help...

Alana poured a glass of wine and raised it to Mr. Evan. "Mr. Evan, please."

Mr. Evan smiled, raised his glass, and clinked it against Alana's.

As their glasses clinked, he even reached out and lightly tickled the back of her hand. Alana instantly looked up, her clear eyes brimming with disgust.

This Mr. Evan, it was one thing for him to be surrounded by women, but he wouldn't even spare her.

It wasn't as if she hadn't encountered workplace harassment before, but every time, the disgust had been overwhelming.

Why must women suffer and be humiliated in the workplace?

Why can't they enjoy the same respect as men?

Mr. Evan hadn't failed to notice the displeasure in her eyes, but he merely smiled, unconcerned.

She was just a lowly assistant, easy to manipulate.

"Alana, bottoms up." Alana took a deep breath, preparing to drink the wine.

Suddenly, Cole reached out and snatched the glass from her hand. "Sorry, my assistant isn't feeling well today, so I'll drink it for her."

Before Alana could react, Cole gave a slight toast to General Manager Evan, then tilted his head back and downed the drink in one gulp.

Mr. Evan hadn't expected Cole to ultimately step in to protect his young assistant.

He was no fool; he guessed that Cole might have special feelings for her. He gave an awkward smile and didn't continue giving her a hard time.

Alana watched as Cole drank her drink, and her brows furrowed slightly.

But given the situation, she didn't say anything. After all, she hadn't asked him to drink it for her.

After Cole finished the drink for Alana and set the glass down, he couldn't help but look at her.

He had expected to receive a grateful look from her. But to his surprise, she remained cold toward him.

His lips twitched slightly.

Huh, who would've thought his help would go completely unnoticed?!

She wasn't even touched!

Chapter 186 Show off your love

Chapter 186 Show off your love

Meanwhile, Stephan arrived at the Spring Banquet and walked into the private room arranged by his brothers.

Gary and the others were all there.

Seeing that he had come alone, the group of friends couldn't help but tease him to his face.

"Why'd you come alone? Why didn't you bring your girlfriend along to show off your love?"

"Exactly! You're always bragging in the group chat, about how your girlfriend looks like a celestial beauty, how she cooks romantic dinners for you, and all the gifts she gives you. Why not just bring her here and make us all jealous to death?"

"Tell me about it! I was all set to be sick of all the lovey-dovey stuff. Where's your girlfriend who's as beautiful as a celestial maiden?!"

"Hahaha, don't tell me she's too ashamed to show her face?!"

"It's possible. After all, what does Stephan know about women?!" Facing the teasing from this group of playboys, Stephsn remained completely unfazed.

He walked over to an empty seat, leaned back against the chair, and leisurely crossed his legs.

He curled his lips in a casual smile. "I wanted to bring my girlfriend over to show her off, but unfortunately, she has a business dinner tonight and is busy.

Otherwise, I would've made sure you all got to meet her."

One of the young playboys teased, "Oh? What's that supposed to mean? Does your girlfriend actually have to work?"

"She's your girlfriend, how can you possibly let her go out and work?"

Stephan retorted coolly, "What's wrong with her working if she wants to? She has freedom to do whatever she wants, all I need to do is support her. Since she wants to work and shine in her field, I need to be her number one fan. As long as she's happy, that's all that matters." As he spoke, a faint smile played at the corners of his mouth, as if he thought his idea was quite brilliant.

Gary's eyes widened. "Stephan, I never would have guessed you had this kind of insight!"

Was this really the Stephan he knew, the aloof, cold-hearted, and unromantic man?

Stephan grinned. "My awareness has always been quite high."

Gary scoffed, fighting the urge to roll his eyes, he handed Stephan a glass of wine.

"Never mind, let's drink!"

Stephan politely declined, "I'm not drinking. I'm on a temporary break from alcohol. My girlfriend's business dinner will be over soon, and I still have to drive to pick her up."

Gary blinked.

What?!

He was showing off again.

Someone couldn't help but ask, "Stephan, where is Mrs. Hudson business dinner at?"

Upon hearing the term "Mrs. Hudson" Stephan shot the guy a look of approval and replied cheerfully, "She's at the Spring Banquet too. Once she's done over there, I'll be heading out."

Everyone was surprised.

“Who knew Stephan’s girlfriend was at the Spring Banquet too? Why not call her over and let her make an appearance for us?!”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s just a matter of asking her to come over!”

“Oh my, I can’t wait! Just what kind of stunning beauty could possibly have won over our aloof Stephan Hudson.”

Stephan maintained his dignified, aloof expression as his long, slender fingers ran along the armrest of his chair. In a calm, measured tone, he said, “She’s working. It wouldn’t be appropriate to call her over.”

The young playboy teased with a smile, “Oh my, is work more important than you? Surely your girlfriend can tell the difference, right?”

“Exactly. Between work and you, she’s gotta pick one, right?”

“Stephan, you can’t let work outshine you!”

Stephan snorted with a laugh, his narrow, dark eyes slowly glancing sideways at the young playboy. “Comparing me to my girlfriend’s work? I think you guys are asking for a beating! I’ll always be more important to her!”

“Calm down, we just want to meet Mrs. Hudson. We’re dying to know the woman who has you hook, line and sinker! Right, guys?”

“Yeah, yeah!”

“It doesn’t matter if you want to see her or not. I only do things that are convenient for her. If she wants to meet you guys soon, she will. But right now, she’s at work. And don’t you dare say her work is more important. There’s just time for everything. And I won’t do anything to put her in a difficult position.”

“Most importantly, my girlfriend is a bit shy. Whether she comes to see you or not depends on her. If we just call her over out of the blue like this, she probably won’t be able to handle it. And you guys can be quite too much...too noisy and annoying.”

The man gasped in shock.

“Did we just get insulted?”

Listening to Stephan’s deadpan explanation, Gary couldn’t help but laugh.

“Wait a minute, Stephan. You have to get your girlfriend’s approval for everything? It sounds to me like you’re turning into a henpecked husband.”

Stephan frowned, shot Gary a glance, and replied with a strong undertone of displeasure, “What do you mean, henpecked? Choose your words more carefully. This isn’t being under her thumb, it’s respect!”

Gary silently rolled his eyes. “Fine, fine, respect. I can see it, you really respect your girlfriend!”

He couldn’t help but roll his eyes inwardly.

‘Fine, go ahead and play it tough! Call it respect if you want, but isn’t that just being henpecked. It all amounts to the same thing, I have no idea what this friend of mine is trying to pull!’ Gary thought.

The social gathering lasted nearly three hours from start to finish.

Throughout the event, Alana didn’t touch a drop of alcohol, but Cole drank quite a bit.

Once the gathering wrapped up and the executives left, all looking rather tipsy, Alana sent a message to Stephan.

[I’m done here.]

Then she sent him her exact location.

After a moment’s hesitation, she added,

[If it’s not convenient for you to come, don’t

worry about it. I’ll just take a taxi home.]

After all, he had his own things to attend to, and she couldn’t keep bothering him.

But if he didn’t come, would she take a taxi back to her own place, or to his?

It was a bit of a headache, especially since she’d been staying at his place for the past few days.

At first, she’d decided to date without living together, so that no one would have too much influence on her life, but gradually, things had started to veer off the path she’d envisioned.

She was powerless against his forceful intrusion. So much so that she was growing increasingly accustomed to being with him. Not only was she getting used to it, she was actually starting to love it.

In the end, would she become more and more accustomed to him, more and more dependent on him?

Alana sighed softly. Never mind, she thought. She wouldn't dwell on it; she'd just take things one step at a time.

Meanwhile, Stephan, who had received Alana's message, let the corners of his mouth turn up slightly.

He stood up decisively, smoothed out the wrinkles in his clothes, and said casually, "Sorry, my girlfriend's business dinner is over. I'm going to go get her."

Someone teased, "So soon? It's still early. Once you get your girlfriend, why not bring her over for us to meet?"

"That's right! We're all looking forward to seeing her tonight!"

Stephan curved his lips. "We'll see. If she doesn't mind, I certainly won't either."

Gary eyed him: "Alright, alright, we'll be waiting for your good news!"

"Remember, if I bring her over, you'll all have to call her 'sister-in-law.'"

Everyone burst into laugh.

Man, he was really down bad.

Stephan paid no mind to their reactions. After making his point clear, he turned and walked away decisively.

He couldn't keep Little White Rabbit waiting too long. No sooner had Alana sent the message than Cole, emboldened by the alcohol, leaned softly against her.

The alcohol amplified his inner longing for her. Her delicate softness and sweet scent captivated him.

Plus, right now, there were only the two of them in the private room...

"Lana, I've been drinking, so I can't drive. Could you take me home later?"

Alana was taken by surprise and couldn't help but push the man leaning against her away.

The strong smell of alcohol on him made her uncomfortable.

But Cole moved again and leaned against her, seemingly quite drunk. Since she'd come with him, and she was his assistant, she couldn't just leave him to

fend for himself.

“Don't you have a driver?”

Cole sensed the girl's resistance, and a hint of disappointment flashed in his eyes.

He sighed softly. “My driver had to go home early.”

Alana suggested, “Then I'll call you a designated driver.”

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Chapter 187 Beating him up

Chapter 187 Beating him up

Cole frowned. “Can't you just drive me home?”

“Sorry, I don't know how to drive.”

“You're lying. I've seen your resume, you said you passed your driver's test.”

Alana couldn't take it anymore. “Cole, don't you get it yet? Do I need to spell it out everything? Fine! Let me be blunt: I don't care about you enough to drive you home.”

Unable to bear her repeated refusals, Cole grabbed her hand and couldn't help but pull her into his arms.

“Lana, are you still mad at me? Let's not fight anymore, okay? Those unpleasant things from the past are long gone. Let's just forget about them, okay? Let's start over, hmm?” But the scene of the two of them entangled in the private room was spotted by Stephan, who had come looking for Alana.

His footsteps halted at the door of the private room. His dark eyes stared unblinkingly at the man and woman embracing inside, and a storm of emotion instantly surged within them.

What does “let’s not fight anymore” mean?

What did “the unpleasant things from the past” mean?

This man... could he possibly be her irresponsible ex-boyfriend who left on a business trip?!

Has that ex returned from his business trip? And he was still hounding Alana, trying to get back together with her?!

Damn it!

Does this despicable man think her current partner was dead? How dare he try to steal her away?

Stephan’s eyes flashed with fury as he strode inside without hesitation.

Suddenly embraced, Alana couldn’t help but panic. She frantically pushed him away, “Cole, let me go!”

Cole, intoxicated by alcohol, had no intention of letting go. As he held her close, he longed to merge with her completely.

“I won’t let you go, Lana. I’ve missed you so much. I want you back...please take me back. Lana, let me hold you. You’re mine, and I’ll never let you go for the rest of my life.”

Alana was furious. “Cole! If you keep this up, I’ll report you for harassment!” She struggled to push him away, but the disparity in their strength was too great; no matter how hard she resisted, she couldn’t break free.

“Lana, I know you can’t bring yourself to do this. You can’t bring yourself to treat me like this...”

Before Cole could finish his sentence, a large hand suddenly grabbed him by the collar.

Immediately afterward, a hard, solid fist slammed viciously into his face.

The searing pain hit him instantly, and he immediately tasted the rusty, metallic taste of blood from his gums. “You...”

Before Cole could get a clear look at who it was, another fist came crashing down. Accompanied by a voice brimming with malice, it slammed down hard on his head.

“How dare you touch her! Alana is my woman! You’re a worthless, scummy loser who’s already been kicked out, you have no right to touch her!”

“If I catch you bothering her again, I’ll fucking kill you...”

Upon hearing that the intruder was Alana’s boyfriend, Cole strained his eyes, trying to get a clear look at who he was.

But he’d had way too much to drink and was pretty drunk.

When he opened his eyes, the overhead lights stung them painfully.

On top of that, the man had already smashed his glasses. All he could make out now was a blurry, cold, and handsome silhouette.

Before he could make out the details in his hazy state, another fist came crashing down. Immediately after, the man’s knee slammed hard into his abdomen.

The excruciating pain in his stomach caused him to convulse; the alcohol he’d drunk all night came gushing out, his face contorted with agony.

The man then tossed him aside as though he were trash. He fell to the ground like a kite whose string had snapped, rolling several times.

Cole gasped for breath, struggling to get back on his feet. But just then, the man walked over, his expensive black leather shoes clacking against the cold floor as he advanced step by step, exuding a palpable sense of danger.

Cole coughed painfully. “Who...who...are you?”

“Who am I? You’re not worthy of knowing.” The man walked up to Cole and, without hesitation, stepped on his chest to prevent him from getting up.

The man’s foot bore the full force of his fury, as if he wanted to crush his chest.

“With a scum like you, you actually have the nerve to beg her to take you back? Where were you when she was sick? Where were you when she was being bullied at work?”

“Now that you’ve been dumped, you’re showing up with a thick skin begging to get back together? Sorry, but the man by her side now is me, and it’ll always be me. You’ve already been kicked out of the picture! I’m never going anywhere.”

Cole felt a wave of suffocation in his chest. Clenching his teeth, he asked, “You... what are you talking about?”

He couldn’t make head or tail of a single word.

Stephan’s thin lips curled into a cold, mocking smile. “Still playing dumb? I think you’re asking for trouble!”

With that, Stephan kicked him without hesitation.

The blows came one after another. Cole instinctively raised his hands to shield his head, but the cries of pain continued unabated, leaving him utterly helpless.

If he hadn’t been drunk and completely drained of strength, he wouldn’t have been so utterly helpless.

Alana watched the scene, speechless.

Stephan... how did he show up so fast?

She had just sent him a message, and he was here in less than a few minutes?

Could it be... that he’d actually seen Cole hugging her just now?

Seeing Cole beaten to a pulp, Alana was genuinely afraid that Stephan might accidentally kick him to death.

She rushed over to stop him. “Stephan, stop! Stop hitting him!” The girl grabbed one of his arms, tugging at him to stop him from continuing the beating.

Stephan turned to look at her, his eyes cold and dark. “What’s the matter? Does it hurt you to see me hitting him?”

He was clearly taking his anger out on him for her sake, yet she actually ran over to stop him?

The more he thought about it, the more he felt like a joke.

He was standing up for her, yet not only did she not care, she was actually pleading for this scumbag!

“Could it be that you still can’t let go of him?” The mere thought of that possibility made Stephan feel as if a jar of jealousy had been overturned inside him; the bitterness was practically bubbling up his throat.

“Afterall, it took a long while for you to dump him for me! Even though he clearly didn’t care about you, you still refused to leave him! Do you know how hard I tried to make you mine?! Now what? You...you’re going to make me the other man again?!” He glared at the girl in front of him, his dark eyes filled with a mix of anger and hurt, as if accusing her of being promiscuous!

As soon as Cole heard this, she knew he’d misunderstood.

He thought Cole was the boyfriend she had made up before.

She quickly grabbed his arm to explain,

“No! You’ve got it wrong, he’s not my ex...”

Stephan sneered, “You’re defending him so fiercely, he’s not your ex? Then what is he? You never broke up with him when we got together?!” Stephan’s heart ached recalling how this bastard had been holding her just now.

Alana was frantic with anxiety; her face flushed as red as a ripe apple.

“It’s true! He’s not who you’re thinking. Yes, he’s my ex but our relationship ended long ago. Before I met you. The boyfriend I told you about that was always on business trip doesn’t exist.”

Stephan froze, his dark eyes fixed intently on the girl’s beautiful, delicate face, almost convinced he’d misheard her.

“What did you just say?”

Alana nodded, vigorously. “When you started coming onto me, I...I didn’t want to date anyone so I lied about having a boyfriend.”

Alana looked at the man’s handsome, expressionless face, unable to guess what he was thinking, and felt extremely anxious.

“Um, I didn’t mean to deceive you on purpose. It was just... a misunderstanding. I...didn’t really like you pestering me at the time, so... I went with the flow and let you keep thinking that...”

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Chapter 188 Unnaturally red

Chapter 188 Unnaturally red

Seeing that the man still saying nothing, Alana felt a strange stinging sensation in her eyes. She bit her lip and took a long time to speak.

“I’m sorry. I know you must feel so disappointed in me...I...I didn’t...I’d understand anything you choose to do now. If...if you want to break up...” By the end, her voice had grown faint. A hazy mist began to gather in her clear eyes, and the corners of her eyes were unnaturally red.

To be honest, the thought of breaking up made her heart ache, she just couldn’t bear to let him go.

Hearing the mention of a breakup, Stephan’s expression darkened, and his jaw tightened.

“Who said we’re breaking up?”

He no longer had the heart to concern himself with the man lying on the ground. Grabbing Alana by the shoulders, he demanded, “Lana, tell me honestly. Those pairs of flips flops in your apartment that time...those weren’t for him?”

“No. I just randomly bought them to make it seem...”

“Then who really is this man to you? Your first love? Your first boyfriend?”

Alana stared at Cole then at Stephan.

“Truth is, I used to think he was my first love and first boyfriend but when I think back now, I think I just foolishly believe what I felt for him was love. Plus, he never made time for me. We could go months without seeing each other. How could I still think that was a relationship? It felt as if I was the only one in that relationship. And now, after getting together with you, it feels like I’m learning so many new things and this feels like my first proper relationship.”

When he uttered the words “first proper relationship,” his voice actually trembled with a hint of excitement.

Alana's shoulders were gripped tightly by the man; she could feel his uncontrollable emotions.

She lifted her slightly reddened eyes to meet his gaze, eyes deeper than obsidian, and nodded slowly and earnestly.

"You're my first boyfriend, Stephan."

A flicker of excitement instantly lit up his dark eyes.

So she had completely written off this punk on the floor and saw him, Stephan as the best boyfriend ever?!

Though he still felt salty that she tried to turn him away by making up an imaginary boyfriend at the time.

No wonder, all this time had passed, and her so-called boyfriend had never once shown up.

He should have realized this long ago.

But when a man was in love, his IQ drops to negative territory. Whatever she said, he believed it like a fool.

Because he never imagined she would

deceive him!

Stephan couldn't help but cup her delicate face in his hands, gritting his teeth. "Lana, I've only just realized that you're the real fraud!"

She's always been the one accusing him of deceiving her, but now, who's deceiving whom?!

Alana felt guilty. "I'm sorry..."

To be honest, so much time had passed. She'd thought that with his intelligence, he would have figured out the whole "boyfriend" thing long ago.

She didn't expect he still hasn't noticed.

Stephan stared into her moist, flushed eyes, his voice low. "Saying 'sorry' won't do it. Make it up to me properly!"

“How should I make it up to you... mmm...” Before she could finish her sentence, the man’s forceful kiss robbed her of her breath. It came on so fiercely that she was completely powerless to resist.

Their lips and teeth tangled, their saliva mingling. The sounds amplified their senses, and with another man present, the excitement reached its peak.

Alana’s breathing grew ragged, her voice a soft gasp.

“Mmm, that’s enough, stop kissing me, there’s someone else here...”

The man clamped one hand around her slender waist, while the other pressed against the back of her neck, leaving her with nowhere to escape. His voice was low and hoarse, brimming with intense desire. “I don’t care. Let him watch! Let him watch me shower you with love properly.”

Giving Alana no chance to refuse, Stephan kissed her again.

Her soft, delicate lips were kissed and nibbled on repeatedly. As if he could never get enough, he took her upper lip between his teeth, then sucked on her lower lip, grinding against it and licking it gently.

Alana couldn’t take it anymore; her body trembled uncontrollably, and she collapsed limply into his arms.

Only when she was kissed to the point of near suffocation did Stephan finally let her go.

He cupped her face with one hand, pressed his forehead against hers, and gazed at her flushed cheeks, breathing heavily.

“After all these kisses, you still don’t know how to breathe. Looks like you need to practice more on how to take me.”

Alana bit her lips, which were swollen and red, not caring about anything else. She glanced nervously at Cole, who was lying on the floor.

He lay motionless on the floor, seemingly unconscious.

She didn’t know if he had seen Stephan kiss her passionately just now.

Stephan pinched her chin, turning her shy, flushed little face back toward him. “What’s the matter? Are you that afraid he’ll see?”

Alana couldn’t help but shoot him a reproachful glance. “Look who’s talking!”

Didn't he feel embarrassed kissing her in front of others?

As for her, she was already so embarrassed she felt like she could dig a luxury castle out of her toes.

Stephan chuckled and shot a sidelong glance at the man lying on the ground.

"Don't worry, I made sure he was unconscious before I kissed you. After all, I wouldn't want another man to see this face of yours, made so delicate and alluring by my kisses."

Alana swallowed.

What a terrifying sense of possessiveness.

Stephan took her soft little hand. "Come with me."

Alana was a little nervous. "Wait, is he... okay?"

After all, Stephan had just dealt a pretty brutal blow to Cole, he hadn't hurt him too badly, had he?

Stephan watched the girl's reaction, his eyes darkening. "You're worried about him?"

Alana bit her lip and explained softly, "No, I'm just afraid that if something happens to him, he'll press charges."

What if Cole called the police and had them come arrest him?

Realizing she was worried about him, Stephan's expression softened. He reached out to ruffle her hair and reassured her,

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it." With that, he reached out to pull Alana away.

Alana couldn't help but glance at Cole, who lay unconscious on the ground. The man's fair face bore red, swollen, and bruised marks, and a trickle of blood was even seeping from the corner of his mouth.

The glasses he'd been wearing had vanished. Originally dressed in a sharp suit, his clothes were now disheveled, with several buttons torn off during the struggle.

To be honest, she had never seen him look so disheveled. In her eyes, he had always been refined, handsome, and elegant.

But seeing him lying on the ground like this, battered and bruised, was a first.

A complex mix of emotions flashed through her eyes, and she wasn't sure how she felt. After a moment's hesitation, she stopped in her tracks, couldn't resist tugging at the man's finger, and whispered, "Wait a minute, we should still call 911 for him. After all, I came here with him; if something happens to him, I can't escape responsibility."

Besides, Cole was quite an asshole too. If he found out Stephan had beaten him up, she knew he might try to ruin Stephan's reputation.

She couldn't let anything happen to Stephan.

Little did she know that the man by her side was powerful enough not to need her to worry about him.

Stephan frowned slightly, but agreed nonetheless.

Alana immediately pulled out her phone and dialed 911.

Only after Cole was taken away by the ambulance did she agree to go back with Stephan.

The two got into the car together.

Alana sat in the passenger seat, still feeling somewhat restless.

She was terrified that this matter would escalate.

Stephan sensed her unease. Instead of starting the car right away, he glanced at her and asked, without much emotion,

"How did you get involved with him again? What's his name?"

The man appeared expressionless, yet he exuded an inexplicable sense of pressure.

Alana couldn't help but feel nervous. "Cole Park."

"His last name is Parker?"

He picked up on something immediately.

"Last time, was he the one who had takeout delivered to you?"

She bit her lip and nodded slightly. "Yes."

His eyes instantly grew colder. "Was he the one who made you work overtime, too?"

She nervously tugged at the hem of her skirt, “Mm-hmm. Right now, I’m his assistant.”

“And he was just hugging you.” Stephan let out a cold laugh. His pitch-black eyes were filled with icy frost, enough to freeze a person to death.

“I feel like I went easy on him just now. I should’ve broke his neck.”

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Chapter 189 How responsible

Chapter 189 How responsible

Alana gasped, “You can’t just go killing people.”

Stephan said coldly, “He touched you. It’s only right that I teach him a lesson.”

Alana watched him anxiously. “Anyway, fighting is wrong. Could you tone it down a bit? I don’t want anything to happen to you because of me.”

Seeing the worried look on her face, Stephan chuckled softly, his gaze softening.

He raised his hand and gently ruffled her hair. “Okay, I’ll listen to you.”

Alana let out a slight sigh of relief.

As for whether Cole would hold Stephan accountable, she’d worry about that tomorrow.

Besides, this wasn’t entirely Stephan’s fault. Next, Stephan drove Alana straight back to their apartment.

The group chat with his friends was buzzing with activity; they were all tagging Stephan, asking when he’d bring his wife over, they were all waiting in the private room to meet her.

When Stephan got back to the apartment, he realized he had over 99 unread messages in the group.

He replied manually: [Don't wait anymore. Go home, wash up, and go to sleep. I just brought your sister-in-law home.]

As soon as the message went out, the group erupted in a chorus of groans.

Stephan couldn't be bothered to respond. He set down his phone, turned around, and pulled Alana into his arms.

He buried his face in the crook of her neck, his hands resting on her slender waist, holding her tightly.

Alana had just been about to look for clothes to take a shower when the man suddenly embraced her. She was a bit puzzled.

"What's wrong?"

His thin lips pressed against the crook of her neck, and he couldn't help but suck hard. "Lana, you really do make men crazy over you. First there was Manager Dane, who had his eye on you, then Luca, and now this guy...Cole."

"Also, these are the only ones these few who have their eyes on you, how many more are there that I don't know about, hmm?"

When he found out she'd lied to him to push him away before, he felt angry, but mostly excited.

Because she belonged to him, entirely and completely his!

He had her all to himself! He was never the other man.

But... the endless stream of unwanted suitors swarming around her left him feeling deeply threatened.

Alana bit her lip. "You're overthinking it. There aren't that many..."

Stephan looked up but kept holding her close, his dark eyes fixed on her. "Do they know you have a boyfriend? And they're still hitting on you?"

Alana felt nervous under his intense gaze and whispered, "They do. I told them I'm seeing someone."

Stephan's thin lips twitched. "They know you have a boyfriend, and they're still after you? Every single one of them wants to be the other man, trying to steal my girlfriend away?"

When your girlfriend was this beautiful and not always by your side, who knows how many wolves were circling her?

Sometimes, you just couldn't guard against everything!

Stephan gazed at the girl's beautiful, innocent yet alluring face. He couldn't help but cup it in both hands and coax her softly,

"Sweetheart, why don't you consider quitting your job? I'll take care of you." He thought to himself, he wasn't forcing her to quit her job, he was just asking her to consider it.

Yes, he was respecting her opinion.

Alana froze. "Huh?"

Weren't they just talking about men?

Why had the conversation suddenly shifted to her job?

Stephan looked at the girl's bewildered expression. To show his sincerity, he pulled out a bank card, grabbed one of her hands, and pressed the card into it.

"This is one of my bank cards. Feel free to use any amount you want. It's unlimited."

Alana looked at the almost entirely black bank card in her palm, edged with gold

stripes, and for a moment, it actually felt a little too hot to hold. "No, no! I don't want your bank card." She quickly shoved the card back into the man's hand.

Stephan stared at her, his eyes dark and intense. "Lana, don't you want my money? Even if I'm giving it to you willingly, you still don't want it?"

Alana shook her head and said earnestly, "Stephan, you've misunderstood. I just don't want to be a parasitic plant that clings to her boyfriend and has no sense of self."

"I should have my own career, and within that career, strive hard, shine brightly, and realize my self-worth. Even though the process is tough, I won't lose myself."

Once she lost her job and devoted herself entirely to a man, even if that man were willing to support her, she wouldn't truly be happy.

On the contrary, having grown accustomed to being supported by a man, she would live in constant fear, what if he stopped treating her well and withdrew everything he'd invested in her? Without a job, how could she fill that void?

Any woman with even a modicum of rationality would never give up her career for the sake of a relationship.

Stephan watched the girl explain her reasoning to him with such earnestness, and instead of getting angry, he smiled.

A faint smile played on his thin lips. She was indeed the woman he had chosen, she had her own thoughts and was very clear-headed.

So clear-headed, in fact, that he found himself at a loss with her.

He wanted to shower her with money and let her live a life of leisure, but she wasn't having it.

So what could he do?

He could only spoil her.

"Fine. If you want to work, then work. I won't ask you to quit."

Alana's eyes crinkled into a smile.

Unlike some men with strong chauvinistic tendencies, Stephan actually respected her opinion and wouldn't force her to do anything she didn't want to do. That was a major plus.

Stephan changed the subject. "But could you switch jobs?"

Alana grimaced. "Hm?"

He rubbed her cheek and discussed it seriously with her, "Come work for me. I'll pay you a high salary."

Alana froze. "Huh? You want me to work for you, does that mean you're offering me a backdoor?"

Stephan asked with a smile, "What's wrong? Don't you like getting special treatment?"

Alana looked conflicted. "I... I don't really. Well, you know, I mean... people will talk if I get a backdoor deal. You said I'm just an ordinary person with average abilities, so if I get a backdoor appointment, then..." The girl stammered, her adorable look of conflict and hesitation making Stephan burst out laughing.

“With me looking out for you, what’s there to be afraid of?”

Alana blinked and said earnestly, “No, I can’t keep bothering you, can I? If I just stay under your wing, protected by you, how am I ever going to grow? I think everyone needs the ability and courage to stand on their own two feet; you can’t rely on others for everything. What if one day, that person turns out to be unreliable?”

Stephan’s lips curled into a half-smile. “Are you implying that I’m unreliable?”

“No. I didn’t mean to say you’re unreliable. I was just saying ‘what if you become’ as in one-in-ten-thousand chance, something so minuscule it’s practically negligible.”

Stephan snorted with a laugh. She was chattering away, but her explanation was practically meaningless.

Wasn’t she just trying to say he wasn’t reliable, that she couldn’t depend on him for the rest of her life?

Were girls these days all so level-headed? Don’t they ever get swept up in romance?

It almost made him, a grown man, seem like the only one with a “love-struck brain,” always thinking of her first.

Never mind, never mind.

“Fine, I’ll put the suggestion of you working by my side on hold for now. But if anything at your job makes you uncomfortable, just tell me, I’ll take care of it for you anytime.”

“But...”

He pinched her cheek. “No ‘buts.’ If your boyfriend doesn’t even have the ability to sort out your problems, he doesn’t deserve to be your boyfriend.”

Alana blinked. Boyfriend... how self-aware, how responsible.

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Chapter 190 No talking

Chapter 190 No talking

It felt as though she'd sifted through the waves and found a treasure of a boyfriend.

Seeing that the girl hadn't replied, the man asked patiently in a low voice, "Did you hear me?"

Alana smiled, her eyes crinkling, "Okay."

Stephan curved his lips, grabbed the girl's soft little hand again, and slipped the bank card back into her palm.

"Keep this card. The PIN is six eights. You don't have to spend my money, but I can't not give it to you. It's only natural to be willing to make sacrifices for a woman you love. If a man isn't even willing to spend money on his girlfriend, it means he doesn't care about you at all, and he doesn't love you."

Alana blinked. "Is that really true?"

Cole barely gave her anything in their one-sided relationship.

She had also heard some female coworkers say that their boyfriends are stingy with them, insisting on splitting the bill for everything when they go out but they don't mind as long as they're in love, right?

Besides, she thought that when two people like each other, it shouldn't be just one-sided giving, giving to each other is the right way to go.

Stephan smiled. "Of course. So don't feel any guilt about it, I'm doing this of my own free will."

Listening to his words, Alana couldn't help but feel a sweet warmth in her heart. What's going on?

Being pampered like this made her heart feel so sweet, it was like being immersed in a jar of honey. What if it started to overflow?

She blinked her clear, beautiful eyes and asked pointedly, "What if, by accident, I end up spending all the money in your bank account?"

Stephan looked at her, a smile in his eyes.

"I'd be delighted."

Alana gazed into the man's deep, smiling black eyes, and her heart skipped a beat.

The bank card she clutched in her palm grew slightly warm, the heat traveling up her slender arm and straight into her heart.

“Then, about the tens of thousands I owe you for that dress...”

“What’s mine is yours. It’s just a dress a boyfriend bought for his girlfriend, how could that be a debt?”

Her lips curved upward, her heart blooming with joy at his words. She couldn’t help but tiptoe up to kiss his sensual, full lips.

“It’s for you...a reward.”

His lips curved upward. “I want more.”

He leaned down and captured her alluring lips in a kiss, not letting her go until she was breathless.

He held her tightly in his arms, making her feel his undeniable presence.

His voice was low and hoarse. “What should we do? I want you...”

Alana felt it and couldn’t help but blush. She whispered, “Not yet. My period hasn’t ended.”

His hot breath brushed against the tender nape of her neck. “When will it end?”

She replied shyly, “Soon...”

His thin lips pressed against the hollow of her neck, sucking gently. “How soon?Your man’s about to lose control.”

Alana immediately bit her lip, her eyes growing slightly moist. “Th-then what should we do?”

“Come with me. As a reward, you can touch me...”

Without giving Alana a chance to react, the man wrapped his arms around her and strode toward the bathroom.

Alanawas carried into the bathroom by the man.

She watched as he turned on the shower.

Her cheeks flushed. “W-what are you doing?”

He curved his lips, his tone tinged with a hint of mischief. “Taking a shower. I’ll have to get you all clean first so you can get your hands on me.”

Alana blinked.

Did she agree to let him have his way with her?

And why was he bringing her into the shower with him?

As she watched the man about to undress, her eyelid twitched violently, and she couldn’t help but want to run away.

“Um, Stephan, you go ahead and wash up. I’ll wait until you’re done before I wash...” But she didn’t manage to escape; the man grabbed her and pulled her back.

He grabbed her slender wrist and pulled her back. “What’s the fun in showering alone? It’s more fun when we wash together and help each other out.”

Alana was forced into his embrace; his muscles were firm and taut, and his body was burning hot.

She looked up and met his dark, piercing eyes, which were full of mischief.

Her cheeks were flushed, making her look incredibly alluring.

“Stephan, it’s just a shower, what kind of games are you playing now?”

Stephan lowered his gaze to her, his eyes burning with an intensity that was almost unbearable.

“You have to let me play with you before I can get creative. Will you let me?”

Alana felt an overwhelming surge of shame and quickly pushed against his rock-hard chest. “No way.”

But to him, her feeble resistance was nothing but a tantalizing game of push-and-pull, a temptation too hard to resist.

“Before, since we weren’t officially together, I held back a little. But now...” He raised his hand, his long, jade-like fingers cupping the girl’s delicate chin and lifting it to meet his gaze.

His eyes were filled with the dangerous aura of a hunter, tinged with intense amusement. “Now that you’re my girlfriend, aren’t you completely at my mercy?”

Alana blushed and tried to turn her head away. But he pressed her chin back down.

His deep voice was tantalizing.

“How about we try something new tonight?”

Alana’s eyelids fluttered. She bit her lip, her moist eyes giving him a reproachful look.

“Don’t be silly, I’m still on my period...” Her eyes were glistening, soft and helpless like a little white rabbit, so easy to take

advantage of.

“Don’t worry, I won’t bother you down there...But...” The man’s slender fingers gently traced her rosy, beautiful lips, his gaze deep and

burning. “I’ll be teasing you here...”

“No, uh...”

The man kissed her fiercely. A storm was brewing, raging beyond belief...

How could a little white rabbit possibly be a match for the big bad wolf? Of course, he coaxed and tricked her, teasing her thoroughly.

When it was all over.

Alana lay on the bed, exhausted, burying her face in the covers, not wanting to see him. He had kissed, fondled and sucked on her boobs too, leaving her wishing she wasn’t on her period so he would do more.

As he sucked on her boobs, he had her hand to his dick, making her stroke him. She recalled how sensation it had felt when he moaned against her nipple. And how his body trembled when he came.

Stephan, of course, came over, turned the girl, who had her back to him, around, and held her close to comfort her.

“Sweetheart, what’s wrong? Are you mad?”

Alana bit her swollen lips. “Stephan, you...you’re a freak! And you’re turning me into...”

Stephan looked at the fuming girl in his arms and found it quite amusing. “Yes, yes, yes. I’m a freak...only for you. And you can also be that way to me too, I won’t resist at all!”

Alana couldn’t help but glare at him. “Where did you learn all these dirty tricks?”

She, an innocent young lady from humble beginnings, had been thoroughly corrupted!

“I think It’s something men are born with. It’s in our genes, in our very bones.”

She huffed angrily, “Go away. I’m not talking to you anymore. I’m going to sleep!”

Stephan smiled, “Oh my, my little darling, your lips are all swollen, let me give you a kiss...”

Alana quickly covered her mouth with her hand to block his approaching lips, saying

coily, “No...no more kissing, no more kissing. I’m going to sleep. If you don’t want to sleep, get out right now!”

Stephan beamed, “Alright, no more kissing. We’ll do it tomorrow. Getting my little darling to sleep is the priority.”

With that, he pulled Alana into his arms, his large hand gently patting her back.

“Good girl, my darling, time for bed.”

She blushed. This rascal was treating her like a three-year-old. “Stephan, no talking while eating or sleeping!”

The man nodded, obediently. “Mm-hmm, no talking while eating or sleeping.

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Chapter 191 From her own lips

Chapter 191 From her own lips

Alana and Leonardo continued playing and bickering in bed for a while before finally closing their eyes in contentment.

Meanwhile, at the hospital.

After a round of tests, Cole was found to have no major issues; his external injuries were severe, but his internal organs were unharmed.

As for the cause of his unconsciousness, it was mostly due to excessive drinking.

If it weren't for the incessant chatter ringing in his ears, he probably wouldn't have woken up so quickly.

"Brother! Please wake up. Don't leave me!"

Cole opened his eyes and saw Camila, who was clutching his hand and wailing incessantly.

His head was pounding, and his body ached terribly. "Cami, where's Alana?"

The moment she heard this, Camila's eyes widened in fury, and she was livid.

"What do you mean, Alana? You were beaten to a pulp, and you're still thinking about that slut Lana? When will you ever truly forget her? A lowly, worthless brat like her, with no parents to love her and no status isn't worthy of you at all!"

Cole frowned, annoyed by what he was hearing. He couldn't help but press his fingers to the bridge of his nose, a vague memory beginning to surface.

He remembered taking Alana with him to a business dinner. Perhaps upset about her cold attitude towards him, he drank a bit too much and ended up getting drunk.

And then...

What happened?

A few fragmented memories flashed through his mind.

He couldn't help but lean against Alana, wrap his arms around her, and then...his eyes darkened. "Camila, what did you just say? That I was beaten up and sent to the hospital?"

"Isn't that what happened? You're covered in bruises. Look at your face, it's all swollen!" Camila gently stroked Cole's face with concern.

Cole frowned. "Who beat me up? Do you know?"

Camila replied, “How would I know? I got a call from the hospital saying you were in critical condition, so I rushed over here. Then I called your company and was told you were out on a business dinner tonight with that slut Alana. Maybe that slut was the one who hit you. She’s up to no good with you!”

Cole furrowed his brow and said with certainty, “She wouldn’t.”

Besides, Alana wasn’t the kind of woman to take advantage of someone in distress. No matter how much she hates him, she wouldn’t do this to him.

Camila pouted, her lips curled in displeasure. “Then who else could it be besides that slut? Look at this...you went to that social event with her, but when you ended up in the hospital, she wasn’t even by your side. It’s obvious she has a hand in this!”

Cole frowned, his tone displeased. “Camila, stop calling her a slut. She’s going to be your sister-in-law in the future.”

Camila sneered, her tone dripping with sarcasm. “Future sister-in-law? I don’t accept her. Besides, with her lowly background, she’s not even worthy. Never mind that I won’t agree, Mom and Dad wouldn’t agree either! You know full well that back in middle and high school, we were like oil and water!”

“Besides, she beat you up like this, she’s clearly heartless and ungrateful toward you. How can you still have feelings for her?”

Cole seemed to recall something; his eyes narrowed dangerously as he said in a deep voice, “It wasn’t her who did it! It was a man!”

“A man?” Camila frowned. “Who is this man?”

Cole clenched his fist.

He, too, was curious about who that man really was.

He believed Alana would give him the answer.

Early in the morning, Alana arrived at the office and found that Cole wasn’t there.

She felt a pang of guilt, wondering if Stephan had beaten him senseless last night.

Damn it! She’d gone to that business dinner with him last night. She wondered if she’d be held accountable too.

After all, her boyfriend had beaten him up, and she hadn't stopped him. But it wasn't entirely her fault, after all, she did call 911 for him, didn't she?

Besides, if he hadn't been groping her, he wouldn't have gotten beaten up.

Hmm, so this wasn't her fault at all.

Alana comforted herself, then turned on her computer and got down to work. However, she hadn't even had a chance to settle in before Grace called her out.

"Last night, you went to a business dinner with Manager Cole. He got beaten up and is in the hospital now. Do you know who attacked him?"

"Well..." Alana bit her lip, unsure how to explain.

Grace frowned. "Weren't you with Manager Cole the whole time last night? You don't know who beat him up?"

Alana lowered her eyes, unsure how to respond. Grace could tell Alana was deliberately holding something back, but it wasn't her concern, after all, she wasn't the one who'd been beaten up.

"Never mind. Go to the hospital right now on behalf of our department to visit Manager Cole, take the opportunity to explain everything to him properly."

Alana didn't hesitate for long; she nodded. "Oh, okay."

Alana left the office and took a taxi to the hospital where Cole was staying. When she reached the hospital entrance, she thought for a moment, then decided to spend a little money and bought a basket of fruit.

She found out that Cole was in VIP Room 109. That was on the eleventh floor. She took the elevator up.

She walked to Room 109.

The door was closed. After a moment's hesitation, she reached out and knocked on the door.

A moment later, the door opened. "Who is it?"

It was Camila who came to open the door.

When Camila saw that it was Alana at the door, she instantly lost her temper.

She let out a shrill scream, like a hedgehog with its quills raised, her voice sharp and grating.

“Alana, why are you here?! How dare you show your face to my brother?!”

Compared to Camila’s loss of control, Alana remained remarkably calm.

After all, she was no longer the little girl she once was. Facing the person who had bullied her in the past, she was able to control her emotions and keep her expression impassive.

She spoke calmly, “I just came by to check on Manager Cole and explain what happened last night. If you don’t want me here, I’ll leave.”

Camila snapped without hesitation, “Get out! You’re definitely not welcome here! Get as far away as you can!”

Alana nodded and was just about to leave gracefully. The man in the hospital room couldn’t sit still any longer. “Lana, wait a minute!”

Alana paused in her tracks and looked toward the man sitting on the hospital bed.

Cole was wearing a blue-and-white striped hospital gown. The bruises on his face remained, and a raised, swollen red mark of blood stood out at the corner of his mouth.

A pair of silver-rimmed glasses rested on the bridge of his nose. His skin was fair, and his lips were slightly pale, giving him a sickly, fragile beauty.

“Camila, stop messing around. Let her in!”

Camila’s tone was displeased. “Brother!”

Cole furrowed his brow, his tone leaving no room for argument. “I have something to ask her.”

With no other choice, Camila turned to Alana and said, “Come in!”

Alana paused for a moment, then walked in carrying the fruit basket. She set the fruit basket on the table before asking,

“Are you feeling okay?”

Cole replied, “I’m fine.”

“That’s good.” Alana breathed a sigh of relief. Since he was fine, surely he wouldn’t hold Stephan’s action against him?

Hearing Alana's words, Cole assumed she was concerned about his injuries. He couldn't help but smile; after all, she still cared about him.

After a moment's hesitation, he spoke up. "Last night... I'm sorry. I was drunk, so I made some inappropriate advances toward you."

Alana bit her lip. The excuse that he'd been drunk and hadn't meant to do it allowed her to pretend his harassment of her had never happened.

She paused for a moment. "It's okay."

Hearing that she didn't mind, Cole's expression softened slightly. Then he asked, "Who was the person who attacked me last night?"

Thinking back on a few recent incidents, he had a vague hunch. But he wanted to hear it from her own lips.

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Chapter 192 Burning fiercely

Chapter 192 Burning fiercely

Alana pressed her lips together and decided to be honest. "It was...my boyfriend."

After all, given Cole's resources, he could easily find out who had beaten him up, all he had to do was check the surveillance footage from the Spring club.

By asking her directly now, he was simply testing her reaction.

Hearing that the person who beat him up was indeed her boyfriend, the gentleness on Cole's face vanished, replaced by a shadow of gloom.

Camila was even more shocked. "Alana, you have a boyfriend? You have a boyfriend now and you're still coming after my brother? How pathetic are you?"

Alana furrowed her brow, raised her eyes to look at Camila standing nearby, and spoke slowly and deliberately. "Camila, I haven't been pestering your older brother. Who's been hitting on whom? Ask your older brother, he knows better than anyone!"

Camila sneered, "I don't believe my older brother would be the one hitting on you. After all, he dumped your ass before! Why would he go back to his vomit?!"

"I'm not vomit and I certainly do not want him around me at all. It's not my problem if you believe me or not. I'm not asking you to believe me, I'm just stating the facts. What on earth do I need your brother for?"

"You!" Camila laughed bitterly. "Lana, I see you've gotten a lot bolder! You actually have the nerve to confront me so brazenly. Do you remember back in middle school, when you were so timid and cowering, like a stinky rat living in a sewer...that you didn't even dare to look me in the eye?"

Alana's gaze was piercing. "Camila, are you so proud of bullying others?"

There were countless times Camila had picked on her in the past. Every single incident was etched in her memory.

For example, placing a disgusting caterpillar on her head, putting a snake in her desk drawer, and drawing a clown on the back of her clothes.

She'd also torn up her test papers; when she reported it to the teacher, Camila turned the tables and accused Alana of tearing up her papers test first...Accusing her of stealing, nearly landing her in bigger trouble.

She incited the whole class to isolate her and turn against her... There were just too many incidents.

Running into a villain like Camila was a disaster for her. But she hoped no one else ever had to go through it. Only after going through it did she realize that the shadow this experience cast over her ran deep to the very marrow of her bones.

To this day, whenever she faces Camila, she couldn't help but feel a deep-seated fear rising from the depths of her soul.

Camila gritted her teeth, her anger turning to laughter. "What bullying? Don't go spreading rumors. I was just warning you to tone it down a bit, stop acting so slutty! Besides, it's not my fault...you just deserve it! If I catch you with a boyfriend and still hanging around my brother, don't blame me for being rude to you again!"

Alana curled her lips. Sure enough, bullies never admit they're in the wrong; instead, they think they're the ones upholding justice.

Once, timid and weak, she had been powerless to defend herself against bullying.

She had once seen Cold as a ray of light that would save her.

But from now on, she no longer needed that light.

Because she had decided to become the light that would save herself.

Eve was right. Facing those who had once bullied her, she shouldn't be afraid or cower, instead, she must bravely take up arms and confront them head-on!

Alana looked at Camila, her expression calm. "Camila, don't use your older brother as an excuse. You just simply can't stand me and want to take me down. If you want to take me on, go ahead. I, Alana, do not start trouble, but I'm not afraid of it either."

Camila, her feelings exposed, laughed bitterly. "Lana, you've got some nerve! You really think I wouldn't dare do anything to you? With my status, crushing you would be as easy as squashing a grasshopper, it'd take no time at all!"

"If it weren't for my brother protecting you all this time, do you really think you'd still be standing here talking to me?"

Alana frowned and instinctively glanced at Cole.

Cole stared at Alana with a dark look in his eyes. "Enough, Camila. Stop it!"

Camila was furious. "Brother, you're taking her side again! She already has a boyfriend. Can't you get a grip? She's not even worth your trouble!"

Cole fixed his gaze on Alana and pressed further, "Lana, tell me, was it really your boyfriend who laid hands on me last night?"

Alana didn't hesitate; she nodded. "Yes. Last night, after the business dinner ended, I texted him to come pick me up. As for why he beat you up, you know exactly why."

Cole felt a sharp pang in his chest.

So she really did have a boyfriend.

Thinking of all the injuries he'd sustained, all caused by her boyfriend, the pain in his chest turned into rage, burning fiercely.

"Lana, tell me, who is he?!"

Alana bit her lip; naturally, she wasn't about to tell him all about Stephan. She didn't want this matter to drag on. She just hoped she could help Stephan smooth things over.

He had taken care of so many things for her; so she had to take care of this one thing for him. "Cole, don't hold it against him. This isn't entirely his fault. I know that it was wrong of him to hit you so I'm apologizing on his behalf. I'll cover all your medical expenses. But

your behavior toward me last night wasn't exactly exemplary either. Both in terms of reason and compassion, you can't hold him responsible."

Cole laughed bitterly, he was so angry his chest ached.

"Lana, are you going against me just for the sake of another man?"

Alana couldn't help but say, "My boyfriend isn't just some other man."

His eyes darkened. "He isn't? Then what about me? What am I to you?"

Alana pressed her lips together, momentarily at a loss for words. He was the random man.

Seeing her silence, Cole's expression grew even darker. "We've known each other for so many years. Ever since you were in middle school, you've been by my side, never leaving me. Even when I went off to college, we still kept in touch regularly. So all those wonderful times we shared together, none of them even come close to the place he holds in your heart? What has he done for you that makes you care so much about him?"

Alana bit her lip and said earnestly, "It's different...with him, he truly feels like my boyfriend, someone I can always rely on. While you...you had always been so distant...at most being with you had felt like being with a distant friend."

Cole's breath caught in his throat.

Just a distant friend?

Camila protested, "Lana, stop shamelessly trying to get close to my brother. Who do you think you are saying those words to him? My brother is a catch! Do you know what he..."

Alana curled the corners of her mouth, her tone laced with sarcasm. "I don't really care what he is. And what exactly is your problem? You accuse me of wanting your problem, I tell you that I don't and you still get mad? What exactly do you want?!"

Cole's fist clenched unconsciously, a flash of hostility crossing his eyes.

"Lana, what if I decide to make things difficult for your boyfriend?"

Alana looked at him, her eyes clear yet determined. "Cole, if you want to completely burn our bridges...then go ahead."

"You're going to keep defending him like this?"

"I am." The moment she admitted it, Cole felt as if he could hear the sound of his own

heart shattering.

He couldn't help but clasp his chest, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

The eyes behind his glasses were slightly reddened, clearly deeply wounded. "If you want me to let him go, fine, but you have to break up with him!"

Alana was stunned by the man's words. "Cole, I thought you were a man of a little bit integrity left, but I never expected you to be so foolish."

Cole's Adam's apple bobbed. He knew his behavior was despicable, but at this point, there was no turning back.

He couldn't accept the fact that she belonged to another man now. "Call me whatever you want but you must break up with him if you don't want me to press charges. He's clearly not good for you! He's a violent person."

Alana paused for a moment, then said firmly, "I refuse! If you insist on holding him accountable and forcing me to break up with him, then last night, when you tried to force yourself on me, I, too..." She looked at him with unwavering resolve, as if to say that if he held her boyfriend accountable, she would hold him accountable too.

But the tremor in her lips betrayed her inner anxiety. After all, she had never threatened him like this before.

She didn't know what the consequences of threatening him would be. But she knew full well that she was merely speaking out of anger; with her own abilities, she had no way of standing up to Cole.

If Cole flew into a rage and took on both her and Stephan, she feared she would be powerless to stop him.

Cole felt the pain in his chest grow even more intense, to the point of suffocation. To think she would threaten him like this for that man.

Before this, he hadn't even dared to imagine it. He'd thought that once he came back to her, they could reunite and be together forever this time.

But he never expected that she already had another man.

She was really going to abandon him!

When did she become so cruel?!

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Chapter 193 Mix of emotions

Chapter 193 Mix of emotions

Cole took a deep breath, suppressing the surging emotions threatening to burst from his chest.

“Lana, you’ve won. You know I won’t make things difficult for you.”

Alana was taken aback.

She had already prepared herself to have a falling-out with him, but unexpectedly, he had actually backed down?

For a moment, her heart was filled with a complex mix of emotions.

Alana stared intently at her, a hazy sadness lingering in his eyes.

“Lana, next time, don’t use this kind of thing to threaten me, okay?”

She remained silent for a moment. Because she didn’t know what to say.

Cole kept his gaze on her and continued,

“I can agree not to hold him accountable, but I have one condition.”

She felt a heavy weight in her heart. “What condition?”

If it was another unreasonable demand like forcing her to break up with Stephan, she certainly wouldn’t agree.

“Take me out to dinner.”

Cole fixed his gaze on her. “Lana, it’s been a long time since we’ve had a proper meal together. That’s my only request.”

Alana bit her lip, thinking to herself, It’s just a meal. If inviting him to dinner can resolve this matter completely, it was not a bad idea.

“Okay.”

Cole’s expression softened instantly.

Alana pursed her lips. “You should get some rest. I’m heading back to the office.”

Cole wanted her to stay, and a hint of pleading crept into his voice. “Lana, you’ve just arrived. Stay with me a little longer.”

“I’m sorry, but since your sister is here, I won’t disturb you...” Alana practically fled the scene.

Because she didn’t like him anymore. And she certainly didn’t want to stay.

After Alana left, Cole’s previously mild expression instantly darkened, as if shrouded by dark clouds, becoming eerily foreboding.

A piercing, bone-chilling coldness emanated from the man.

As cold as a demon.

Even Camila, standing beside him, was affected by it, her body trembling involuntarily.

It was the first time she had ever seen her brother look so sinister and terrifying.

In her eyes, her brother had always been easygoing and gentle, never letting his temper show.

But now, he seemed to have lost control.

All because of that woman, Alana.

Cole clenched his fists so tightly they creaked, struggling to contain his rage.

He looked up at Camila and ordered, “Cami, call the manager at Spring Club and request the surveillance footage. I want to see exactly who that boyfriend of Alana is!”

Camila frowned, clearly puzzled. “Big Brother, didn’t you just promise her you wouldn’t hold it against her?”

Cole’s eyes darkened with intensity. Not pursue it? How could that be possible? That man had stolen the woman he loved, how could he possibly let it go?

Promising Alana he wouldn’t pursue the matter was merely to make her feel guilty and burdened.

He didn't believe that, after all he'd done, Alana wouldn't have even the slightest feeling for him.

He still planned to win her back, so there was no way he would burn bridges with her so easily.

What boyfriend! No one but him was worthy of being with her!

"Go, call and find out right now. I want to know who that man is immediately!"

Know your enemy and know yourself, and you will have the upper hand.

Besides, he wasn't going to let this beating go so easily.

Meanwhile.

The CEO's office at Hudson Group.

Stephan sat in his office, his legs crossed, casually flipping through the documents Vande had presented.

Vance said from the side, "President, as you requested, I've already destroyed the surveillance footage from last night. I guarantee no one will be able to trace what happened to you at the Spring Club last night."

Stephan continued flipping through the documents, idly flicking the pages with his fingertips without even looking up. "Good. Well done."

Vance couldn't help but let the corners of his mouth turn up.

"However..." The man changed the subject abruptly, flinging the documents onto the desk. His deep, magnetic voice carried a hint of displeasure.

"I told you to investigate Alana's boss. How come you've only given me this much information?"

Vance scratched his head, looking a bit flustered. "Well, I'm sorry, President, but that's all I've been able to find so far."

“Cole, Project Manager at HY Cosmetics. Plus some basic personal details, including the schools he attended and his past addresses, but the specifics can’t be obtained right away, they still need to be looked into.”

After all, the man had some connections; they tried to look into him, but the information was blocked.

Stephan remained expressionless. “Get to the bottom of this as soon as possible.”

He needed to know everything about his competitor.

Vance nodded. “Understood.”

After a moment’s pause, he couldn’t help but ask, “Um, Mr. Hudson, why are you suddenly interested in this person?”

Could it be that he’s realized he doesn’t like women and has switched to liking men?

After all, the man they were investigating was quite handsome.

Stephan frowned. “Vance, since when did you become so nosy? Have you been secretly running a gossip club at the office?”

“Um... not exactly.”

“If not, then get out.”

“Uh, got it.”

Vance immediately slipped away smoothly.

Stephan, meanwhile, stared intently at the documents on the desk.

In the file, Cole’s ID photo with its red background stood out strikingly.

This stranger actually looked quite good.

With striking features and a pair of silver-rimmed glasses, he was the kind of “cultured bad boy” that many women find attractive.

Although he wasn’t quite as good-looking as him, if Alana kept getting harassed by this man, there was no guarantee she wouldn’t be swayed.

What if, by some chance, he were to lose his hard-won position as the main man? Where would he go to cry then?

No way!

He had to figure out a way to eliminate this potential threat.

Alana had no idea that she had become a coveted prize, with two men setting their sights firmly on her.

She walked out of the hospital, her mind heavy with worry.

The words Cole had spoken to her kept weighing on her mind.

His accusatory tone made it seem as though she had committed some heinous crime against him.

When she asked herself honestly, had she really done anything to betray him?

Was it simply because she had stood up for her boyfriend instead of him?

It was true that he had looked out for her

back when she was in middle school.

She was very grateful to him.

But on second thought, all the hardships she had endured back then were related to his sister, Camila.

It was only natural and reasonable for him to protect her.

He shouldn't use the favors he did her in the past to demand she take his side, should he?

Besides, if she didn't stand up for her boyfriend, what kind of girlfriend would she be?

In any case, she felt she hadn't done anything wrong.

The more she thought about it, the more of a headache it gave her. She decided to stop worrying about it, whatever happens, happens.

As long as she didn't wear herself out over it, that was enough.

After all, Cole had already promised her he wouldn't pursue the matter with Stephan, that was a good thing.

After leaving the hospital, Alana took a taxi back to the office to get back to work.

Having taken a few days off because of her Grandma, she had quite a backlog of work. On top of that, with Cole currently in the hospital, many tasks from higher-ups were being handed directly to her to handle.

She was revising documents, verifying data, and analyzing conclusions.

All day long, she was glued to her computer screen, swamped with work.

A few colleagues asked her how Cole was doing in the hospital. Alana downplayed the situation, saying it was nothing serious, just a few superficial injuries that should heal quickly.

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Chapter 194 The biggest

Chapter 194 The biggest

“Who beat up Manager Cole? That’s so evil! A perfectly healthy person ended up in the hospital.” Danielle shot Alana a glance. “Lana, you were with him you must know, right?”

Alana smiled faintly. “Sorry, but this is Manager Cole’s private matter. I can’t really say. If you want to know, you’ll have to ask him yourself.”

Danielle pouted. Seeing she couldn’t get anything out of Alana, she decided not to press the issue.

At the hospital, Camila called the manager of Spring Banquet to request the surveillance footage. However, the manager said that the surveillance system had malfunctioned last night and hadn’t been repaired in time, so there was no footage.

She informed Cole about this.

Cole’s expression turned cold.

The surveillance was broken?

What a coincidence?

Was it a genuine malfunction, or was it deliberate?

If it was deliberate, then who exactly was Alana's boyfriend?

He must be quite the character to have the manager sabotage the surveillance footage.

Cole clenched his fist; he was getting even more curious. No matter what, he was going to track that man down!

What happened last night absolutely cannot be swept under the rug so easily!

Cold spoke up, "Cami, please arrange for my discharge."

Camila gave a noncommittal "Oh," but inwardly she wondered, "Why can't he let go of Alana?"

Alana had clearly told him outright that she already had a boyfriend, yet he insisted on chasing after her.

She really didn't understand what was so great about a woman like Alana that she was worth her brother's attention for so long.

No way. She'll find a way to make Alana stay away from Cole on her own!

After work, Stephan arrived right on time to pick up Alana from work.

After buckling Alana's seatbelt, he asked casually, "That Manager Cole of yours, has he been picking on you again?"

Alana shook her head. "No. I worked it out with him, I convinced him not to pursue last night's incident, so don't worry, you'll be fine." Her eyes were bright and clear, and her cherry-red lips moved as she spoke with complete sincerity.

Stephan couldn't help but laugh. "Are you afraid something might happen to me?"

Alana nodded. "I am. What if he calls the police and has you arrested? What then? You're still young; you can't just go to jail.

If you go to prison and get a criminal record, your whole life will be ruined."

Stephan curved his lips, a smile playing in his eyes. “Lana, I’ve noticed you care about me more and more.”

Her cheeks flushed slightly as she spoke softly, “If I really didn’t care about you, I’m afraid you wouldn’t be happy.”

Stephan gazed at her flushed cheeks and couldn’t resist leaning in to kiss her.

He whispered soothingly, “Thank you for thinking of me. But your boyfriend isn’t as weak as you think. Even if he really does call the police, nothing would happen to me.”

Alana said with a straight face, “There are security cameras at the Spring Club. If they pull up the footage and see you hitting him, you won’t be able to explain yourself no matter what. Anyway, one less hassle is a good thing.”

Those who find themselves in a thorny situation can never help but think of the people they care about.

Having been caught in the rain herself, she always wanted to hold an umbrella over him, shielding him from harm.

Stephan smiled and ruffled her hair.

He really couldn’t help but be charmed by her. But she was thinking of him, too.

It really felt wonderful to be cared for and cherished by his girlfriend. “Did you have to go through any trouble helping me?”

Alana shook her head and smiled. “No, not at all.”

She was the classic type to only share the good news.

Even when she was negotiating with Cold, she’d been pretty nervous and scared inside.

But so what? As long as the outcome was good, that’s all that mattered.

Stephan’s lips curved upward. “That’s good. If you ever feel wronged, tell me, your boyfriend will take care of it for you.”

Alana obediently replied, “Okay.”

His girlfriend was so sweet, so sweet, so soft, and so adorable.

Stephan couldn’t resist kissing her again. “Where else could I find a girlfriend who

cares about me this much? Tonight, I'll cook dinner and take good care of you."

Alana's cheeks flushed again. "You're such a flirt."

"When have I ever been serious with you?"

Alana pouted her rosy little lips and grumbled, "Enough of that. Let's head to the supermarket."

The two went to a grocery store together and picked up the ingredients they needed for dinner.

Suddenly, Stephan stopped in his tracks, his gaze fixed on a certain spot. "What's wrong?"

Alana looked over curiously and realized he was actually staring at the rows of condoms.

Her cheeks began to flush. "Stephan, you..."

Was it polite to stare like that?

Stephan turned his head, glanced at her, and smiled, raising his handsome eyebrows.

"I think we're out. I'd like to get a few more boxes to stock up."

Alana's breath caught in her throat; it seemed she'd imagined some unspeakable scene, and her cheeks flushed even brighter.

"Who...who told you to use so much every time..."

Stephan curved his lips. "What can I do? Your man is too powerful. These are too small and not long enough. If he exerts even a little more force, they tear."

"What?!!"

Wait, was that something you just blurt out?!

This man was shameless, utterly shameless. Alana felt a bit embarrassed and quickly glanced around. Thankfully, no one had noticed.

But standing here any longer would be too conspicuous. "Just grab it and get out of here!"

"You grab it for me."

Alana glared at him, her almond-shaped eyes widening. "Don't you have hands?"

The man said with a straight face, “I want you to get used to my size. Next time, it’ll be your turn to buy it.”

She gasped.

How embarrassing!

Alana lowered her voice and asked through gritted teeth, “What size are you?”

“The biggest.”

She blinked. “What size is the biggest?”

She had never bought one before and really didn’t know about these things.

Stephan couldn’t help but laugh; his chest vibrated slightly, his voice deep and magnetic.

“Sweetheart, I’ve realized you’re adorably innocent.”

She didn’t even know the sizes of condoms, just how innocent was she, really?

Alana’s face flushed red, the color spreading all the way to the backs of her ears.

“I...I’ve never bought one, so of course I don’t know. Just tell me already! If you don’t, I’m leaving!”

Seriously, she must be out of her mind to be arguing with him about this here.

Just thinking about it was so embarrassing! “Here, I’ll show you.”

Stephan reached out and picked a box from the row.

He held it up in front of Alana and pointed to a label on it. “This one...it’s the largest size.”

Alana glanced at it sheepishly, then had a lightbulb moment. “Oh, so they just label it ‘Extra Large.’”

Stephan smiled slightly as he patiently explained to the innocent little bunny,

“Yeah, besides extra-large, there’s large, medium, small, and extra-small.”

He leaned in slightly, bringing his face close to her ear, his warm breath brushing against her and drifting into her ear.

“Remember this: your man uses the extra-large size.”

His seductive breath washed over her, effortlessly causing a tempting blush to spread across Alana’s cheeks.

“Alright, I get it. You’re the biggest.”

He had to stop teasing her like this in public.

Did he want the whole world to know he was the biggest?!

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Chapter 195 Marrying me

Chapter 195 Marrying me

Alana couldn’t resist her curiosity about something else. “So there’s...extra, extra small? How small is that?”

Stephan chuckled, his large hand gently rubbing her flushed cheek. “You don’t need to know about extra-small. Just know about extra-large.”

She eyed him.

Wasn’t it okay to ask out of pure curiosity?

She placed the box the man had handed her into the shopping cart and asked shyly,

“Is one box enough?”

“One box isn’t enough. Grab a few more.” The man grabbed over a dozen boxes at once.

Alana gasped: “Oh my, that’s enough, that’s enough! Stop taking more! Do you want to fill up the whole cart?”

“Better to stock up, you know...better safe than sorry. Or maybe you’re ready to have my baby?” He teased, winking at her.

Embarrassed, Alana left the man behind and ran off. “You go pay for this. I’ll wait for you outside!”

Stephan watched the girl flee in panic, unable to catch her even if he tried.

He chuckled, “She sure runs fast.”

Was it that embarrassing to buy condoms with him?

Alana jogged out of the supermarket and accidentally bumped into someone at the entrance.

“Oh, sorry, sorry!”

She hurriedly apologized, then looked up in a rush only to realize it was someone she knew.

That’s right, the person she’d accidentally bumped into was Darla.

Alana’s cheeks had been flushed just moments ago, but the moment she saw Darla, the heat drained from her face.

It was as if she’d been doused with cold water.

Darla, having been bumped, looked up and was also taken aback when she saw it was Alana.

“What a coincidence...running into you again.”

Alana looked awkward. “Heh.”

Actually, she didn’t want to run into her at all.

Darla continued. “You know what? It seems we’re quite destined to keep running into each other.”

Alana frowned, she didn’t want this connection at all.

Darla asked curiously, “Who did you come to the supermarket with?”

Alana replied: "My boyfriend."

Darla was surprised. "You have a boyfriend?"

The last time she asked, Alana clearly didn't have one. "Is it the one who walked the cat and dog with you the other time?"

Alana pursed her lips. "No."

Darla was even more curious. "Then who is it?"

"Darla."

They both turned to see Stephan walking towards them.

Before any of the women could say anything, Stephan grabbed Darla by the arm and pulled her aside.

Alana watched as the two spoke heatedly for a moment, though she couldn't hear what they were hearing but she didn't like Stephan talking to this woman at all.

Turning, she stormed off. But moments later, she heard Stephan calling her name as he hurried up to her.

"Lana...wait." He rushed to stand in front.

"Are you done getting seduced by that vixen?!" She thundered.

Stephan blinked and then smiled. "C'mon, sweetheart. Are you seriously jealous?"

Alana couldn't help but retort, "No. How could I possibly be jealous? You're overthinking it!"

Stephan chuckled, the corners of his mouth curving upward. "If you're not jealous, how else would you have said something like 'being seduced by a little vixen'?"

"I..." Alana wanted to continue arguing, but found she had no rebuttal.

Fine, she was jealous.

Seeing Stephan standing with another woman, talking, made her feel uneasy.

She pouted slightly and muttered under her breath, "You know I could get jealous, yet you don't even bother to keep your distance from other women. And you two talked for so long, you didn't even realize my legs were getting sore from waiting."

The girl lowered her head slightly, mumbling to herself for a while, though no one could tell what she was saying.

But for some reason, Stephan felt she was full of sass.

Finding it amusing, he leaned in, pinched her cheek, and turned her pretty face toward him.

“What are you muttering about? So quietly, are you cursing me?”

With her cheeks pinched, Alana had no choice but to face him.

Her clear, moist eyes sparkled with vitality. Her cheeks were puffed out quite a bit, looking adorably cute.

“I wasn’t cursing at you, I was just...”

Alana pouted, her gaze shifting slightly. “I was just... making fun of you for being with other women...”

Stephan stared at her and asked with a chuckle, “What exactly were you complaining about me doing with other women?”

“You’re asking a question you already know the answer to.”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “So you’re jealous because I was talking with another woman?”

Stephan saw that the girl’s pout was so deep you could hang a soy sauce bottle from it; her sulky expression was

particularly endearing.

He never would have guessed that his little white rabbit could get so jealous.

He quickly reached out, wrapped his arms around her slender waist, and pulled her into his embrace.

Then he lowered his head slightly, pressed his thin lips to the space between her eyebrows, and coaxed her gently,

“There, there. Don’t be jealous. I only spoke to her to make it clear I’m not interested. So she shouldn’t bother you at all.”

Alana looked up at the man's handsome face. "Really?"

Stephan gently rubbed her cheek. "It's true, as true as gold!"

A smile tugged at Alana's lips. It had to be said, she was quite easy to placate; with his explanation, she instantly felt much better.

After a moment's hesitation, she couldn't help but ask, "Is she... the blind date your mother set you up with?"

"Yeah, it's her. Her name is Darla. She's a colleague of my mom's at the hospital. I heard she's a returnee from studying abroad."

Hearing this, a faint sense of disappointment flashed through Alana's mind.

"No wonder your mom likes her so much. So she's her colleague, and she studied abroad too. She must be quite accomplished."

A woman this accomplished, and she was still pursuing Stephan so relentlessly, could he... possibly be moved by her?

Stephan studied the girl's eyes, not missing the fleeting glimpse of disappointment in her gaze.

He curled the corner of his lips. "So what if she's outstanding? I don't like her. My mom likes her, that's her business, but that doesn't mean I do."

Alana's heart skipped a beat. She looked up at him and pressed on, "So if your mom told you to marry her, would you?"

Stephan curved his lips, his deep eyes fixed on her. "No. I'll only marry someone I love."

Alana's heart gave a sharp jolt, racing wildly. When he said he'd marry the one he loved, did that mean he'd marry her?

But she hadn't decided to marry him yet. What should she do?

Being in love was a wonderful thing, something truly worth looking forward to.

But marriage...

The pain from her family made her instinctively fear marriage.

She felt that dating was fine, but marriage required careful consideration.

She bit her lip and asked softly, “Stephan, do you... have any plans to get married?”

This topic was too sensitive.

Couples who have just started dating rarely broach it.

But she wanted to hear his true thoughts.

Stephan smiled. “Yes.”

After a brief pause, he continued, “Lana, I’ve told you before, my family is pressuring me to go on blind dates and get married. But I back then, I had no woman in my life, so I made no plans. But now, I’ve met you. If it’s possible, I want to... marry you and spend the rest of my life by your side.”

For the rest of their lives?

What a distant prospect.

Alana pressed her lips together and asked uncertainly, “Stephan, are you sure I’m the one you want to marry?”

So many couples never end up together in the end. Maybe they were incompatible, or didn’t love each other enough. Or perhaps family issues, parents who don’t approve. So many reasons, they were all defeated by the harsh realities of life.

Was he really that certain that she was the one he wanted to marry, and that he was willing to spend the rest of his life with her?

But a lifetime was so long, who can guarantee that?

Stephan gazed intently into her eyes and asked, “What about you? Have you ever thought about marrying me?”

A flicker of hesitation crossed Alana’s face; she didn’t know how to answer at first.

Stephan furrowed his brow slightly. “You haven’t thought about it?”

Had he not done enough?

Had he failed to make her want to marry him?

Alana paused for a moment before saying, “I’m sorry, but I’m actually a bit afraid of getting married.”

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Chapter 196 Cannot be compared

Chapter 196 Cannot be compared

Stephan's frown deepened. "Why?"

"Because..." Alana bit her lip. Should she tell him about her complicated background?

But if she told him, would he accept her as she was?

After a moment's hesitation, she still couldn't bring herself to say it.

It took courage to reveal those searing scars from the past to the man she loves.

So she said, "These days, most young women aren't really interested in getting married. Because in many people's eyes, marriage is a grave, a prison...not a very pleasant place."

Stephan chuckled, "How do you know that marrying me would be a grave or a cage, rather than a wonderful beginning?"

Alana felt a pang of guilt. "I... I'm just not sure. Besides, I think when two people love each other, simply being together is a form of happiness. Why force it into the confines of marriage? I think it's enough that we're together like this."

Stephan looked at Alana, intently.

She seemed very resistant to marriage.

Not everyone was resistant to marriage.

Like him before, he hadn't met a woman he truly liked, so naturally he'd instinctively resisted marriage.

But once he met her, things were different. Dating was just the beginning; eventually, it leads to marriage.

He wasn't the kind of man who just wanted to take advantage of women.

As he dated her, it was naturally with the intention of marriage. He wanted to take things further with her, build a new family together, get married, and have children...

Dating was one stage, and marriage was another; the two cannot be compared.

In a man's eyes, when he meets a girl he likes, the ultimate goal was to marry her and make her his wife in good standing.

But simply dating involves too many uncertainties.

What if, during the relationship, some scumbag steals her away? It was safer to marry her and add her to his household registry.

He raised his hand and gently pinched her soft cheek, saying softly, "Lana, if you don't want to marry me, it must be because I'm not doing enough right now. It's okay. Once we've spent more time together, you'll naturally want to marry me."

Alana froze, looking at the man before her with a touch of emotion, her eyes glistening with tears.

Clearly, it was her own fault, yet he took the blame upon himself. In what way had he fallen short? Many men weren't nearly as self-aware as he was.

"Stephan, you're such a good man."

Really, he was truly kind.

It was she who was flawed, who wasn't good enough. So it wasn't his fault, it was hers.

Stephan curved his lips, cupped her cheeks, and said earnestly, "If you think I'm good, then marry me right away."

After a brief pause, he leaned in slightly, his thin lips gently brushing against her fair earlobe, his voice low and husky.

"I want to call you... my wife...my dear wife...my sweet wife..." Alana's ears turned red at a visible speed.

Especially that phrase, "My dear wife" it sent a tingling sensation straight to her bones, striking a chord deep within her heart, leaving her feeling utterly overwhelmed with sweetness.

No one had told her that being called "my dear wife" by the man she loved would make her heart flutter like this.

She really couldn't take it anymore. Blushing, she said, "Stephan, it's time to go back and cook."

Stephan gazed at the girl's rosy, alluring little face. He let out a low chuckle and continued to tease her, "As you wish, my dear wife."

Alana's heart fluttered again, and she said shyly, "Stephan, don't call me that!"

The man chuckled, brazenly replying, "I'll be calling you that sooner or later anyway. Who knows? Maybe if I call you that sooner, you'll become my wife sooner?"

"Stephan!"

"What's wrong, my dear wife?"

"Don't call me that anymore!"

"I'm going to keep calling you, my dear wife, my dear wife..." The deep, magnetic sound of "My dear wife" made Alana's whole body burn with heat, and her heart fluttered with excitement.

She couldn't help but reach out, wanting to cover his bold lips. But before she could touch him, he swiftly wrapped his arms around her waist and pressed his lips firmly against hers.

He kissed her until her legs went weak, then cupped her delicate chin and asked calmly, "My dear wife, did you enjoy that kiss from your husband?"

Alana was swooned.

He was so damn sexy.

The two of them returned to the apartment together, Stephan took off his suit jacket and placed it on the sofa, then promptly carried the vegetables and meat into the kitchen, ready to show off his culinary skills.

Alana went to help him out. To be honest, she really enjoyed cooking with Stephan in the kitchen, it felt down-to-earth and cozy.

Plus, this was their own private world, just the two of them, with no one to disturb them. Cooking together is actually a special kind of romance for couples.

Throughout the process, their interactions were constant, and their bond grew closer and deeper without them even realizing it.

For instance, he would hold out an apron, gesturing for her to tie it for him.

Alana took the blue apron he handed her. “Hold out your arms.”

Stephan smiled, teasing her on purpose, “Do you want me to take off my shirt and go shirtless while you tie it?”

Alana’s cheeks flushed. “Stop fooling around. We’re cooking, be serious. Who cooks without clothes on?!”

Stephan raised an eyebrow. “Is that a fact, or have you just never seen it?”

Stephan gazed at the girl’s tempting little face, which had flushed red again, a mischievous smile playing at the corners of his mouth. “I’ve heard that women really like it when their men cook without clothes on, just wearing an apron. It makes them look especially turned on in the kitchen. Want me to give you a taste of that?”

Alana blushed and protested, “Who...who said that? I don’t like it at all.”

Stephan laughed. “Just try it, and you’ll know whether you like it or not.”

Alana’s almond-shaped eyes widened in mock anger as she scolded him, “Stephan, are you going to put on that apron or not?”

She pretended to turn and walk out. Stephan quickly grabbed her hand and pulled her back.

Seeing her puffed-up cheeks, he chuckled and poked her cheek with his finger. “I’ll put it on. I was just teasing you, you innocent little bunny!”

This man was getting more and more mischievous. After they finished cooking and eating dinner together, they went back to their room to rest.

To prevent this mischievous big bad wolf of a man from taking a shower with her again, Alana quickly locked herself in the bathroom as soon as they got back to the room.

Stephan chuckled.

Trying to keep him out?

After all, he’d already seen and explored every inch of her.

After her shower, Alana emerged with her hair dripping wet, wearing a pristine white nightgown that gave her a clean and gentle aura.

Stephan had showered in the next room and was wearing a black silk pajama set.

The pajamas were a deep V-neck style, leaving his collarbone and sexy, toned pectorals fully exposed.

Even his abs were faintly visible. Alana couldn't help but blush. It was late at night, why was he dressed so revealingly and provocatively? Who was he trying to tempt?

When Stephan saw her, her unbrushed black hair hung wetly across her chest, leaving a slight damp mark.

He immediately beckoned to her, "Come here, I'll blow-dry your hair."

Alana said, "No need, I can do it myself."

Stephan paid no heed to her, stepping forward to take her small hand and leading her to sit on the bed.

He pinched her cheek gently, his tone firm yet tender.

"Sit still. Don't deprive me of the right to take care of my girlfriend."

Alana pursed her lips and didn't refuse any further. The man went to the drawer, took out a hair dryer, plugged it in, and then came back to blow-dry Alana's hair.

The heat from the hair dryer wasn't too intense; as it blew over Alana's head, it felt warm and incredibly comfortable.

Stephan sat there quietly, drying her hair without saying a word.

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Chapter 197 Deeply moved

Chapter 197 Deeply moved

His slender fingers moved gently through the soft strands of her hair.

Alana bit her lip, savoring the man's thoughtful care. Her expression seemed calm, but inside, she was deeply moved.

She loved how much he cared about her. When she was very young, her parents divorced, and she was left to fend for herself.

Many of her childhood memories had grown hazy; she didn't know if her parents had ever truly cared for her or looked after her.

Most of what remained in her memory was her parents arguing and ignoring her. She never felt warmth or affection from her parents.

But she found them in Stephan.

He truly gave her so much, the care and attention she had never felt before.

If Cole was once a ray of light in her life, Stephan, on the other hand, gave her a sense of a solid, warm, safe, and reliable haven.

Light was visible but untouchable, far out of reach, but a safe haven is a place where she can dock and find the support she craves. Stephan was her safe haven.

Her hair was dry, and the sound of the hair dryer faded away.

Alana couldn't help herself; she opened her arms and embraced the man standing before her.

Stephan lowered his gaze, looking at the girl nestled against his lower abdomen.

"What's wrong?"

Alana buried her little face against his abs, rubbing against them softly, her voice sweet and gentle.

"Stephan, I've realized... I think I like you even more now..."

It seemed that since being with him, she had become increasingly able to express herself. And little by little, she was opening up her heart to him.

She thought that soon, she would reveal everything about herself to him.

As Stephan listened to the girl's confession, his brow twitched slightly. It felt as though something had gently tapped his heart, silent, yet resonating.

He couldn't help but let the corners of his mouth turn up. "Me too."

Alana smiled faintly.

Suddenly, she felt that this moment was so blissful.

If only things could stay this way forever.

Stephan let her hold him, his large hand gently stroking her soft hair. “Lana, you’ve been staying here for so many days now. When are you going to move your things over from your apartment so we can officially live together?”

Alana paused for a moment, clenched her fist, and gave him a light tap. “It’s all your fault. You always drag me back and won’t let me leave. I haven’t been back to my place in days.”

Stephan said, “Then move in. Let’s live together.”

“No rush. My lease isn’t up yet. I’ll move when it expires.”

Besides, she had her own plans: if she ever got into a fight with him, she’d go back to her own rented apartment, so she couldn’t move out lightly.

What if Stephen had a fight with her and wouldn’t let her stay in his apartment? Wouldn’t she end up staying in a hotel or sleeping on the streets?!

Hmm, a girl must never lose her head.

Stephan had no idea what was going through the girl’s mind. All he could think about was how to lure her to his home for life to be his wife, how could he possibly bear to upset her or argue with her?

Besides, he believed having a fight with a girl was extremely ungentlemanly and uncivilized. Especially with his own woman, if he can coax her, he’ll never argue!

The man leaned down and kissed her.

“Sweetheart, if you’re not worried, I am. I just want to hold you in my arms every night and sleep soundly.”

Alana eyed him.

What kind of sleep was he talking about, exactly?

She didn’t even have to think about it, she knew exactly what he meant.

The next day, after Stephan and Alana finished breakfast, he drove her to work as usual.

Sitting in the car, Alana kept glancing at the man driving intently. Stephan glanced over casually. “What?”

“You can’t stop looking at me, do you think I look especially handsome today?”

Alana blinked, her gaze falling on the red tie at his collar. “Stephan, I noticed you’ve been wearing this red tie a lot lately, haven’t you?”

Stephan chuckled. “It’s your fault for only giving me one. I don’t have any others to switch to, so I have to wear it a few more times.”

Alana gasped. “But... don’t you have plenty of ties in your closet? It’s not like this is the only one you have.”

“Those weren’t gifts from you. I only want to wear the one you gave me, it feels comfortable.”

Alana blinked.

Was that for real?

The tie she gave him wasn’t that expensive, could it really be more comfortable than the designer ones in his closet?

Or was it because she gave it to him that he treasured it so much?

Alana couldn’t help but recall that she had once given Cole many gifts, yet she had never seen him wear any of them.

It wasn’t until a couple of days ago that she noticed he was wearing a sandalwood bead she’d given him.

That sandalwood bead was still brand new, which meant its owner didn’t wear it very often.

But Stephan... he wore the tie she gave him every single day, as if he wanted the whole world to know how much he treasured her gifts.

So, this was the difference between being in a one-sided relationship and being in a relationship where your feelings were reciprocated.

Alana couldn’t help but smile. “Once I get paid, I’ll buy you a few more.”

Stephan found it amusing. “If you want to buy them, just use the card I gave you. You don’t need to spend your own money on that.”

Alana shook her head, standing her ground. “No way! It shows more sincerity if I buy them for you with my own money.”

Stephan curved his lips. “Fine, whatever you want.”

“You’re not allowed to look down on them!”

“I wouldn’t dare.”

Alana’s eyes crinkled into a smile.

The car pulled up near the company.

Alana kissed him goodbye, then got out of the car and walked toward the office.

Stephan then drove away.

But after walking just a short distance, he realized Alana hadn’t brought the brown sugar ginger tea he’d prepared for her.

Stephan chuckled, “That little bunny is so scatterbrained.” He had no choice but to reverse and go back.

Just as Alana was about to enter the company, she ran right into Camila. Or rather, Camila had been waiting for her on purpose.

Camila blocked Alana’s path, preventing her from leaving.

Alana didn’t want to deal with her and tried to walk around her to the left.

But Camila moved to the left to block her.

When she went right, Camila went right. It was clear she wasn’t going to let her leave.

What was particularly annoying was Camila’s haughty, aloof attitude, as if she were above everyone else and did whatever she pleased.

Alana frowned. “Camila, are you trying to annoy me this early in the morning?”

Camila said bluntly, “Lana, I need to talk to you. Can we step aside for a moment?”

Alana refused, “Sorry, I have to go to work. I don’t have time to waste on you.”

Camila sneered at her, “What’s the matter? Afraid to face me alone?”

Alana was exasperated. “You’re reading too much into it. Right now, in my eyes, you’re nothing more than a clown, funny, not scary. Got it?”

“You!” Camila glared at her. “Who are you calling a clown?”

“Whoever’s making the most of a fuss is the clown.”

Camila laughed bitterly. “Lana, I’m done wasting my breath on you. Get out of this company right now, and stop bothering my brother!”

Alana frowned. “You tell me to get out, and I’ll just leave? Camila, you really think too highly of yourself.”

Does she really think she was the Emperor of Heaven, that everyone has to listen to her? How ridiculous!

“You won’t leave?” Camila sneered, “Or do you want to stay here and keep trying to seduce my brother?”

“Alana, it’s bad enough that you shamelessly seduced the guy I liked back in middle school, but now you’re trying to steal my older brother too? How low can you go? Do you just love stealing other people’s men?”

Alana frowned; she really couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Camila, do you have some kind of persecution complex? When did I ever steal the man you liked? Or even try to steal your older brother? I know you look down on me, but please don’t falsely accuse someone for no reason. That’s despicable and shameless!”

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Chapter 198 That obedient

Chapter 198 That obedient

Camila clenched her fists and said through gritted teeth, “I said you did it, so you did it! Anyway, get out of here right now. If I catch you hanging around my brother again, don’t blame me for being harsh!”

Alana remained expressionless. “You can’t tell me what to do!”

She’d earned her way in here. Why should she just leave because Camila told her to.

She wasn’t that obedient.

If anyone should leave, it should be Cole!

Camila’s gaze was icy cold. “Lana, are you deliberately trying to antagonize me?”

Alana felt like laughing. “You’re just imagining things.”

Camila’s gaze turned dark and menacing. “Those who cross me never end well. Back

in middle school, you were already my defeated opponent, haven’t you learned your lesson yet? If I hadn’t been kind enough to let you off, do you think you’d still be acting so cocky in front of me right now?”

Alana smiled, though the smile didn’t reach her eyes. “Camila, if it weren’t for your brother protecting you back then, you’d have been locked up long ago. You’re the one who wouldn’t be in a position to act so cocky! It was my kindness that spared you, not the other way around!”

“You!” Camila suddenly remembered a time when she had falsely accused Alana of stealing her belongings.

The incident caused quite a stir, the police even showed up.

In the end, after an investigation, the truth came to light: it was she who had falsely accused Alana.

Alana insisted she be punished and had the police take her away.

At that moment, Cole arrived just in time. He spoke with Alana privately for a long time, and eventually, Alana agreed to let her off.

Camila apologized to Alana then and promised it would never happen again.

But as a result, she became the laughingstock of the entire school.

Thinking back on that humiliating ordeal she had endured, all thanks to Alana, Rage welled up inside Camila, and she couldn’t help but reach out and slap Alana’s fair, delicate face.

“Lana, shut your mouth!” Before she could land the blow, a hand grabbed her wrist just in time...

Alana wasn't going to back down this time. As Camila reached out, she grabbed her hand without hesitation.

Instead, she slapped Camila right across the face.

She struck with full force and ferocity.

It was as if she were venting years of pent-up humiliation.

The slap left Camila dazed; one side of her face seemed to go stiff.

She had never imagined Alana would fight back. In her eyes, Alana was nothing more than a timid, cowardly rat, vile and filthy.

But who would have thought that even a rat could extend its sharp claws and slap her back?!

She stared at Alana in disbelief. "Lana, you..."

Alana's palm was still tingling, but she had no regrets.

Meeting Camila's shocked and furious gaze, she said calmly, "I've waited far too long for that slap. You have no idea how much I've longed to strike you back every time I recall the times you bullied me." She had even imagined about slapping Camila a million times when she was younger.

"But every time, I didn't dare make a move against you. Now, I've realized that striking you isn't all that hard, it's just a matter of a single slap."

Camila, driven to fury, burst into a bitter laugh. "Lana, I'll fight you to the death!"

She lunged forward, claws out, intent on giving Alana a severe beating.

But before she could act, a powerful hand suddenly appeared out of nowhere and shoved her aside.

Camila stumbled from the sudden force, nearly falling to the ground.

She looked up, and a tall, slender, dark figure burst into her line of sight.

The man wore a black suit, a gray shirt, and a red tie, a dignified and handsome ensemble. His features were striking, sharp eyebrows and starry eyes, with deep-set brow ridges.

Even Camila, who was used to seeing handsome men, couldn't help but be momentarily mesmerized.

Alana was also taken aback when she saw Stephan appear.

He grabbed her hand and instinctively shielded her behind him. His back was solid and broad, radiating a sense of security that made her feel grounded.

She exclaimed in surprise, "Why are you here?"

Stephan turned around, reached out, and stroke her hair gently. "You left your thermos behind, so I came back to bring it to you."

Alana paused for a moment.

Come to think of it, he had made her some brown sugar ginger tea, but she'd left in such a hurry that she'd forgotten to bring it with her.

Seeing this, Camila couldn't help but ask, "Lana, who is he?"

Before Alana could introduce him, Stephan wrapped his arm around her slender waist and stated his relationship outright.

"I'm her boyfriend. And who are you? Bullying my girlfriend and acting like I don't exist? How dare you?!" The man's dark eyes fixed intently on Camila, his thick eyebrows radiating an overflowing chill and a menacing aura.

Camila met the man's gaze and couldn't help but shiver. She felt both terrified and stunned.

She had assumed Alana's claim that she had a boyfriend was just a casual fabrication, she never imagined it was actually true.

And Alana's boyfriend looked so handsome, his aura seemed extraordinary as well...

But since Stephan rarely appeared in public, she couldn't recognize him.

Yet her intuition told her that the man before her possessed a presence and aura that no ordinary person could match.

This Alana, when did she meet such an impressive man?

And he was her boyfriend?

Camila hesitated to confront the man, afraid of offending someone she shouldn't. Besides, she was the classic type who bullied the weak and feared the strong, she'd only dared to pick on Alana because she saw her as an easy target.

"So you're Lana's boyfriend? Let me tell you, you'd better not get involved with her. She's a total flirt, she loves seducing men. Watch out or she'll make a fool of you!"

Alana's expression turned cold. "Camila, can you please stop spreading those cheap lies?"

Camila stared at Stephan and insisted, "I'm telling the truth! I know her very well!"

Alana laughed in exasperation, fearing Stephan might misunderstand, and hurriedly said, "Stephan, she's lying. What she's saying isn't true!"

Stephan patted her on the back, as if to comfort her.

Then, he turned to Camila, his gaze gradually turning dangerous. A faint smile played at the corners of his mouth, yet it was chillingly cold.

"I know exactly what kind of person my girlfriend is. As for you, I don't care much for that mouth of yours. I don't hit women, but if you dare to bully my girlfriend again, I won't hesitate to make an exception for her and take actions against you, you raving mad bull." With that, Stephan casually cracked his knuckles, as if he could launch an attack on Camila at any moment.

Camila felt a sudden wave of fear.

She never would have guessed that a man this incredibly handsome could actually be a violent maniac?!

She hurriedly took a few steps back. "Fine, it's okay if you don't believe me...but why get so violent? Besides, do you even know who I am? How dare you threaten me like this?!"

A cold smile curled at the corner on his mouth as he advanced toward Camila step by step, exuding a suffocating aura of intimidation.

"Who you are doesn't matter. What matters is that I can beat you so badly no one will recognize you."

Camila turned pale with fear, her lips trembling. "Lana, look at the kind of

boyfriend you've got, he actually hits women? If you stay with him, you'll end up a victim of domestic violence sooner or later. I can't wait to see you make a fool of yourself!" With that, Camila turned and ran.

Just as arrogant as she had been moments ago, she now fled in utter disarray.

Stephan watched Camila flee, and the dangerous chill radiating from his eyes and brows gradually subsided.

He turned to look at the girl standing there in a daze and strode over to her.

“What’s wrong? Did I scare you?” His towering figure loomed over her, a cold, handsome face, deep, piercing eyes, and

thin lips pressed together, his jaw slightly clenched.

Alana shook her head. “No, I just think you’re really handsome.”

Stephan’s tensed features finally relaxed a little. He’d thought she was afraid he might suddenly turn violent towards her.

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Chapter 199 Head over heels

Chapter 199 Head over heels

He hadn’t expected her to find him handsome in the midst of everything.

Come to think of it, how could a man who’s so devoted to protecting his girlfriend not be handsome?

Maybe this little white rabbit in front of him was already head over heels for him? She would definitely marry him now.

He curved his lips slightly, cupping the girl’s head in his large hand and running his fingers through her soft hair. “What happened just now? Was she really bullying you?”

Alana shook her head. “No, I wasn’t bullied.”

Stephan frowned and pressed further, “What’s your relationship with her? Why would she do that to you...”

Alana explained, “We were classmates in middle school. We had some personal issues. But don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.”

Stephan chuckled. She really didn't want to bother him at all.

"If you can't handle it, just tell your boyfriend. I'll take care of it for you."

Alana asked curiously, "How do you plan to help me? Like just now, by beating her up?"

Stephan raised an eyebrow. "What's wrong with that? Are you not satisfied with how I handled it?"

Alana hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "I'm satisfied that you didn't even lay a finger on her, yet you scared her off right away."

Stephan gave a forced smile, "Are you indirectly saying I'm scary?"

"No, I'm complimenting you. You intimidated her without even lifting a finger, that's so impressive and awesome!"

Stephan snorted with a laugh, reaching out to pinch her cheek. "Next time you get bullied, just drop your boyfriend's name. That'll really scare them off."

Alana couldn't help but chuckle. This man actually had a sense of humor.

She played along, replying, "Okay, okay, I get it!"

Stephan curved his lips, as if a thought had occurred to him. He lowered his gaze and took her right hand.

Seeing the girl's bright red palm, he frowned. A pang of heartache welled up inside him.

"You little girl, you have no idea how careful you need to be, your palm is all swollen."

Her skin was naturally delicate; even a slight touch from him usually left a mark.

That slap just now was so hard that the palm of her hand was completely red and swollen.

Alana saw him frown and asked cautiously, "What's wrong?"

Stephan gently stroked her tender palm, his deep voice tinged with concern. "Does it hurt?"

Enveloped by his warm, large hand, Alana's heart fluttered slightly. She blinked her beautiful, moist eyes. "Hmm?"

Stephan lifted his head and gazed deeply into her eyes. "Your hand...does it hurt?"

Alana paused for a moment before realizing what he meant. She shook her head. “It doesn’t hurt.”

“From now on, don’t resort to violence so easily. Otherwise, seeing you suffer the consequences will break my heart. If anyone needs to use their hands, I’ll handle it.” He lowered his head and gently blew on the palm of her hand.

The warm breath enveloped her palm, traveling along the lines of her skin all the way to her heart.

It wasn’t just a warm feeling in her heart, it was sweet, too.

Alana felt a warm glow inside; the corners of her mouth turned up, and her voice was soft and gentle. “Okay, I’ll listen to you.”

Stephan curved his lips, reached out, and affectionately ruffled her soft cheek.

Suddenly, Alana realized something, and her eyelid twitched violently. “Oh no, I’m going to be late! I have to go clock in at the office now!”

With that, she started to run toward the company entrance.

But Stephan pulled her back, slipping the thermos into her arms as he did so.

“Don’t forget to take this!”

“Oh, oh, oh, right, right, thank you.” Alana clutched the thermos tightly and hurried away.

Stephan watched her dainty figure run into the company building until she disappeared from view.

A smile played around his eyes. “Little white rabbit, so clumsy...”

He paused, then looked in the direction Camila had left. The tender smile in his eyes vanished, replaced by a cold stare.

What kind of personal grudge does that woman have against Alana?!

As soon as Camila got home, she rushed to tell Cole what had happened. She clutched her badly swollen face, weeping uncontrollably,

“Brother! I just went to see Alana, and she slapped me in the face! She actually dared to slap my face! You have to go avenge me!”

Cole’s facial injuries hadn’t fully healed yet. He’d planned to rest at home for another day, but upon hearing Camila’s outcry, he couldn’t sit still any longer.

He walked over to Camila and stared at her, asking, “Why did you go to her? Who told you to go see her alone? Did you go warn her about something again? Lana isn’t the kind of woman who hits people for no reason. You must have provoked her again!”

Camila was both shocked and furious.

“Cole, you’re my own brother! Why are you siding with her? My face is all swollen up by Alana, and instead of checking on me right away, you’re taking her side? Who exactly is your real sister?”

Cole said in a deep voice, “I stand by what’s right, not by family ties. I know your temperament inside and out! Tell me, what exactly did you go to Lana for?”

Camila pouted angrily. “I didn’t say anything. I just told her to behave herself and stop bothering you.”

Cole had guessed as much. He furrowed his brow in exasperation. “Cami, how many times do I have to tell you? She isn’t the one pursuing me, it’s me who wants to get back together with her. That’s why I went to such lengths to find her and reach out to her! If anyone’s been pestering anybody, it’s me!”

“Don’t always shift the blame onto Lana, she hasn’t done anything wrong!”

Camila was deeply unconvinced. “Brother, I don’t get it. You have all kinds of women around you. Why are you so obsessed with her? What’s so great about a woman like Lana? Her background doesn’t match yours at all, she’s just a pretty face, nothing more! Even while you two were supposedly dating, you also dated at least ten girlfriends over the years so I thought you two weren’t anything serious? Were all those women really no match for you?”

Yeah. When Alana thought she was in a “relationship” with Cole, he was never faithful to begin with. He only saw and hung out with her once in a while. He had dated several other women over the years.

He had felt that his feelings for Alana were nothing more than a passing infatuation; he hadn’t invested any real emotion in her.

But he was furious that Alana had suddenly blocked and deleted his number, she didn’t even try to fight for him when she found out about Sophia.

No woman had ever been as ruthless and heartless toward him as Alana.

For the first time, he started to feel that she was more important in his heart than any of the women he had ever being with.

And soon, he realized Sophia wasn't the right woman for him at all. In fact, no other woman came close to the way Alana cared about him.

No other woman would willingly endure the pain of cold hands in winter just to knit him a scarf. Just because he said he liked wearing a scarf she'd knit herself.

Yet once she finished it and gave it to him, he never wore it even once.

Once, he was nearly hit by a car and scraped his knee. Alana ran to the temple and personally obtained a "Blessing of Safety" for him, saying it would protect him and keep him safe and healthy.

She gave it to him, but he never wore it either. Oh, and the sandalwood prayer beads on his wrist.

He had heard that Alana had climbed the 9,990 steps of a temple specifically to obtain it as a birthday gift for him.

It took her almost a whole day, and her heels and legs ached for days on end.

He didn't know any of this; he found out from some of Lana's close friends.

And he never wore them either; they were just left lying around in some corner of the house. Before, he'd looked down on the gifts she gave him as cheap.

But when he thought about it, how many women would go to such lengths for him?

The gift might have been cheap, but the sentiment behind it was precious.

But he realized it too late.

Still, it's not too late to do something about it. He'd win her back.

Cole said earnestly, "Alana is different from all those other women."

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Chapter 200 Set her straight

Chapter 200 Set her straight

Alana was the kind of person who seemed quiet and unassuming, with a low profile. But whenever he needed her, she would be there, silently standing by his side.

Unnoticed, she had quietly seeped into his heart. Like a poison, it had gradually taken root, becoming impossible to quit or uproot.

Those other women only knew how to enjoy his generosity, how could they possibly be as sincere with him as Alana was?

“So what if she’s different from those women?” Camila was furious. She never imagined her older brother would be so smitten with Alana!

“Brother, it’s too late. I just saw Alana’s boyfriend. She wasn’t lying to you or to me, she really does have a boyfriend!”

Cole’s pupils contracted. “What? You saw her boyfriend?”

“Yes! I saw him.” Camila said through gritted teeth, seething with jealousy inside.

She couldn’t understand what was so great about Alana. It was bad enough that the boy she liked in her youth had fallen for her, but now even her brother was smitten with her!

What’s more, the boyfriend she was dating now was absolutely stunning in both looks and charm.

It really seemed like every good thing in life had fallen to Alana.

Cole grabbed Camila’s shoulders in a fit of rage, his eyes dark and menacing. “Who is that man?”

Who on earth had stolen his girl?

Camila was intimidated by Cole’s terrifying glare. “I...I don’t know. I didn’t ask.”

“Why didn’t you ask him clearly?”

“I...”

Camila clenched her teeth, feeling guilty. She’d almost been beaten up at the time, how could she have had the presence of mind to ask his name?

“Anyway, she already has a boyfriend! But her boyfriend isn’t much of a good guy. He actually hits women, he’s clearly the

domestic-abuse type. Alana won’t be happy with him!”

Cole’s expression shifted.

What?!

He actually hits women? He was a domestic abuser?! Damn it!

How could Alana be with a man like that?

He absolutely would not allow it!

Cole immediately let go of Camila’s shoulders and strode toward the door.

Camila froze, watching as Cole strode out the door in a few long strides. She hurried after him and asked, “Brother, where are you going?”

Cole’s tone was icy. “To the company!”

When Alana arrived at the office, she took a moment during a lull in her busy schedule to send a message to Eve.

Alana: [I need your help in a pinch!]

Eve’s message popped up immediately; she was clearly taking a break from her own busy schedule.

Eve:[What’s up?]

Alana: [The tie I gave my boyfriend last time is getting worn out. Let’s go pick out a few more together next time. You have better taste than me, so it’ll be more reliable with your input.]

Eve: [Wow, worn to a sheen? Is that even possible? Is he that cheap? Doesn’t he have any other ties?]

Alana: [Ahem, no, that’s not it. He just likes wearing the one I bought for him all the time.]

Eve was speechless. An eye-rolling emoji was instantly sent Alana’s way.

Work was exhausting enough as it was, and now she had to endure her best friend shoving her lovey-dovey stuff down her throat. Life was just unbearable!

After a moment's hesitation, Alana blushed and tentatively typed out a message.

Alana: [By the way, um, I was thinking of buying some sexy nightgowns. Maybe you could help me pick some out?]

This morning, she realized her period had ended, it was time to get things moving. After all, she'd promised Stephan a reward, she couldn't very well go back on her

word.

Although it was pretty embarrassing, but... well, what could she do? He had such weird and quirky tastes.

She'd promised, so she couldn't go back on her word.

Eve's eyes nearly popped out of her head.

Eve: [Whoa! What am I seeing?]

[Last time I tried to convince you to buy this, you were all hesitant and reluctant, and now you're actually asking to buy it yourself?!]

[Holy cow, have you changed your ways?!]

[Or have you been possessed by some evil spirit? Give me back my innocent, pure best friend!]

Alana felt her cheeks growing hotter by the second.

Alana:[I haven't been possessed. I just promised to give him a reward, so I can't go back on my word.]

Eve:[Oh, so your boyfriend's the one who's corrupted you.]

[I wouldn't have guessed it. Your boyfriend's such a player, just how far do you two go in private? Have you ever given him a handjob or a blowjob?!]

Now it was Alana's turn to widen her eyes. Oh my god, was that something you just blurt out?

Alana: [No, wait, Eve, can you be a little more serious? We're chatting online here, watch out, the internet police might come crawling up the cable to arrest you!]

Eve shrugged it off.

Eve: [So what? There are even more scandalous things to talk about!]

[Lana, you're just too innocent!]

[Being too innocent will get you totally taken advantage of by men!]

Alana pouted, unable to resist speaking up for her man.

Alana: [He wouldn't take advantage of me. He's really good to me.]

She was a bit protective of him; she could say whatever she wanted about Stephan, but she didn't want others to speak ill of him.

Eve was hit with another dose of couple-goes-here.

Eve:[Oh my, you're being silly again. When I say "take advantage," I didn't mean the usual kind, I meant him seducing you.]

Alana had no retort.

Suddenly, the colleagues' surprised voices rose in a chorus.

"Oh my, Manager Cole is here!"

"Wasn't he supposed to be on leave today? Why is he at the office?"

"Oh my, he looks like he got beaten up pretty badly, the bruises on his face are still there!"

"Who could be so cruel? I feel so bad for him."

Alana couldn't help but look up and saw Cole, dressed in an expensive suit, walking into the project office.

She immediately hid her phone, picked up the mouse, and continued to pretend to be hard at work.

Cole's gaze locked onto her, observing her every move. Seeing her nervously put down her phone and lower her head, his eyes darkened.

Without giving her a chance to speak, he said, "Alana, come to my office."

Seeing there was no escaping it, Alana had no choice but to stand up. "Oh, okay."

She followed him to his office.

Colleagues around them all wore expressions of curiosity.

“Did you guys notice? Manager Cole seems to treat Alana differently, he’s been looking for her ever since he arrived at the office!”

“Yeah, ever since Manager Cole asked her to be his assistant right from the start, I knew something was up.”

“And that time in the cafeteria, he didn’t sit anywhere else, he sat right next to her. That’s blatant favoritism!”

“But doesn’t Alana have a boyfriend?”

“Who knows? Has anyone actually seen her boyfriend?”

“I don’t think so. Maybe she just made him up out of thin air!”

“So does that mean there’s a chance between Manager Cole and Alana?”

“It’s not impossible. After all, Alana is the absolute stunner of our company. It’s only natural that she’s so popular with men. As the old saying goes, even heroes have trouble resisting a beautiful woman.”

Someone asked Carla, “Carla, you and Alana are such good friends. Is there really something going on between her and Manager Cole?”

Carla waved her hand. “I don’t know. Don’t ask me.”

After Alana and Cole entered the office, Alana immediately closed the office door.

She felt a sudden tightness in her chest, and her small hand unconsciously clenched the hem of her dress.

“Manager Cole, did you... need to see me?”

Cole turned to face her. “Lana, Cami came looking for you this morning, didn’t she?”

Alana pressed her lips together and nodded slightly.

Cole continued, “Did she say anything unreasonable to you?”

Alana nodded. “Yes, please keep a closer eye on your sister in the future. Don’t let her show up in front of me out of the blue and pick on me for no reason.”

Cole swallowed hard. “I’m sorry. I’ll make sure to set her straight.”

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